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Development Planning
West Lothian Council
County Buildings
High Street Linlithgow
EH49 7E2

15 October 2014

BY EMAIL wlldp@westlothian.gov.uk

Dear Sirs

OBJECTION TO PROPOSED WEST LOTHIAN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

[REDACTED]

Our clients, [REDACTED] wish to lodge an objection in relation to the proposed West Lothian Local Development Plan ("LDP").

[REDACTED] are the owners of the above property, which is Grade 'B' Listed and situated on the outskirts of Murieston.

Specifically, our clients object to the designation in the LDP Main Issues Report of Site EO1-0110, Land at Murieston Castle Farm, as a preferred alternative site (in part) for new housing development.

GROUNDS OF OBJECTION

The grounds for our clients' objection in relation to Site EO1-0110 are as follows:

Landscape and Visual Amenity

Our clients' property is situated within a large expanse of greenfield land on the outskirts of Murieston, West Calder. Site EO1-0110 is designated in Map 6 of the Main Issues Report so as to form a 'horse-shoe' area that wraps around the majority of our clients' property boundary. Conceivably, our clients' property could be surrounded on three sides by an expanse of new housing development; currently it is separated by several hectares of land from a handful of individual residences.

While our clients' appreciate that the site is proposed as a preferred alternative site (in part), to the extent that there is a prospect of housing development within the site, our clients' position is that this poses a detrimental impact to

the landscape and visual amenity of their property and the surrounding area. This detriment is heightened because, even within an 85 hectare site, up to 375 new houses will have a high visual impact from most parts of our clients' property as the site currently comprises mostly open fields and farmland. Our clients' access to their property – along a private road dissecting the site – will also be greatly affected in this respect.

Connected to their concerns about the landscape, our clients also object to any proposed development on the grounds of ecological impact. There are a number of areas of mature trees and shrubs across the site, acting as a natural windbreak and providing habitats for numerous species.

Such trees and shrubs are vulnerable both to the effects of the construction process in the short term and the requirements of developers for clear sites in the longer term. Any screening potentially provided to our clients' property by more established vegetation would also be expected to decline as a result.

Applicable planning policy

The proposed LDP requires to accord with the Strategic Development Plan ("SDP") for South East Scotland, as reiterated in the LDP Main Issues Report at paragraph 3.36.

Policy 7 of the SDP indicates that sites for greenfield housing development proposals may be allocated in the LDP if each of the following criteria are satisfied: (a) the development will be in keeping with the character of the settlement and local area; (b) the green belt objectives; and (c) any additional infrastructure is either committed or to be funded by the developer.

We submit that in terms of (a), a housing development with such potential scale is not in keeping with the rural character of the area and its current function as a natural separation between Murieston and nearby settlements including Polbeth and West Calder.

Although the site is not in the Green belt, it is still relevant that the ability to access the countryside and open space and maintaining the landscape setting of the site, are also undermined.

Listed Building status

Arguably the criteria under Policy 7 are more significant in this instance, in light of the obligation on a planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting in considering whether to grant planning permission for development (Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, section 59.)

Westfield House is in many ways characteristic of the attractive landscape of this part of the Upland Hill Fringe. It is built on a local high point, with a walled garden, pond, outbuildings and trees set within a wider pattern of trees along burns and geometric fields reinforced by shelterbelts in alignments reflective of the landscape designs of the agricultural improvement era of the late 1700's. Particularly because of the property's distinctive landscape features, the setting and amenity of Westfield House are intimately linked to its wider setting.

Accordingly, the fact that our clients' property is Grade 'B' listed should ensure that it receives enhanced protection in the LDP process, notwithstanding the Policy 7 criteria do not appear to be satisfied in the first place.

Area of Special Landscape Protection

The agricultural landscape which forms the wider setting of Westfield House is indicated in the current West Lothian Local Plan (2009) to be Countryside Belt, with an Area of Special Landscape Protection and the Pentland Hills to the south. We are not aware of any alteration to such protections in the current Local Plan that would allow the land at Murieston Castle Farm to be considered as an Alternative Site. Furthermore, we consider that Site EO1-0110 does not relate to the existing pattern of development at the adjacent south western edge of Livingston. It would likely be experienced as a distinct development and as such would be a significant intrusion into an attractive landscape. We suggest that it would be more appropriate to grow Murieston southwards, up to the Carstairs railway line. A site in this location would benefit from having a clear boundary to Livingston and is less sensitive than the land at Murieston Castle Farm in terms of landscape and listed building protections.

For the reasons connected to landscape and visual amenity; applicable planning policy; listed building status and special landscape protection as outlined above, Site EO1-0110 should not be designated as a preferred alternative site (in part) for new housing in the forthcoming West Lothian Local Development Plan.

Please confirm timeous receipt of this objection.

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the sender.

On behalf of Brodies LLP