

Application by
CAREBASE LTD

In respect of:
2 - 8 Danson Road, Bexleyheath

APPEAL AGAINST REFUSAL OF PLANNING PERMISSION

LPA Reference:
19/03072/FULM

PINS Reference:
APP/D5120/W/22/3293225

Date of Inquiry: Commencing 13th December 2022

Proof of Evidence on

LANDSCAPE, TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL MATTERS

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1. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 My name is Jon Etchells and I am a director of Jon Etchells Consulting Limited, which is a registered practice with the Landscape Institute. I have an MA in Geography from the University of Cambridge and a BPhil in Landscape Design from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.2 I have over 30 years experience of landscape assessment and design. Much of my work has been concerned with the landscape and wider environmental assessment of small and large scale infrastructure projects and a variety of built developments. I have undertaken landscape, townscape and visual assessments for housing projects in Essex, Cumbria, Kent, Leicestershire, Surrey and West Sussex, as well as assessments for a variety of major infrastructure projects, including new industrial buildings, several motorway service areas, schools and a new road in Bedfordshire (a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project under the Planning Act 2008). I have recently completed a landscape and townscape assessment for a proposed 8 storey building in central Cambridge, adjacent to three Conservation Areas.
- 1.3 I have provided landscape evidence on behalf of North West Leicestershire District Council, South Lakeland District Council, Canterbury City Council, Medway Council, North Somerset Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in respect of numerous appeals for housing and other developments. I have provided landscape evidence on behalf of developers in respect of appeals for developments within the High Weald AONB, adjacent to the Kent Downs AONB and elsewhere in Kent, for a housing development adjacent to the South Downs National Park in West Sussex, and for a development within the Hayes Village Conservation Area in Bromley.
- 1.4 I have provided evidence on landscape, townscape and visual matters in connection with more than 75 appeals, most of them determined by means of Public Inquiries.
- 1.5 The evidence which I have prepared, as set out in this document and the Appendices to it, is true and has been prepared in accordance with the guidance of my professional institute. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions, irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

2. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 I have been commissioned by Carebase Ltd to undertake an independent assessment of the landscape, townscape and visual effects which are likely to result from the proposed redevelopment of land at numbers 2 to 8 Danson Road, Bexleyheath, involving the demolition of four existing properties and the erection of a new 70 bedroom care home together with associated provision for access, car parking and landscaped amenity space. The site lies to the west of the A221 Danson Road, just to the south of its junction with the A207 Park View Road.
- 2.1.2 The site is within the Greater London urban area, is already developed and is within a busy urban environment. Within that wider urban area, the site adjoins the north eastern entrance to Danson Park, which is a Grade II Listed Park and Garden, with an 18th Century mansion and lake around 450m to the south west of the site. The boundary to the Registered Park and Garden (RPG) runs along the northern site boundary (alongside the park entrance) and also the western site boundary, at the end of the rear gardens to numbers 2 to 8 Danson Road.
- 2.1.3 The site itself comprises two pairs of substantial semi-detached houses and their front and rear gardens. The houses are inter-war suburban houses with gabled frontages and are undistinguished in terms of their architecture and materials; they are typical of other houses along Danson Road and within the surrounding urban area (see Photographs 1 and 2). The site location is shown on Figures 1 and 2, which form part of Appendix A to my evidence.
- 2.1.4 A full planning application for the proposed development was submitted to the London Borough of Bexley (LBB) in December 2019 (LBB Reference 19/03072/FULM), and was accompanied by a number of supporting documents, including a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Tyler Grange, and a Design and Access Statement (DAS).
- 2.1.5 The application was then the subject of detailed discussions with Council officers, and was reported to the Planning Committee in November 2021 with a recommendation for approval. The Planning Officer's Report was detailed and extensive, and concluded in terms of the design of the development that:

'On balance, it is considered that the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing character and appearance of the locality.'

2.1.6 However, notwithstanding the officer's recommendation for approval, the application was refused in a decision dated 30 November 2021 for a total of 6 reasons, as set out below:

- '1 The proposed development, by reason of layout, height bulk and scale would result in a form and scale of development which would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, contrary to policies D1, D3 and D4 of the London Plan (2021), policies CS01 and CS03 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012), saved policies ENV39 and H3 of the Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004) and Paragraph 130 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).*
- 2 The proposed development by reason of the intensity of vehicular movements and its location would have a detrimental impact on highway safety and congestion, contrary to policy T4 of the London Plan (2021), CS15 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012), saved policy T6 of the Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004) and Paragraph 110 and 111 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).*
- 3 The proposed development provide insufficient parking for the use in this location. This would cause increased on-street parking stress, detrimental to the amenities of local residents, contrary to saved policy T17 of the Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004).*
- 4 The proposed development, by reason of the position, height, bulk and scale would harm the setting of and result in less than substantial harm to, Danson Park, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden and designated heritage asset. It is not considered that this harm would be outweighed by the public benefits required by paragraph 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021). The proposed development is therefore contrary to policy HC1 of the London Plan (2021), CS07 and CS19 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012), saved policies ENV39 and H3 Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004) and Paragraph 199 and 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).*
- 5 The proposed development results in the loss of the four family dwelling houses which is not outweighed by the benefits of the scheme, including the provision of 70 car homes beds, contrary to Policies H8 of the London Plan (2021) and policies CS01 and CS03 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012).*
- 6 The proposed development by reason of its position and built form would result in loss of sunlight and overbearing impact on 1 Danson Mead, detrimental to the amenities of the occupiers of this property and contrary to saved policy ENV39 Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004) and Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021)'*

2.1.7 Subsequently, on 7 November 2022, LBB advised that they would (following discussions with the Appellant on additional measures relating to the use of the site and highways matters) no longer be contesting the Appeal, and any areas of disagreement to be considered at the

Inquiry are therefore between the Appellant and the Rule 6 party only. My evidence has been amended to reflect this situation.

2.2 Scope and Format of Evidence

- 2.2.1 This Proof of Evidence updates my previous Appeal Statement, which was submitted to PINS in May 2022 at a time when the appeal was due to be heard at a hearing. As the appeal will now be the subject of a Public Inquiry I have amended the text and title accordingly, and also updated my evidence to include a review of LBB's Appeal Statement (dated July 2022 - although LBB are no longer contesting the Appeal I have retained this section of my evidence as some of the issues raised by LBB in that statement are also raised by the third parties) and also some of the comments made by third parties (many of whom are now part of the Rule 6 party), where relevant to my evidence.
- 2.2.2 My evidence relates to the first (though subsequently withdrawn by LBB) Reason for Refusal, and covers the effects of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area (a topic which is also raised by the Rule 6 party). I do not directly address the fourth (also now withdrawn) Reason for Refusal, which is covered by the evidence of Mr Handforth, but the general landscape, townscape and visual effects which I identify will have some bearing on the setting of the RPG, and I do consider how the landscape and townscape of the park would be affected in general terms, with matters of effects on the significance of the RPG as a heritage asset considered in the evidence of Mr Handforth.
- 2.2.3 The site adjoins the large open space of Danson Park to the west, and its relatively narrow north eastern entrance to the north, but is already developed, and has existing built development to its east and south and also beyond the park entrance to the north. Where I refer to landscape in the following text, that should therefore be taken to also include elements of townscape, and vice versa.
- 2.2.4 I have made my own assessment of the character, quality, value and sensitivity of the landscape and townscape within and around the site, and the effects on landscape and townscape character and also local views which would result from the proposed development. I have then considered my assessment against the first Reason for Refusal and also the relevant parts of the LBB Planning Officer's Report. I have also reviewed and commented on where appropriate the LBB Appeal Statement (dated 22 July 2022) and some of the representations made by third parties where they are relevant to my evidence.

- 2.2.5 My evidence is set out in the following manner: Section 3 describes the baseline situation in terms of the existing site and the character and quality of the surrounding landscape and townscape, and also views to the site. Section 4 summarises the relevant policy background (concentrating on the policies cited in the first Reason for Refusal), and Section 5 describes the proposed development. My assessment of the landscape, townscape and visual effects likely to result from the development is set out in Section 6, and in Section 7 I consider that assessment against LBB's first Reason for Refusal, and also make some observations on the Planning Officer's Report and on the LBB Appeal Statement and representations by third parties. In Section 8 I summarise my evidence and draw conclusions.
- 2.2.6 A separate volume of Appendices contains Figures which support my assessment (Appendix A), site photographs (Appendix B), a summary of the landscape, townscape and visual effects I have identified (Appendix C) and the methodology used in the assessment (Appendix D).

2.3 Methodology

- 2.3.1 In landscape, townscape and visual assessments, a distinction is normally drawn between landscape or townscape effects (i.e. effects on the character or quality of the landscape or townscape, irrespective of whether there are any views of the landscape/ townscape, or viewers to see them) and visual effects (i.e. effects on people's views of the landscape/ townscape, principally from residential properties, but also from public rights of way and other areas with public access). Thus, a development may have extensive landscape (or townscape) effects but few visual effects (if, for example, there are no properties or public viewpoints), or few landscape/ townscape effects but significant visual effects (if, for example, the landscape or townscape is already degraded or the development is not out of character with it, but can clearly be seen from many residential properties).
- 2.3.2 The methodology used for the landscape and townscape assessment is based on that set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', produced jointly by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and the Landscape Institute ('the GLVIA', 1995, revised 2002 and again in 2013). The document 'Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002' (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage) is also relevant, and stresses the need for a holistic assessment of landscape character, including physical, biological and social factors.
- 2.3.3 The GLVIA notes (in section 5.5) that there are some differences where the assessment is of townscape as opposed to landscape, with townscape defined (in section 2.7) as '*areas where the built environment is dominant*'. In the case of the site, it is within the wider urban area, and the built environment is generally dominant, but it does also adjoin the large open space of

Danson Park, so there are elements of landscape as well as townscape in the area around the site, and the assessment has therefore followed the methodology of a landscape and visual assessment, but with references to townscape as well as landscape where appropriate. The detailed methodology used is set out in Appendix D to my evidence.

2.3.4 I have visited the site and surrounding area in both February and April 2022, and have therefore not been able to assess the site in mid summer, when deciduous vegetation is in full leaf and when views tend to be less open, but I have made judgements about how effects may vary in the summer, based on observation of the vegetation within and around the site and on experience of the changes in terms of local landscape character and visibility which occur with the seasons.

2.3.5 My photographs were taken from publicly accessible points within the area around the site.

3. THE BASELINE SITUATION

3.1 Site Location, Boundaries and Land Use

3.1.1 The site lies around 1.5km to the west of the centre of Bexleyheath, within the wider suburban area of south east London (see Figure 1 in my Appendix A). It is on the west side of the A221 Danson Road, to the south of its junction with the A207 Park View Road, which is a busy signalised T junction. Park View Road is a busy urban road, with shops along its northern side to the west of the junction, and the parallel residential street of Danson Mead on its southern side.

3.1.2 As I have noted, the site adjoins the large open space of Danson Park to its west - although it covers an extensive area and its southern part has an open, parkland character, the park is an urban open space, and is surrounded by built development, with no significant views from surrounding roads into the body of the park in the area around the site, though there are some views across the lake and the southern part of the park from further to the south along Danson Road.

Site Boundaries

3.1.3 The boundaries to the site are indicated on Figure 2 in Appendix A and are described below:

- The northern site boundary runs along the southern side of the north eastern entrance to Danson Park. It is marked by a timber closeboard fence with a mixed species (mainly privet) hedge around 1.5m in height on the north side of the fence where it adjoins the front garden to number 2 Danson Road (see Photographs 3 to 5). That hedge continues past the gable end of that property, and rises to around 2m in height to the west of the house where it forms the boundary to the rear garden (see Photograph 7). The park entrance is a broad tarmac path with tapering grass verges to each side, planted with an avenue of birch trees, some of which are well established and around 12m in height, but the majority of which have been planted relatively recently (see Photographs 6 and 7). At the eastern end of the entrance strip, close to the junction of Danson Road and Park View Road, there is a set of iron railings and gates with stone piers - a plaque on this entrance notes that it was opened by the Lord Mayor of London in 1929 (see Photograph 8).

- The eastern boundary runs alongside Danson Road, for the width of the four properties which make up the site. The front garden boundaries are marked by low brick walls with some overhanging garden shrubs and broad openings for vehicle access (see Photographs 9 and 10). There are two large trees in the front garden of number 2, an oak on its southern side and a sycamore in the north eastern corner of the front garden, both of which are local landscape features providing some relief from the generally hard and busy urban environment along the road,
- The southern site boundary runs along the southern front and rear garden boundaries of number 8 Danson Road - the front garden boundary has a stone pier at its eastern end adjacent to the road and a dwarf brick wall to the west of the pier, while the rear garden boundary is formed by garden fencing and shrubs.
- The western site boundary runs along the rear garden boundaries of numbers 2 to 8 Danson Road, and is marked by (from south to north) a 1.8m high closeboard fence with a large garden shed just inside the fence line - the shed is in a poor state of repair, with a bowed ridge line, the brick flank wall of a flat roofed garden shed just over 2m in height, a further length of closeboard fencing, and a low brick wall with timber fencing above and a wrought iron gate. Just inside that boundary is a large blockwork garden building with a ridge height of around 4m and a large ivy covered ash tree in the narrow gap between that building and the boundary. Just outside the boundary and within the park there is a variable band of shrubby vegetation including hazel, ivy and shrub roses (see Photographs 11 and 12).

Land Use and Vegetation Within the Site

- 3.1.4 The site comprises two pairs of large semi-detached houses and their front and rear gardens. Numbers 2 and 4 Danson Road are broad properties with two gables on their front elevations, integral single garages, brick walls and concrete tiled roofs. Number 2 has been extended to the rear, and its northern elevation (alongside the park entrance) is rendered at first floor level with a brick wall to the rear extension element. That elevation is largely blank, with two small side windows only.
- 3.1.5 The front gardens to these two properties are largely hard surfaced and used for parking, with small planted areas only, though (as noted above) the garden to number 2 does contain two mature trees (see Photograph 13). The rear gardens mainly consist of lawns with some garden shrubs and small trees, though (again as noted above) the rear garden to number 2 has a large garden building and a mature ash tree at its western end.

3.1.6 Numbers 6 and 8 Danson Road are similar to numbers 2 and 4, but their elevations are white painted render, and number 6 has a full width extension to the rear. The front gardens to these two properties have curved, hard surfaced drives, but also have some areas of lawn and a greater proportion of soft landscape than those to numbers 2 and 4. The rear gardens have large patios, and both have garden buildings at their western ends. There are some mature trees, including a large copper beech, in the adjoining garden to number 10 Danson Road, but the trees within the garden to numbers 6 and 8 are small and well spaced.

3.1.7 All four existing properties are undistinguished in architectural terms, and make a generally neutral contribution to local townscape quality - they are not run down, derelict or unsightly, but neither are they of any particular interest or quality in terms of their design or materials.

3.2 Landscape and Townscape Context

3.2.1 The landscape and townscape around the site is as follows:

- Immediately to the north of the site, on the far side of the park entrance, is number 1 Danson Mead (see Photograph 9), with the other properties on Danson Mead extending to its west. Number 1 is aligned parallel to the park entrance within a triangular plot, and its southern elevation faces the site. There is a broad grass verge planted with trees between Danson Mead and Park View Road, and along the north side of that road are closely spaced houses, with a row of shops with flats above (including some 2½ storey buildings) further to the west along Park View Road (see Photograph 14), and with the grounds of Welling United Football Club and Bexleyheath Cricket and Tennis Clubs on the south side of the road, between it and the park. To the north east of the site, on the far side of the road junction, is the Crook Log Leisure Centre, which is a large, bulky modern building roughly equivalent in height to a typical three storey house (see Photograph 15).
- Further to the east along the A207 (which becomes Crook Log to the east of its junction with Danson Road) there is a relatively recent residential development at Talehangers Close on the south side of the road which has some buildings up to 4 storeys in height (see Photographs 16 and 17), and a large estate extending to the east of Brampton Road on the north side of the road which comprises rows of 3 storey flats (see Photograph 18).
- To the east of the site are houses along the east side of Danson Road, which are similar in style and size to those within the site.

- To the south of the site are further houses extending to the south along the west side of Danson Road as far as the main entrance to the park, around 350m to the south of the site. To the south of the main park entrance there are no houses on the west side of the road, allowing views into the more open, southern part of the park, including the area around the lake.
- To the south west and west of the site is the large expanse of Danson Park. The RPG designation covers the entire area of the park, but there is a noticeable difference in character between the central and southern parts of the park which include the ornamental gardens to the north of Danson House and also the sweeping parkland and lake to its south (see Photograph 19), and the northern part of the park (closer to the site) which is still green, pleasant and open, but has the character of a municipal park, with play areas, tennis courts, bowling greens, open grass areas and avenues of trees alongside broad paths, enclosed by houses and other urban uses. In the park close to the site there are a number of mature trees, including a group of poplars and a weeping willow just to the west of the site boundary which help to screen the site in views from the west (see Photographs 20 to 24).

Public Access

3.2.2 Danson Park is open during the day but (see below) closed at night and in the evenings, so there is daytime access to the area to the north (along the park entrance) and west of the site. There is also public access along Danson Mead and Danson Road, to the north and east of the site respectively.

Topography

3.2.3 The area around the site is broadly flat, and topography has no significant bearing on local landscape and townscape character. Further to the south west, within the park, the land falls to the south towards the lake, with the mansion set above the lake on a broad south facing slope. That change in slope further emphasises the separation between the open sweeping landscape around the lake and the more enclosed municipal parkland beyond the break in slope to the north east of Danson House.

Existing Light Sources

3.2.4 There are no significant light sources in the northern part of Danson Park close to the site, though there is some lighting around the pub/ restaurant in the former stables, which is open until 11pm. The roads around the site are all lit with tall lighting columns, and there are lights

on and within the houses around (and also within) the site, as well as lights on the vehicles passing along the busy roads to the north and east of the site. There is therefore a contrast between the well-lit environment of the site and the areas to its north and east, and the mainly dark landscape of the park to the west.

3.3 Landscape and Townscape Character

National Landscape Character

3.3.1 Natural England has produced profiles for England's National Character Areas ('NCAs'), which divide England (including large urban areas) into 159 distinct natural areas, defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. The site lies within the western end of NCA 113, the 'North Kent Plain'; this is a large area, extending from Ramsgate in the east across the northern edge of the county into the south eastern part of Greater London. The summary description for the NCA includes the following (extracts are from page 3):

- *'The area has a strong urban influence, with several built-up areas, including coastal towns and these occupy a substantial part of the area with significant development around London and the Medway towns, which has a strong influence in the west of the NCA.'*
- *'Development pressures (and the associated infrastructure) are likely to present significant challenges as the area responds to an increasing population and the demands of economic development and a changing climate. In response to these challenges, it will be important to maximise the opportunities for society and the natural environment in a balanced and co-ordinated manner.'*

3.3.2 Most of the character area description is for the more open landscape to the east of London, but the key characteristics of this area are noted (on page 6) as including:

'Large settlements and urban infrastructure (including lines of pylons) are often visually dominant in the landscape, with significant development around Greater London and the Medway Towns, as well as around towns further east and along the coast. Major rail and road links connect the towns with London.'

Greater London Landscape Character

3.3.3 The Natural England publication 'London's Natural Signatures: The London Landscape Framework' (2011) seeks to set out a holistic assessment of London's 'Natural Landscape Areas' and also their relationship with the built-up parts of the city. It shows the site as being within the north eastern part of Area 19, the 'South London Pebbly Sands'. The assessment includes the following description:

'There was limited 19th century expansion around Bromley and Eltham, and along the top of the ridge overlooking the Thames - the latter in response to the riverside industrial developments. But the majority of this landscape type remained largely undeveloped until the 20th century, when there was large scale suburbanisation - mainly interwar, but with some major postwar housing. Suburban development was generally low density and its coverage is far from total, so extensive areas of open space survive.'

Borough Landscape and Townscape Character

- 3.3.4 LBB have produced the Bexley Local Character Study (2021), which identifies aspects of both the built and unbuilt environments which are considered important in terms of spatial qualities and character. Under the heading of 'Landscape and Built Form' the study notes on page 34 that:

'...the relatively low rise, low density urban development in the borough means landscape remains prominent. As private houses with gardens is the dominant building typology in the borough, a large proportion of this landscape is private and often hidden from view.'

- 3.3.5 The study identifies a number of building typologies in the Borough, with the properties on the west side of Danson Road including the site shown as being of the 'detached sparse' typology on page 98. This typology is described as:

'Areas of predominantly detached houses are almost exclusively in the south of the borough, and areas of sparse detached housing are particularly rare.'

Where they do occur they are generally found next to parks or greenbelt and have houses set back with deep gardens.'

- 3.3.6 I would note in respect of this study that, although the properties along the west side of Danson Road (including those within the site) are shown as being in the 'detached sparse' typology, most of them (including the four properties within the site) are in fact semi-detached. This appears to be as a result of the parameters used in the study to establish different typologies, which include (as set out on page 94) the Floor to Area Ratio, which is the relationship between the gross internal area of the building and the overall plot size. The houses on the west side of Danson Road have quite large gardens, so that is presumably why they have been included within this typology, though (as shown on my Figure 2) they do not appear to be significantly different in that respect from the properties on the east side of the road, which are not included within the typology.

- 3.3.7 The LBB Core Strategy (2012) also includes elements of townscape categorisation, as it divides the Borough into 6 'geographic regions', stating in its paragraph 3.1.2 that:

'For the purposes of creating a geographical baseline and in order to break the borough up into manageable sized areas, the borough has been divided into six regions, based on ward boundaries. This enabled character assessments of the geographic regions to be carried out, which analysed various environmental, social and economic attributes, such as access to transport, green space, local services and facilities and the built form, including the historic environment.'

3.3.8 The site is within the eastern part of the Welling geographic region, which is stated in paragraph 3.10.2 to be:

'typified by inter-war, family housing with reasonably sized gardens, and although many of the residential properties were not built to high levels of sustainable design and construction, they are often highly regarded by their owners and renovations and extensions are commonplace.'

3.3.9 Paragraph 3.10.6 refers to Danson Park as *'the borough's main metropolitan park'*, and as a *'high quality open space'*.

Local Landscape and Townscape Character

3.3.10 The site and surrounding area shows many of the characteristics identified by the above assessments, as it is within the urban area and comprises inter-war suburban residential areas (with the open space of Danson Park adjacent to the west) typified by family housing with reasonably sized gardens. Other aspects of local character which are relevant to this assessment are:

- The site is adjacent to the RPG of Danson Park, but as noted above there is a significant difference in character between the central and southern parts of the park which include the gardens to the north of the mansion and the sweeping parkland landscape to its south, and the northern part of the park (closer to the site) which has the character of a municipal park, with play areas, tennis courts, bowling greens, open grass areas and avenues of trees alongside broad paths.
- The adjoining roads of Danson Road and Park View Road are very busy and the junction between them (immediately to the north east of the site) is also very busy - the junction and its traffic is a dominant feature of the local townscape (see Photograph 8).
- The quality of the existing buildings on the site in terms of design and materials is not high, and the northern and western site boundaries facing onto the park access and body of the park respectively have a somewhat unattractive, run down appearance and do not make a positive contribution to the views from the park entrance or from its north eastern corner.

- In terms of height, bulk and scale (which are referenced in LBB's first Reason for Refusal), there are other buildings of similar or greater height and bulk to the proposed building within the local area, including the leisure centre to the north east (which is equivalent to three storeys in height and has a large footprint), the estate of three storey blocks of flats to the east of Brampton Road and the four storey block of flats to the east along the south side of the A207 (see Photographs 15 to 18).

3.4 Landscape and Townscape Designations, Quality, Value and Sensitivity

Landscape and Townscape Designations

- 3.4.1 There are no landscape or townscape designations affecting the area of and immediately around the site - the RPG is a heritage designation, and as noted above the part of the park adjacent to the site has a very different character to that around Danson House to the south west, though the parts of the park adjacent to the site are within the designated area.

Landscape and Townscape Quality and Value

- 3.4.2 Using the definitions set out in Appendix D to my evidence, I have assessed the site itself and the land immediately around it as being of **medium quality** in landscape and townscape terms to the north and west within the park, and of **low to medium quality** to the north east and east, where the busy road junction is a detracting element and where the houses and other buildings are generally undistinguished in architectural terms. The northern part of the park is a pleasant and open area and is clearly a valuable recreational resource, but its landscape quality is limited by the adjoining residential boundaries and overlooking properties (including those within the site), and also the extensive fenced tennis courts and grassed areas within the part of the park close to the site.
- 3.4.3 As noted in Appendix D, the concept of landscape and townscape value is also important - it includes consideration of landscape/ townscape quality, but also includes other factors in order to avoid a focus only of how scenically attractive an area may be, and thus to avoid undervaluing areas of strong character or important landscape/ townscape function, but little scenic beauty. Factors such as cultural association, recreational use and intangible qualities such as wildness can be important in terms of determining landscape and townscape value, and have some bearing on the area around the site as the park is a designated heritage asset and also a valuable recreational resource. However, the site itself and the areas around it to the north and east have no such additional value, and the overall landscape and townscape value for the area of and around the site has therefore been judged to be **medium**.

Landscape and Townscape Sensitivity

- 3.4.4 Landscape and townscape sensitivity is judged according to the type of development proposed, and relates to the susceptibility of the landscape/ townscape to change and also to its value, as set out in Table 4 of my Appendix D. The site is of **low susceptibility** to the proposed development, as it is already developed and contains some significant buildings - the proposed building would be taller (up to three storeys in height) and would also occupy a greater proportion of the site than the existing houses, but the increase in built form would not necessarily be harmful. In the countryside additional built form is generally taken (even if well designed) to be adverse, because it changes the nature of previously undeveloped areas, but within an urban area (and with a number of other larger and taller buildings already present in the area around the site), that in-principle harm would not apply, and an increase in built form would tend to be harmful only if the increase was very large, or if the design, form or use of the larger building made it locally discordant - none of those would apply in this case.
- 3.4.5 The site is well contained by existing development to the north (with some short distance views from the park entrance but no significant longer distance views), east and south, but open to some short and medium distance views from the west. However, any views of the new building within the site would simply replace existing views of the existing undistinguished houses on the site and their garden boundaries.
- 3.4.6 Taking into account the character of the site as it stands, the scale and nature of the proposed development, the low susceptibility and the medium landscape value, the sensitivity of the site and surrounds to the proposed development is in my judgment **low to medium**. As set out in Table 5 of my Appendix D, this is based on the site having a reasonably good ability to accommodate change as a result of its present use and the nature of the existing houses within it, the fact that the new building (as discussed below) would be visible from a limited area around the site but would not be discordant where seen and the relatively low local landscape quality and value, but also the fact that the landscape of the park to the west is of higher quality and value.

3.5 Visibility

- 3.5.1 Visibility of the site in its current form is limited to some extent by the existing houses and other buildings to its north, east and south (though it is obviously visible from those properties) which prevent any more distant views, and also by the mature trees in Danson Park to the west. The main areas from which the site is presently visible are summarised below:

- From the north there are clear and short distance views from the park entrance path as it passes the site, and also some filtered views from number 1 Danson Mead on the far side of that path - views from that property are partially screened by the birch trees alongside the park entrance, and also by the tall garden hedge which screens any views from ground floor windows. There are also some more heavily screened and oblique views from properties further to the west along Danson Mead and from Park View Road as it runs to the north of the site and from the houses on its northern side - those views are across the busy road. From the north east there are also some views from the area in front of the Crook Log Leisure Centre, diagonally across the busy road junction.
- From the east there are short distance views to the site across Danson Road from around 9 of the properties at the north end of the road, but no significant views from any further to the east, as those properties form an effective screen.
- From the south there are some short distance but filtered views from the adjoining gardens of numbers 10 and (to a lesser extent) 12 Danson Road, above garden fences and through garden trees and other vegetation.
- From the west and south west there are some limited views from the north eastern part only of Danson Park. As noted above, there is a small group of mature trees within the park just to the west of the site, and other trees scattered across the grassed areas within the north eastern part of the park. As a result, any significant views to the site are limited to those parts of the park to the south east of the diagonal access path and a short stretch of that path as it approaches the site. There are some glimpses of the western site boundary from parts of the park to the west of the access path, but no views at all to the site from anywhere within the park to the south of the tennis courts, and no views from the area around the Listed Building of Danson House or the parkland landscape to its south (see Photographs 19 to 24). These judgements were made on site in February and mid April, and visibility within the park would be more limited in the summer when the many trees within it are in full leaf.

4. RELEVANT POLICY BACKGROUND

4.1 General

4.1.1 Mr Batchelor's evidence sets out a full review of relevant planning policy, but in this section I will summarise those aspects of it which are of particular relevance to my assessment.

4.2 National Planning Policy

4.2.1 The Government's national planning policy and guidance on various aspects of planning are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, July 2021). The NPPF states that '*the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development*', and that in order to do so, the planning system must perform mutually dependent economic, social and environmental roles.

4.2.2 Paragraph 130 of the NPPF states (in part) that:

'Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit.'*

4.2.3 Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states:

'Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

- a) *development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b) *outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings’.*

4.3 London Planning Policy

4.3.1 The London Plan 2021 contains the following policies which are cited in LBB’s first Reason for Refusal:

- **Policy D1 - London’s form, character and capacity for growth**, which states:

‘Defining an area’s character to understand its capacity for growth

A *Boroughs should undertake area assessments to define the characteristics, qualities and value of different places within the plan area to develop an understanding of different areas’ capacity for growth. Area assessments should cover the elements listed below:*

- 1) *demographic make-up and socio-economic data (such as Indices of Multiple Deprivation, health and wellbeing indicators, population density, employment data, educational qualifications, crime statistics)*
- 2) *housing types and tenure*
- 3) *urban form and structure (for example townscape, block pattern, urban grain, extent of frontages, building heights and density)*
- 4) *existing and planned transport networks (particularly walking and cycling networks) and public transport connectivity*
- 5) *air quality and noise levels*
- 6) *open space networks, green infrastructure, and water bodies*
- 7) *historical evolution and heritage assets (including an assessment of their significance and contribution to local character)*
- 8) *topography and hydrology*
- 9) *land availability*
- 10) *existing and emerging Development Plan designations*
- 11) *land uses*
- 12) *views and landmarks.*

Planning for growth

B *In preparing Development Plans, boroughs should plan to meet borough-wide growth requirements, including their overall housing targets, by:*

- 1) *using the findings of area assessments (as required in Part A) to identify suitable locations for growth, and the potential scale of that growth (e.g. opportunities for*

extensive, moderate or limited growth) consistent with the spatial approach set out in this Plan; and

- 2) *assessing the capacity of existing and planned physical, environmental and social infrastructure to support the required level of growth and, where necessary, improvements to infrastructure capacity should be planned in infrastructure delivery plans or programmes to support growth; and*
- 3) *following the design-led approach (set out in Policy D3 Optimising site capacity through the design-led approach) to establish optimised site capacities for site allocations. Boroughs are encouraged to set out acceptable building heights, scale, massing and indicative layouts for allocated sites, and, where appropriate, the amount of floorspace that should be provided for different land uses.'*

The supporting text to the policy notes in paragraphs 3.1.1 to 3.1.3 that:

- 3.1.1 *This Plan provides a policy framework for delivering Good Growth through good design. Part A of this policy sets out the requirements for assessing an area's characteristics and Part B sets out the steps for using this information to establish the capacity for growth of different areas and ensure that sites are developed to an optimum capacity that is responsive to the site's context and supporting infrastructure.*
- 3.1.2 *Understanding the existing character and context of individual areas is essential in determining how different places may best develop in the future. An evaluation of the current characteristics of a place, how its past social, cultural, physical and environmental influences have shaped it and what the potential opportunities are for it to change will help inform an understanding of an area's capacity for growth and is crucial for ensuring that growth and development is inclusive.*
- 3.1.3 *It is important to understand how places are perceived, experienced and valued. Those involved in commissioning or undertaking area assessments should consider how they can involve the widest range of people appropriate depending on the scope and purpose of the work.'*

Paragraph 3.1.7 notes that change can be positive:

'As change is a fundamental characteristic of London, respecting character and accommodating change should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Understanding of the character of a place should not seek to preserve things in a static way but should ensure an appropriate balance is struck between existing fabric and any proposed change. Opportunities for change and transformation, through new building forms and typologies, should be informed

by an understanding of a place's distinctive character, recognising that not all elements of a place are special and valued.'

- **Policy D3 - Optimising site capacity through the design-led approach**, which states:

'The design-led approach

- A *All development must make the best use of land by following a design-led approach that optimises the capacity of sites, including site allocations. Optimising site capacity means ensuring that development is of the most appropriate form and land use for the site. The design-led approach requires consideration of design options to determine the most appropriate form of development that responds to a site's context and capacity for growth, and existing and planned supporting infrastructure capacity (as set out in Policy D2 Infrastructure requirements for sustainable densities), and that best delivers the requirements set out in Part D.*
- B *Higher density developments should generally be promoted in locations that are well connected to jobs, services, infrastructure and amenities by public transport, walking and cycling, in accordance with Policy D2 Infrastructure requirements for sustainable densities. Where these locations have existing areas of high density buildings, expansion of the areas should be positively considered by Boroughs where appropriate. This could also include expanding Opportunity Area boundaries where appropriate.*
- C *In other areas, incremental densification should be actively encouraged by Boroughs to achieve a change in densities in the most appropriate way. This should be interpreted in the context of Policy H2 Small sites.*
- D *Development proposals should:*

Form and layout

- 1) *enhance local context by delivering buildings and spaces that positively respond to local distinctiveness through their layout, orientation, scale, appearance and shape, with due regard to existing and emerging street hierarchy, building types, forms and proportions*
- 2) *encourage and facilitate active travel with convenient and inclusive pedestrian and cycling routes, crossing points, cycle parking, and legible entrances to buildings, that are aligned with peoples' movement patterns and desire lines in the area*
- 3) *be street-based with clearly defined public and private environments*
- 4) *facilitate efficient servicing and maintenance of buildings and the public realm, as well as deliveries, that minimise negative impacts on the environment, public realm and vulnerable road users*

Experience

- 5) *achieve safe, secure and inclusive environments*
- 6) *provide active frontages and positive reciprocal relationships between what happens inside the buildings and outside in the public realm to generate liveliness and interest*
- 7) *deliver appropriate outlook, privacy and amenity*
- 8) *provide conveniently located green and open spaces for social interaction, play, relaxation and physical activity*
- 9) *help prevent or mitigate the impacts of noise and poor air quality*
- 10) *achieve indoor and outdoor environments that are comfortable and inviting for people to use*

Quality and character

- 11) *respond to the existing character of a place by identifying the special and valued features and characteristics that are unique to the locality and respect, enhance and utilise the heritage assets and architectural features that contribute towards the local character*
- 12) *be of high quality, with architecture that pays attention to detail, and gives thorough consideration to the practicality of use, flexibility, safety and building lifespan through appropriate construction methods and the use of attractive, robust materials which weather and mature well*
- 13) *aim for high sustainability standards (with reference to the policies within London Plan Chapters 8 and 9) and take into account the principles of the circular economy*
- 14) *provide spaces and buildings that maximise opportunities for urban greening to create attractive resilient places that can also help the management of surface water.*

E Where development parameters for allocated sites have been set out in a Development Plan, development proposals that do not accord with the site capacity in a site allocation can be refused for this reason.'

- **Policy D4 - Delivering good design**, which states:

'Design analysis and development certainty

- A Masterplans and design codes should be used to help bring forward development and ensure it delivers high quality design and place-making based on the requirements set out in Part B of Policy D3 Optimising site capacity through the design-led approach.*
- B Where appropriate, visual, environmental and movement modelling/ assessments should be undertaken to analyse potential design options for an area, site or development proposal. These models, particularly 3D virtual reality and other interactive*

digital models, should, where possible, be used to inform plan-making and decision-taking, and to engage Londoners in the planning process.

Design scrutiny

- C Design and access statements submitted with development proposals should demonstrate that the proposal meets the design requirements of the London Plan.*
- D The design of development proposals should be thoroughly scrutinised by borough planning, urban design, and conservation officers, utilising the analytical tools set out in Part B, local evidence, and expert advice where appropriate. In addition, boroughs and applicants should make use of the design review process to assess and inform design options early in the planning process. Development proposals referable to the Mayor must have undergone at least one design review early on in their preparation before a planning application is made, or demonstrate that they have undergone a local borough process of design scrutiny, based on the principles set out in Part E if they:*
- 1) include a residential component that exceeds 350 units per hectare; or*
 - 2) propose a building defined as a tall building by the borough (see Policy D9 Tall buildings), or that is more than 30m in height where there is no local definition of a tall building.*
- E The format of design reviews for any development should be agreed with the borough and comply with the Mayor's guidance on review principles, process and management, ensuring that:*
- 1) design reviews are carried out transparently by independent experts in relevant disciplines*
 - 2) design review comments are mindful of the wider policy context and focus on interpreting policy for the specific scheme*
 - 3) where a scheme is reviewed more than once, subsequent design reviews reference and build on the recommendations of previous design reviews*
 - 4) design review recommendations are appropriately recorded and communicated to officers and decision makers*
 - 5) schemes show how they have considered and addressed the design review recommendations*
 - 6) planning decisions demonstrate how design review has been addressed.*

Maintaining design quality

- F The design quality of development should be retained through to completion by:*
- 1) ensuring maximum detail appropriate for the design stage is provided to avoid the need for later design amendments and to ensure scheme quality is not adversely affected by later decisions on construction, materials, landscaping details or minor alterations to layout or form of the development*

- 2) *ensuring the wording of the planning permission, and associated conditions and legal agreement, provide clarity regarding the quality of design*
- 3) *avoiding deferring the assessment of the design quality of large elements of a development to the consideration of a planning condition or referred matter*
- 4) *local planning authorities considering conditioning the ongoing involvement of the original design team to monitor the design quality of a development through to completion.'*

4.4 Local Planning Policy

4.4.1 Saved policies of the Bexley Unitary Development Plan (2004) include:

- **Policy ENV39, Built Environment**, which states that:

'In order to protect and enhance the quality of the built environment, the Council will seek to ensure that all new developments, including alterations and extensions, changes of use and other operations, including highway improvements, are satisfactorily located and are of a high standard of design and layout. In determining applications for development the Council will consider the extent to which the proposal:

- 1 *is compatible with the character of the surrounding area, would not prejudice the environment of the occupiers of adjacent property, or adversely affect the street scene by reason of its (a) scale, (b) massing, (c) height, (d) layout, (e) elevational treatment, (f) materials and/or (g) intensity of development;*
- 2 *is appropriately landscaped, including the retention of appropriate trees and shrubs and the incorporation of public art where relevant;*
- 3 *has any unreasonable effect on the surrounding area by reason of noise and any emissions to land, air, or water, and is not, by reason of its location, itself adversely affected by such conditions as may already be in existence within the neighbourhood;*
- 4 *makes adequate provision for vehicle parking in accordance with the Council's vehicle parking standards;*
- 5 *takes due account of the need to deter crime, both against individuals and against public or private property whilst maintaining an attractive environment; and*
- 6 *takes into consideration important local and strategic views, particularly where the proposed development is one which significantly exceeds the height of its surroundings or is located on a prominent skyline ridge.'*

- **Policy H3, Character**, which states:

'Residential development and other development in primarily residential areas should be compatible with the character or appearance of the area in which it is located, and the following criteria should all be satisfied:

- 1 *the layout, scale and massing, elevational treatment, and materials of building should be compatible with the local character or appearance;*
- 2 *the spaces around buildings (including roads) and their hard and soft landscaping and plot separations should be compatible with the local character or appearance and fulfil clear and useful functions;*
- 3 *the development should pay special regard to the setting of any listed buildings or the character and appearance of a Conservation Area where appropriate; and*
- 4 *where appropriate, landscape and nature conservation features of interest, such as trees, hedgerows and ponds, should be preserved.*

Residential development will not normally be permitted in locations which are, or are expected to become, subject to excessive noise.

The actual or potential cumulative effects of a development should be given sufficient weight in applying this policy.'

4.4.2 Relevant policies of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012) include:

- **Policy CS01, Achieving sustainable development**, is a general policy which seeks *'to create a 'strong, sustainable and cohesive community', in order to provide people equal access to a better quality of life, protect the environment, promote the local economy and encourage an active and healthy lifestyle'*. The policy sets out a number of principles which should be met by new development, including:

- 'h maintaining and improving the best elements of Bexley's suburban character by ensuring new development reflects or, where possible, enhances the unique characteristics of these areas, including residential gardens and the historic environment;*
- i ensuring that building height, mass and setting enhances the character of the surrounding locality, and requiring proposals for tall buildings to make a positive contribution to the existing character of the surrounding area by being of high architectural quality and appropriate to their local and historic context. '*

- Policy CS03 is cited in LBB's first Reason for Refusal, but LBB have confirmed that is an error and should refer to Policy CS07, (see below), as Policy CS03 relates to the Belvedere geographic region which is some distance from the site.

- **Policy CS07, Welling geographic region** - this policy sets out a '*vision for the Welling geographic region*', which includes the following criteria:
 - 'd ensuring that the heritage assets and areas that are characterised by mainly semidetached and detached family housing are retained and, where possible, improved, including the surrounding environment, and that new development is in keeping with the local and historic character of these areas;*

 - g protecting or enhancing the key heritage asset of Danson Mansion, Danson Park and its role as a prestigious park, including enhancing access, especially from the town centre.'*

5. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 General

5.1.1 The proposals are shown on the drawings and described in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) submitted with the application, and also within Ms Bryan and Ms French's evidence. In this section I will summarise those aspects of the proposals which are of most relevance to my assessment, including the those which the first Reason for Refusal finds harmful, i.e. layout, height, bulk and scale. I will also comment on the quality of the design and materials for the new building - those matters do not feature in the Reason for Refusal, but are obviously important in considering what the effects of the development on the local area may be.

5.1.2 As set out in Ms Bryan and Ms French's evidence, the design has been developed in order to fit in with and complement the surrounding area, without simply aping the surrounding house types, which are of no particular architectural quality and would not be appropriate as a template for a high quality building designed for a different use. The design is a bespoke one, specifically developed for this site, and is not an off the peg or standard design solution.

5.2 Building Proposals

Design Approach

5.2.1 As set out in the DAS, the design has made use of two typologies - one to address the street frontage and building line along the Danson Road frontage, and one to address the park entrance which runs along the north side of the site.

Layout

5.2.2 The Danson Road frontage is broken down into four elements to reflect the existing arrangement of houses, with pitched roofs to reflect the surrounding domestic architecture, but with the use of modern, high quality materials.

5.2.3 The northern frontage has been set back from the boundary hedge (which would be retained), and is also set well away from the main body of the park at the western end of the site, where presently the collection of unattractive sheds and garden structures within the site directly adjoins the park.

Height

- 5.2.4 The new building would generally be two storeys in height (with an additional floor below existing ground levels in places) to reflect the adjoining houses, with a three storey element at the northern end of the Danson Road frontage to address the corner and provide a low key local focal point. However, as a result of the generally shallow roof pitches the new building would not be significantly taller than the existing houses along Danson Road - as set out in the DAS (pages 30 and 31), the ridge heights for the existing numbers 6 and 8 Danson Road are 51.6m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) - the proposed ridge height would be 52.7m, just over 1m taller, and the ridge height of the adjacent 12 Danson Road is 53.1m, i.e. higher than the proposed maximum ridge height.
- 5.2.5 The highest points of the new development would be 54.5m, on the chimney features of the three storey element - this compares with 52.7m for the chimney to numbers 2 and 4 Danson Road, and 54.4m for the chimney to number 12 - the height of the new development would therefore be broadly comparable with existing building heights within and around the site.

Bulk

- 5.2.6 The new building would have a greater bulk than the existing houses on the site as it would have a larger footprint and volume, but it would not be a bulky building in the pejorative sense of that word - the building has been well designed and articulated in terms of its form, elevations and materials to appear light and active, rather than as a homogenous mass. I would also note that a significant proportion of the additional built form would not be apparent from outside the site, as it results from the additional depth of footprint away from the visible elevations and back into the site, and also from the additional floor below existing ground levels - the visible elevation onto Danson Road would not appear more bulky than the existing frontage.

Scale

- 5.2.7 I would make similar observations in terms of the scale of the proposed building - it would clearly be larger than the combined scale of the existing houses, but the full increase in the scale of built development would not be apparent from outside the site, and neither would it be inherently harmful - the local area already contains buildings of a variety of scales, including some very large structures, such as the Crook Log Leisure Centre (as can be seen in plan form on Figure 4.1.1 of Ms Bryan and Ms French's evidence).

Quality of Design and Materials

5.2.8 The existing houses along Danson Road are of a variety of styles, but are in general large semi-detached or detached inter-war suburban villas with gables, pitched roofs and bay windows. They are ordinary houses of no particular architectural quality, and their materials are also ordinary, with brick or rendered walls and clay or concrete roof tiles. There is nothing wrong with the houses and they do not detract from local townscape quality, but neither do they enhance it. The proposed building is a bespoke design which has been developed to specifically address its location, and materials would be high quality and include red and red/ brown facing bricks, masonry window surrounds and mullions, and grey or dark red/ brown standing seam zinc for the roofs.

5.2.9 The proposals would also involve the removal of some elements of the existing site which do detract from local townscape quality, in the form of the garden boundaries and buildings at the western end of the site, along its boundary with Danson Park.

5.3 Landscape Proposals

5.3.1 Landscape proposals for the development have been drawn up by Tyler Grange, and are described in the DAS and shown on the landscape drawings submitted with the application. I have summarised the main elements of these proposals which are relevant to my assessment below:

- Significant existing trees would be retained, including the oak and sycamore in the front garden of number 2 Danson Road and the ash tree in its rear garden close to the park boundary.
- The site boundaries to the park would be secured by means of a new 1.8m high timber fence - the Boundary Treatment Plan drawing shows a contemporary fence with horizontal boards. Existing planting outside the fence line (mixed shrubs along the western boundary and a trimmed hedge to the north alongside the park entrance) would be retained and enhanced with new planting where there are gaps or poor sections.
- The eastern boundary alongside Danson Road would comprise a low brick wall and metal railings, with shrub beds behind to soften the proposed parking areas.

- The southern boundary with number 10 Danson Road would be 1.8m high timber fencing as for the park boundaries, with shrub planting inside the fence line.
- Planting within the site would vary with location, with the aim of helping to provide a variety of environments and experiences for staff and residents. As shown on the drawings, there would be areas of metal pergolas to support climbing plants, a sensory garden with textured and scented plants, terraced and sunken gardens, and an area for growing cut flowers for use within the new care home.

6. LANDSCAPE, TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

6.1 General

6.1.1 This section sets out the landscape, townscape and visual effects which I believe would result from the proposed development.

6.2 Landscape and Visual Change

Visibility

6.2.1 I have described the current visibility of the site in Section 3.5 above. The redevelopment of the site to provide the new care home would not significantly increase that degree of visibility, as the height of the new buildings would be only marginally greater than the existing houses on the site. The area from which the proposed development would be visible would therefore be essentially the same as that described in Section 3.5, and is shown on Figure 3 in my Appendix.

Landscape and Visual Change

6.2.2 While the extent of the visibility of the site would remain broadly the same, the nature of the views would change, and the new building would have a different appearance within the local area, as set out below.

6.2.3 Before considering the likely landscape, townscape and visual effects of the proposed development, it is important to note the following important characteristics of both it and the surrounding landscape and townscape:

- The site is within the urban area, and is already developed and occupied by four reasonably large houses, their gardens and garden buildings. Some of those garden buildings are unattractive in terms of their design and materials and adjoin the boundary with Danson Park.
- The proposals would involve an increase in the amount of built development on the site in terms of footprint and volume, with a slight increase also in height, but much of the increase in height and volume would not be apparent from outside the site, and the new building would not be significantly higher than other buildings in the area close to the site (and would in fact be lower than some of them).

- While an increase in built development may generally be seen as adverse for greenfield sites within the countryside, that in-principle harm does not apply in urban areas, and an increase in built form would tend to be harmful only if the increase was very large, or if the design, form or use of the larger building made it locally discordant - none of those considerations apply in this case.
- The new building would have limited visibility from the surrounding area, and where seen would replace the existing houses on the site in the view.
- The site adjoins Danson Park, which is a Registered Park and Garden, but cannot be seen from the central and southern parts of the park around the Georgian mansion, which are more sensitive in landscape terms than the more municipal, north eastern parts of the park which do have some views of the site.
- The new building would be clearly visible from the entrance to the park which runs along the northern site boundary, and would replace views of the existing side elevation to number 2 Danson Road. There would be a greater length of built development alongside the park entrance, but the new building at this point would be set further back from the park boundary, would be no taller than the existing house, and would be of higher quality in terms of its design and materials.
- The proposed building is a bespoke design which has been developed to specifically address its location, and the materials used in its construction would be high quality, so there would be some elements of improvement in townscape terms over the existing buildings on the site, which are undistinguished in terms of their design and materials.

6.2.4 Bearing the above in mind, the change to the landscape and townscape around the site (i.e. the areas likely to be affected by the development proposals, as broadly indicated by the extent of the visual envelope shown on Figure 3) brought about by the proposed development would in general be **low to medium** in terms of degree, and **broadly neutral** in terms of its nature, as it would be roughly balanced between the potentially negative aspects of the additional built form (though as noted above, much of that increase would not be readily apparent from outside the site, and additional built form is not inherently harmful within an urban area) and the positive aspects of the high quality bespoke design and materials.

6.3 Landscape and Townscape Effects

- 6.3.1 As set out in my Appendix D, landscape and townscape effects are assessed in terms of the magnitude of the change brought about by the development in combination with the sensitivity of the resource affected. I have assessed the landscape and townscape of and around the site as of low to medium sensitivity to development of the type proposed. The magnitude of change brought about by the development would also be low to medium in terms of its degree, and broadly neutral in terms of its nature. Landscape and townscape effects on the area around the site would therefore be at a **slight to moderate** level in terms of their significance, recognising that the character of the area around the site would change to some degree, but **neutral** in terms of their nature, as they would be broadly balanced between the negative and positive aspects of the change. This would be in the winter of the first year following completion, when the various elements of the development would be at their most visible, and effects would be expected to become **gradually beneficial** over time as the proposed planting matures and the new building is progressively integrated into the surrounding landscape and townscape.
- 6.3.2 These effects would be felt over a limited area, as indicated by the visual envelope shown on my Figure 3.

6.4 Visual Effects

- 6.4.1 Landscape and townscape effects are those affecting the landscape or townscape as a resource, while visual effects are those affecting a specific visual receptor. Visual receptors are normally taken to be people in their homes or at publicly accessible points, or moving along public highways or footpaths. The assessment of visual effects is set out in the table in my Appendix C, and also described below. As set out in my Appendix D, residential properties are normally taken to be of high sensitivity, unless they have partial views only, and users of Public Rights of Way or areas of public open space are also generally of high sensitivity unless stated otherwise.
- a) Properties to the north - there would be some short distance and filtered views of the new building from three first floor windows on the side elevation of number 1 Danson Mead, across the park entrance path - views from that property are partially screened by the birch trees alongside the park entrance, and also by the tall garden hedge which screens any views from ground floor windows. The existing view is across the rear gardens of numbers 2 and 4 Danson Road with the side elevation of number 2 only obliquely visible to the east, but the angle of the view means that the rear elevations of

numbers 6 to 10 are present in the view but slightly further away. The northern element of the new building would be visible extending across the view and above the retained hedge, resulting in some closing down of the view and **slight adverse visual effects** for this property. These effects have been judged to be adverse (as opposed to neutral effects for people passing along the park entrance just to the south of this property - see below), as this is a fixed view and viewpoint, rather than the kinetic and variable views which people passing along the entrance would experience. There would also be some more heavily screened and oblique views from properties further to the west along Danson Mead and from the houses on the northern side of Park View Road, across the busy road. Any effects for these properties would be **insignificant**.

- b) Properties to the east - there would be some short distance views of the new building across Danson Road from around 9 of the properties at the north end of the road, in which the new building would replace the existing houses on the site, with some filtering provided by the mature trees at the northern end of the site and also by front garden vegetation on the east side of the road. There would be a minor increase in the height of the building but also some improvements in terms of design quality and materials, and the overall view would not change significantly. Any visual effects would be no more than **slight** in magnitude, and **broadly balanced between positive and negative aspects**, for the same reasons as discussed above for landscape and townscape effects.
- c) Properties to the south - there would be some short distance but filtered views from the adjoining gardens of numbers 10 and (to a lesser extent) 12 Danson Road, above garden fences and through garden trees and other vegetation. The eastern element of the new building would replace the existing houses on the site in the view, and the new, northern element would be some distance away and more strongly filtered by intervening trees. Any visual effects would again be no more than **slight** in magnitude, and **broadly balanced between positive and negative aspects**.
- d) Users of Danson Park - there would be some limited views of the new building from the north eastern part only of Danson Park, noting that there is a small group of mature trees within the park just to the west of the site, and other trees scattered across the grassed areas within the north eastern part of the park also limit views to the site. The eastern element of the new building would replace the existing houses on the site in the view, and the new, northern element would be set back from the main body of the park, though clearly visible above the boundary hedge from the park entrance path. There would be some beneficial aspects to the change in the view as a result of the improved boundary treatment to the west and the removal of the generally unsightly garden buildings, as well as the improved materials and design quality of the new building.

Effects for users of the park entrance would be **slight to moderate** in terms of their significance, recognising that the view from that area would change, but **neutral** in terms of their nature, as they would be broadly balanced between the negative and positive aspects of the change. Effects for people elsewhere within the north eastern part of the park would be **insignificant**, and there would be **no visual effects** for users of the central and southern parts of the park.

- e) Users of Local Roads - as set out in my Appendix D, users of busy roads are taken to be of low sensitivity, particularly for roads in urban areas. People passing along Danson Road and also a short stretch of Danson Mead to the north, as well as (to a lesser extent) Park View Road further to the north would have clear and short distance views of the new building, but they would again replace views of the existing houses on the site, and would be seen in the context of a journey along urban roads which would include a variety of other buildings - there would therefore be **no significant effects** for users of the roads around the site.

6.4.2 The above effects would be in the winter of the first year following completion, and all of the effects would tend to gradually become beneficial with time, as the proposed planting begins to mature and the new building becomes more integrated within its setting.

6.5 Night Time Effects

6.5.1 The above effects are those which would take place during the day. There would also be some potential for night time effects, as the new building would contain light sources both within it and for the parking and garden areas around it. However, the existing buildings on the site also contain light sources, and the area around the site is generally well lit to the north and east, though the park to the west is closed and largely dark at night. There would therefore be no significant additional effects at night, over and above those set out above for the daytime.

6.6 Planning Policy

- 6.6.1 In general, the national and local planning policies which I have summarised above seek to prevent harm and to provide enhancement where possible. It therefore follows that as I have identified no significant landscape or townscape harm, with effects gradually becoming beneficial over time, there would be no conflict with the range of policies concerned.
- 6.6.2 Recurrent and repetitive themes within the policies which I have summarised are that developments should be *'sympathetic to local character and history'*, should deliver *'the most appropriate form of development that responds to a site's context'*, should *'positively respond to*

local distinctiveness, should *respond to the existing character of a place*, *be of high quality, with architecture that pays attention to detail*, should be *compatible with the character of the surrounding area*, and also *compatible with the local character or appearance*. It is inherent in those policies and in design guidance in general that respecting local character does not simply mean copying what is already there - the proposed building would be of a contemporary design, but (as set out in the DAS and Ms Bryan and Ms French's evidence) that design has drawn upon and reflects local character, and my view is that the proposed development would accord with this general policy theme.

6.7 Subjectivity

6.7.1 In making the above judgements, I am conscious that there are inevitably elements of subjectivity within them - that is recognised in the GLVIA, which states in its paragraph 2.23 that *'much of the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements'*, though such judgements need to be explained and justified. My opinion is that the proposed development would contain elements of improvement in terms of its design and materials relative to the existing houses on the site, and also in terms of the removal of the existing somewhat unsightly garden boundaries and buildings. My opinion is also that the proposed design is entirely appropriate within its suburban context, which already contains a variety of building styles and materials.

6.7.2 Design appreciation is to some extent a subjective matter, but even if I were to be of the opinion that the proposed design was unattractive or inappropriate, perhaps because it is contemporary in style, any perceived increase in height or amount of built form would still be limited, and buildings of an increased size are not generally considered to cause significant harm within urban areas unless that harm is at a level where it would be discordant. In this case there are other large buildings within the townscape around the site, and the development would be set back from (and not widely visible from within) the park to the west. Even if the subjective opinion of a viewer was that they did not like the proposed design, my view is that any adverse effects would still be at a low level, and would affect a localised area around the site only.

6.8 Other Assessments

6.8.1 I would note in respect of my assessment as set out above that the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) submitted with the application was in general agreement, as it stated (in its paragraph 6.14) that there would be a neutral change in terms of local built form, because:

'... the overall quality and legibility of the built form will be increased and the existing character of the typology will not materially change and no existing defining features will be removed. The characteristic set back built edge will be retained along Danson Road as will the existing material palette. There are changes to the roofline but as Appendix 3 shows the change is minimal and would not be incongruent. The on-going evolution and development of the proposals has ensured that they would be seen as part of the existing streetscene and not an incongruent addition.'

6.8.2 I will make more specific reference to the LBB Planning Officer's Report in the following section, but I would note here that it also accorded with my assessment, both in much of its detailed content and analysis and also in its overall conclusion that:

'On balance, it is considered that the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing character and appearance of the locality.'

7. REVIEW AGAINST REASON FOR REFUSAL

7.1 General

7.1.1 In this section I will consider my assessment against LBB's first Reason for Refusal. I will also make some brief comments on the Planning Officer's Report where appropriate, and comment on LBB's July 2022 Appeal Statement and some of the representations made by third parties. As noted above, LBB have now withdrawn their Reasons for Refusal and are not contesting the Appeal, but I have retained these sections of my evidence as many of the points and objections to the proposed development previously made by LBB are maintained by the Rule 6 party.

7.2 The Planning Officer's Report

7.2.1 I have a number of observations on the Planning Officer's Report, as set out below in the order in which they appear. The report does not have page or paragraph numbers, so I have grouped my comments according to the report's sub-headings.

Impact on the character and appearance of the area

Impact on the Historic Environment

The report notes that *'The bulk, scale and mass of the development would increase over the current dwellings'*, but also states that the *'tree and hedge lined nature of the access to the park'* and the *'set back from all boundaries fronting into the park'* would reduce visual impact. The report concludes that *'It is not considered that it would result in an overbearing visual impact to the entrance or wider park.'*

Design

The report makes the following observations:

'The proposed development would be seen from both the rear of neighbouring properties, from Danson Road, along the entrance into Danson Park and from limited views within the park itself.'

'The massing of the proposal has been designed to break up the visual mass along Danson Road. The frontage, while a single building, would be well articulated and reflect the residential character. This would be achieved through the use of typically domestic style roof forms (hipped and gabled) as well as the set back of parts of the front to provide depth, interest and reduce visual monotony.'

'The side wing which extends along the boundary adjoining the entrance to Danson Park has been carefully designed to minimise visual impact between hedges and trees that currently exists. The proposed wing would be set away from the two metre high hedge line by between 2 and 4.5 metres in order to reduce its prominence.'

'Additional trees and planting would be provided along this boundary to add screening. Whilst the wing would be clearly visible, given the lightweight materials proposed to be used it is considered that on balance, the visual impact would be acceptable.'

'The proposed building is a part single, part two, part three storey building of a high-quality contemporary design. The design makes use of varying heights, gables and hipped roofs and large fenestration. Along the northern boundary, the proposal has been designed as a three-storey building to Danson Road, reducing to two storeys along the Danson Park entrance.'

'The material palette proposed includes a mixture of red/brown bricks with dark and light mortar, zinc, metal framing (in order to allow for planted climbers), masonry fins and masonry window surrounds. The materials would complement the contemporary design of the development. Whilst details of these materials have been provided in the submitted Design and Access Statement, a materials condition is recommended to ensure that a high-quality finish would be delivered.'

'On balance, it is considered that the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing the character and appearance of the locality.'

'Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed development conforms to the objectives of Policies D3 and D4 of the London Plan (2021), CS01 and CS07 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012) and ENV39 and H3 of the Bexley UDP (2004).'

Conclusion

The report comes to the following conclusions:

'Based on the above analysis, it is considered that the proposed redevelopment to provide a 70 care home would not cause harm sufficient to Danson Park or the listed buildings within to warrant refusal. Additionally, there is not an adverse impact resulting from the scheme that would significantly outweigh the benefits of the scheme in providing 70 beds for dementia and end of life care.'

'Therefore, the scheme is considered acceptable, subject to conditions and the entering into of a S106 agreement.'

7.2.2 I agree with those conclusions. As a result of that analysis, the report recommended that planning permission be granted. I would note from the above that:

- The Planning Officer did not appear to consider the matter finely balanced, and gave a clear recommendation for approval.
- The report specifically considered matters of the '*bulk, scale and mass of the development*', the '*visual impact to the entrance or wider park*', the '*side wing*' alongside the park entrance, the proposed storey heights and the proposed materials, and found them all to be acceptable.
- The Planning Officer's judgement was that the proposals would make a '*meaningful contribution to the street scene*' (and that contribution would presumably be positive), and that the development could take place '*without harming the existing character and appearance of the locality*'.

7.3 The Reason for Refusal

7.3.1 LBB's first Reason for Refusal was (in direct contradiction to the analysis set out in the Officer's report, and noting that LBB have now withdrawn this Reason) :

'1 The proposed development, by reason of layout, height bulk and scale would result in a form and scale of development which would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, contrary to policies D1, D3 and D4 of the London Plan (2021), policies CS01 and CS03 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012), saved policies ENV39 and H3 of the Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004) and Paragraph 130 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

7.3.2 There are a number of strands to this reason, and I will comment on them in turn as follows (on the basis that many of the points are relevant to the case of the Rule 6 Party), with a summary of the component of the reason in italics, and then my observations in normal type below:

- *The proposed development, by reason of layout ...*

As set out in the Planning Officer's Report, the proposals comprise two 'wings' - that running to the south alongside Danson Road, and the element running to the west to the south of the park access. The Danson Road frontage addresses the road in much the same way as the existing houses on the site, and I see no reason why the layout of that element could be considered harmful. The northern wing does introduce an additional element of built form to the south of the park entrance, as the new wing would extend further to the west than does the existing number 2 Danson Road. However, the new wing would be two storeys only in height, would be set back behind the existing boundary hedge, would be a well-designed structure using high quality materials, and the avenue of trees along the park entrance would screen it to some degree. I would

also note that this is an entrance to an urban municipal park, from a busy urban road junction - the presence of a building alongside the entrance would not appear discordant within this urban context. I therefore agree with the observation of LBB's Planning Officer, that: *'Whilst the wing would be clearly visible, given the lightweight materials proposed to be used it is considered that on balance, the visual impact would be acceptable.'*

- *... height ...*

As I have noted, the height of the new building would not be significantly greater than that of the existing houses within or adjoining the site, and there are other taller buildings in the local area within around 100m of the site. Those buildings, including the leisure centre and the 4 storey residential buildings to the north east of the site are part of the *'character and appearance of the area'*, so I cannot see why the proposed lower height buildings on the site would harm that character and appearance.

- *... bulk and scale ...*

As I have also noted, the new building would be larger than the existing houses on the site in terms of its footprint and volume, and there would therefore be an increase in the bulk and scale of built development. However, much of that increase would not be apparent from outside the site, and the new building would not have a bulky appearance. It is again part of the character and appearance of the area that it already contains a number of large scale and somewhat bulky buildings, and the proposed new building would be well designed to fit into its immediate and wider context, and would not look in any way out of place

- *... would result in a form and scale of development which would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area ...*

Before considering whether the development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area it is clearly necessary to first determine what the existing character and appearance is. My assessment is that the local character is in general busy, developed and urban, though the large open area of Danson Park does provide some relief from that character to the west. It is also part of the character and appearance that there are other buildings of similar or greater height and bulk than the proposed building within the local area, that the quality of the existing buildings on and around the site in terms of design and materials is not high, and that the northern and western site boundaries facing onto the park access and body of the park respectively have a somewhat unattractive, run down appearance. My assessment is that the new

building would not harm the character and appearance of the area, and that there would be some elements of improvement in terms of its design quality and the quality of its materials - taking into account the increase in built form, my assessment is therefore that there would be neutral effects on the character and appearance of the area, and that those effects would become increasingly positive over time.

- ... *contrary to policies D1, D3 and D4 of the London Plan (2021),*

These are lengthy policies, and the reason does not explain which aspects of them the proposals are considered to conflict with, but I assume the claimed conflict is to do with the recurrent theme within the policies that designs should reflect and respect the character of the area. For the reasons set out above, my view is that the proposals would be in accordance with those aspects of the policies.

- ... *policies CS01 and CS03 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012),*

LBB have confirmed that the reference to Policy CS03 is an error, and should instead refer to Policy CS07, which covers the 'geographic region' including the site. Policy CS07 refers to the '*key heritage asset of Danson Mansion*', but these policies do also cover similar ground to those of the London Plan discussed above in terms of respecting the character of the area, so for the same reasons my view is that the proposals would be in accordance with those aspects of the policies.

- ... *saved policies ENV39 and H3 of the Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004)*

These policies again have a number of elements to them, but I assume that the reason is again identifying conflict with the aspects of them which state that a development should be '*compatible with the character or appearance of the area in which it is located*' - for the reasons set out above my view is again that there is in fact no such conflict.

- ... *and Paragraph 130 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).*

These are general design policies, with Paragraph 130 stating that developments should be '*sympathetic to local character and history*', so I assume that the claimed conflict is again on the same basis as above, and my view is again that the proposed development is in fact well designed, is sympathetic to local character, and would result in no harm to the character of the local area.

7.3.3 The reason takes specific issue with the layout, height, bulk and scale of the development, but LBB's own Planning Officer (as noted above) in the course of his (or her) detailed consideration of the proposals concluded that those matters were acceptable.

7.3.4 In summary, I would therefore conclude that the first Reason for Refusal as it relates to my evidence is not justified, as the proposed development would not harm the character and appearance of the area and would therefore not lead to the claimed policy conflict. I would also note that my view of this matter was shared by LBB's own Planning Officer, as set out in the Officer's Report, which identified no policy conflict which would justify a refusal of planning permission, and that presumably LBB have now come to a similar conclusion, as the Reasons for Refusal have been withdrawn.

7.4 LBB's July 2022 Appeal Statement

7.4.1 This document is dated 22 July 2022, and was produced at a time when the appeal was due to be heard at a hearing. Although LBB will not now be presenting evidence at the Inquiry, I have commented on the statement below, again on the basis that many of the points within it are maintained by the Rule 6 Party.

7.4.2 As I have noted, Policy CS03 is cited in LBB's first Reason for Refusal, and LBB's statement confirms in paragraph 2.2 that is an error and should refer to Policy CS07, as Policy CS03 relates to the Belvedere geographic region which is some distance from the site.

7.4.3 I have a number of comments on the parts of the statement which cover the first Reason for Refusal (pages 6 to 9), as set out below by reference to the paragraph numbers in the statement:

- In paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10 the statement says that the site and surrounding area has '*a distinct character*', and is a '*distinct area defined by large detached and semi-detached houses*'. In my opinion this significantly exaggerates the distinctiveness of the area around the site - it is simply part of the wider suburban area, and my Figures 1 and 3 show that the built form around the site on Danson Road does not differ significantly from that within the suburban area just to the east and south east, or further away to the north and west.
- Paragraph 2.9 refers to the Bexley Local Character Study, which as I have noted does show the houses along the west side of Danson Road as being within the '*detached sparse*' typology, though as I have also noted, most of them are in fact not detached,

and they are very similar to the properties of the east side of the road, which are shown in a different typology.

- My view is that the properties on the western side of Danson Road at this point are not particularly distinctive, and insofar as they can be identified as being set within slightly larger plots, I do not see that as conferring any particular status or value - they are simply part of the general variation within the wider suburban area, and that variation also includes (as I have noted) a number of larger scale and denser developments within the area around the site.
- Paragraphs 2.13 and 2.14 state that the existing houses are set back from the street, '*allowing front gardens to provide parking and maintaining large areas of mature landscape*', which '*creates a verdant street character*'. Paragraph 2.14 states that the proposed parking area within the site '*diverges from this prevailing approach*'. I would note that the proposed building line follows the existing street frontages, so there would be no significant change in that respect, and also that the four properties within the site (and in particular numbers 2 and 4) already have extensively paved front gardens devoted to car parking (as can be seen on my Photographs 1, 3, 9 and 13), and that the proposals would retain the largest existing trees within those front gardens, so again the degree of change would be limited.
- Paragraph 2.16 seeks to identify a problem in that the '*rhythm of entrances*' along the road would be 'disrupted' by the single main entrance to the new building. In my judgement the entrances to the houses are not a particularly strong element of the streetscape, and other elements of the existing houses such as the gable ends to the roofs are much more apparent. The proposals reflect some of these features in the new built form, but the new building would clearly look different than the existing houses - I do not see that as being inherently harmful however: the proposals would just introduce some variation (while respecting the adjoining built form) to an area which already has some variation in the scale and nature of built form, and which is not of any particular value or overriding character in townscape terms.
- Paragraph 2.17 makes another general (though largely inaccurate) statement in that '*the large plots within this area means [sic] that large gaps exist between houses*', before going on to accept that this character has been eroded on the site (as can be seen from my Figure 2 and Photographs 1, 2 and 5 - the gaps between the houses are in fact very small). If the characteristic referred to has already been eroded on the site, I do not see what significant further harm could result from the development in this respect.

7.4.4 In summary, my view of this part of the statement is that it would appear that the Council were casting around in search of some defining characteristic of the local area which would be harmed by the development, but they have in my opinion exaggerated the distinctiveness of the area, the extent to which any such distinctiveness may matter or have a specific value, and the extent of any harm caused.

7.4.5 I would also note that the views expressed in the LBB Appeal Statement are in direct contrast to those set out in LBB's own Planning Officer's Report, which stated in respect of the design that: *The massing of the proposal has been designed to break up the visual mass along Danson Road. The frontage, while a single building, would be well articulated and reflect the residential character*', and in overall terms that:

On balance, it is considered that the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing the character and appearance of the locality.'

7.4.6 No explanation is given in the Appeal Statement as to why the judgements set out in the Planning Officer's Report should be set aside or were considered by LBB at the time of refusal and subsequently in the preparation of their statement to be completely incorrect.

7.5 Third Party Representations

7.5.1 I have read the representations made by local residents and other third parties (some of whom now have Rule 6 status at the Inquiry), and I have set out below some comments on the main themes of those representations. Many of the points made are repeated in several of the representations (and in many cases the wording is identical), so I have grouped the points made under a number of headings, which I have set out below in italics, with my observations following in normal type:

The design of the new building is not in keeping with the residential buildings in the road and surrounding area/ the design is unsightly and does not fit in with neighbouring houses.

Design appreciation is to some extent a matter of personal taste, but the proposals have been developed to reflect some of the characteristics and features of the adjoining houses (while noting that the proposed building has a different function and layout and cannot simply mimic the nearby houses).

The bulk and scale of the proposed building is inappropriate.

The new building would be larger than the existing houses on the site in terms of its footprint and volume, and there would therefore be an increase in the bulk and scale of built development. However, much of that increase would not be apparent from outside the site, and the new building would not have a bulky appearance. It is part of the existing character and appearance of the area around the site that it already contains a number of large scale and somewhat bulky buildings, and some further variation in this respect would not be inherently harmful within the urban area. The proposed new building would be well designed to fit into its immediate and wider context, and would not look in any way out of place.

The height of the proposed building is inappropriate/ the three storey element is out of place in the local area, where all the houses are two storeys in height.

While three storeys in part, the overall height of the new building would not be significantly greater than that of the existing houses within or adjoining the site, and there are other taller buildings in the local area within around 100m of the site. Those buildings, including the leisure centre and the 4 storey residential buildings to the north east of the site are part of the 'character and appearance of the area', so the proposed lower height buildings on the site would not be out of place within the local area, which already includes significant variation in terms of building height.

The proposal to remove the existing hedge along the south side of the park entrance would be harmful.

The existing hedge will in fact be retained, with a 1.8m timber fence inside the hedge line (i.e. behind the hedge in views from the park entrance) to provide additional security.

- 7.5.2 Finally I would also observe that, although local people are clearly entitled to express their own views, those views run contrary to not only my assessment but also the judgement of LBB's own Planning Officer's Report, which stated that *'the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing the character and appearance of the locality.'* I would also note that LBB are no longer defending their previous Reasons for Refusal at the Inquiry.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The site is within the Greater London urban area, is already developed and is within a busy urban environment. Within that wider urban area, the site adjoins the north eastern entrance to Danson Park, which is a Grade II Listed Park and Garden, with an 18th Century mansion and lake around 450m to the south west of the site. The boundary to the Registered Park and Garden (RPG) runs along the northern site boundary (alongside the park entrance) and also the western site boundary, at the end of the rear gardens to numbers 2 to 8 Danson Road.
- 8.2 The site itself comprises two pairs of substantial semi-detached houses and their front and rear gardens. The houses are inter-war suburban houses with gabled frontages and are undistinguished in terms of their architecture and materials; they are typical of other houses along Danson Road and within the surrounding urban area.
- 8.3 A full planning application for the proposed development was submitted to the London Borough of Bexley (LBB) in December 2019, and was accompanied by a number of supporting documents, including a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Tyler Grange, and a Design and Access Statement (DAS). The application was then the subject of detailed discussions with Council officers, and was reported to the Planning Committee in November 2021 with a clear recommendation for approval. The Planning Officer's Report was detailed and extensive, and concluded in terms of the design of the development that:
- 'On balance, it is considered that the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing character and appearance of the locality.'*
- 8.4 The area around the site has a generally busy urban character, though the site does also adjoin the RPG of Danson Park - within the park there is a significant difference in character between its central and southern parts which include the gardens to the north of the mansion and the sweeping parkland landscape to its south, and the northern part of the park (closer to the site) which has the character of a municipal park, with play areas, tennis courts, bowling greens, open grass areas and avenues of trees alongside broad paths.
- 8.5 The quality of the existing buildings on the site in terms of design and materials is not high, and the northern and western site boundaries facing onto the park access and body of the park respectively have a somewhat unattractive, run down appearance and do not make a positive contribution to the views from the park entrance or from its north eastern corner.

- 8.6 In terms of height, bulk and scale (which are referenced in LBB's first Reason for Refusal), there are other buildings of similar or greater height and bulk than the proposed building within the local area, including the leisure centre to the north east (which is equivalent to three storeys in height and has a large footprint), the estate of three storey blocks of flats to the east of Brampton Road and the four storey residential buildings to the east along the south side of the A207.
- 8.7 The proposals are for the demolition of the existing houses on the site together with their various garden buildings, and the construction of a new care home to a bespoke design, with an eastern element reflecting the arrangement of the existing houses along Danson Road and a northern element extending to the south of the entrance to the park. The height of the new building would be broadly comparable with existing building heights within and around the site, and while it would have a greater bulk than the existing houses on the site it would not be a bulky building in the pejorative sense of that word - the building has been well designed and articulated in terms of its form, elevations and materials to appear light and active, rather than as a homogenous mass. A significant proportion of the additional built form would not be apparent from outside the site, as it results from the additional depth of footprint away from the visible elevations and back into the site, and also from an additional floor below existing ground levels - the visible elevation onto Danson Road would not appear more bulky than the existing frontage.
- 8.8 The change to the landscape and townscape around the site brought about by the proposed development would in general be low to medium in terms of degree, and broadly neutral in terms of its nature, as it would be roughly balanced between the potentially negative aspects of the additional built form (though much of that increase would not be readily apparent from outside the site, and additional built form is not inherently harmful within an urban area) and the positive aspects of the high quality bespoke design and materials.
- 8.9 Landscape and townscape effects on the area around the site would therefore be at a slight to moderate level in terms of their significance, recognising that the character of the area around the site would change to some degree, but neutral in terms of their nature, as they would be broadly balanced between the negative and positive aspects of the change. This would be in the winter of the first year following completion, when the various elements of the development would be at their most visible, and effects would be expected to become gradually beneficial over time as the proposed planting matures and the new building is progressively integrated into the surrounding landscape and townscape. These effects would be on a limited area only, close to the site, and there would be no effects on the parts of Danson Park around the lake and the Listed Building of Danson House.
- 8.10 There would also be some visual effects for the properties to the north, east and south of the site, with slight adverse effects for the closest property on Danson Mead to the north. Other visual

effects, including those on users of the park and people passing along local roads, would be at a low level and broadly balanced between positive and negative aspects.

- 8.11 Turning to the first (and now withdrawn) Reason for Refusal, it refers to the layout, height, bulk and scale of the development resulting in harm to the character and appearance of the area. My assessment is that the character of the area is in general busy, developed and urban, and it is also part of the character and appearance that there are already other buildings of similar or greater height and bulk than the proposed building within the local area. In my judgement the new building would not harm the character and appearance of the area, and there would be some elements of improvement in terms of its design quality and the quality of its materials - taking into account the increase in built form, my assessment is therefore that there would be neutral effects on the character and appearance of the area, and that those effects would become increasingly positive over time.
- 8.12 In summary, I would therefore conclude that the first Reason for Refusal as it relates to my evidence is not justified, as the proposed development would not harm the character and appearance of the area and would therefore not lead to the policy conflict claimed in that reason. I would also note that my view of this matter was shared by LBB's own Planning Officer, as set out in the Officer's Report, which identified no policy conflict which would justify a refusal of planning permission and made a clear and unequivocal recommendation for approval of the application. LBB now appear to have reached a similar conclusion, and are not now defending this Reason for Refusal (or indeed any of the previous Reasons) at the Inquiry.

