



Proposed Site for Housing Allocation, Spring Lane, Radford Semele

A Landscape & Visual Appraisal on the potential of the site for housing development



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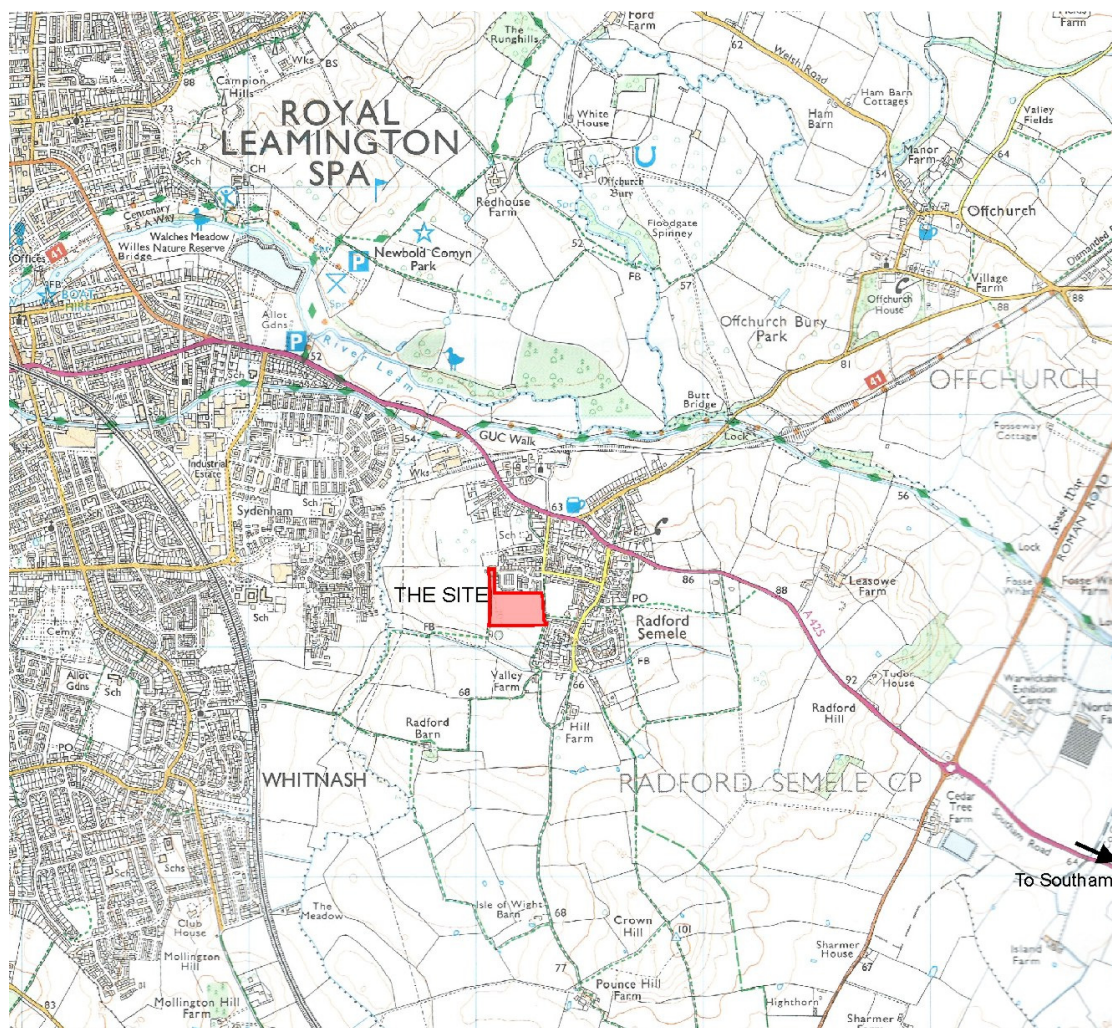
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Proposed Development on land off Spring Lane, Radford Semele, Nr Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

A Landscape & Visual Appraisal for the allocation of the site for housing
15 January 2014

Location and Context

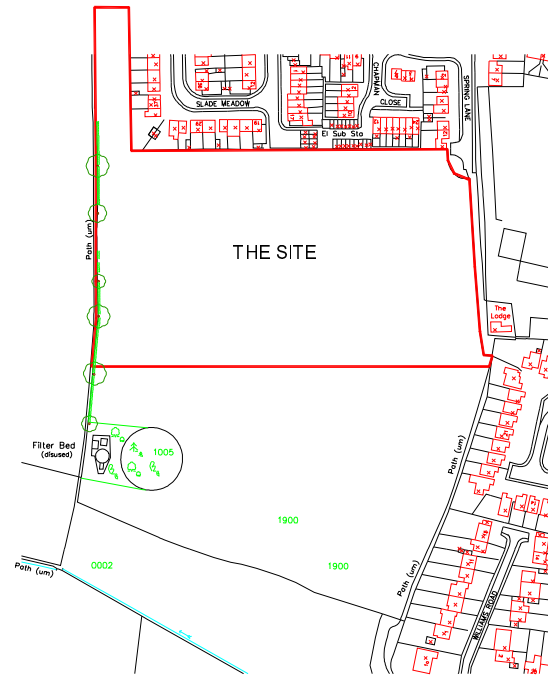
The site is a rectangular plot of unoccupied land on the south-western edge of the village of Radford Semele, Warwickshire. It lies beyond the last property in Spring Lane, before the metalled road reverts to a gravel drive along the west side of the recreation ground. The eastern edge of the town of Leamington Spa lies just over 0.5 kilometres to the west of the site.



LOCATION PLAN

The Site & Setting

The main part of the proposed development site is rectangular in shape, and occupies the northern, most elevated half of a cultivated field at the southern end of Spring Lane. A 20m-wide arm of the site extends north from the north-west corner of the rectangle as far as to the end of Hamilton Road.



THE SITE

The site, measuring some 3.5 Hectares, consists of an arable field that is presently unvegetated ploughed farmland. The site is urban fringe, open to a rural landscape to the south and beyond a boundary hedge to the west, but interfacing with the unscreened housing of Slade Meadow and Chapman Close to the north. To the east is a broken hedge and a public open space beyond, that is surrounded by housing on the other 3 sides.



VIEW NORTH-WEST OVER THE SITE TO HOUSES IN SLADE MEADOW



THE REAR OF HOUSES IN SLADE MEADOW, OVERLOOKING THE SITE

Along the north boundary of the site is a short section of ornamental hedging, but most of the boundary is visually open, with an array of low fences, so that the houses stand out strongly on the ridgeline with little in the way of softening elements. As shown in the photograph above, even the west-facing housing is unscreened at first storey level - allowing views to and from Sydenham.



THE OFF-SITE SPINNEY, AND HEDGEROW ON THE WEST BOUNDARY

The hedge on the western boundary of the site, comprising hawthorn, blackthorn and field maple, with some regenerating elm, is cut to between 1.5m and 2.0m height. Within the hedgerow are a few hedgerow oak and ash trees, and one sycamore. Beyond the hedge, the farmland falls away, at first gently and then more steeply, into a valley that is occupied by Whitnash Brook. Beyond the brook lies the eastern urban edge of Sydenham on the outskirts of Leamington Spa.

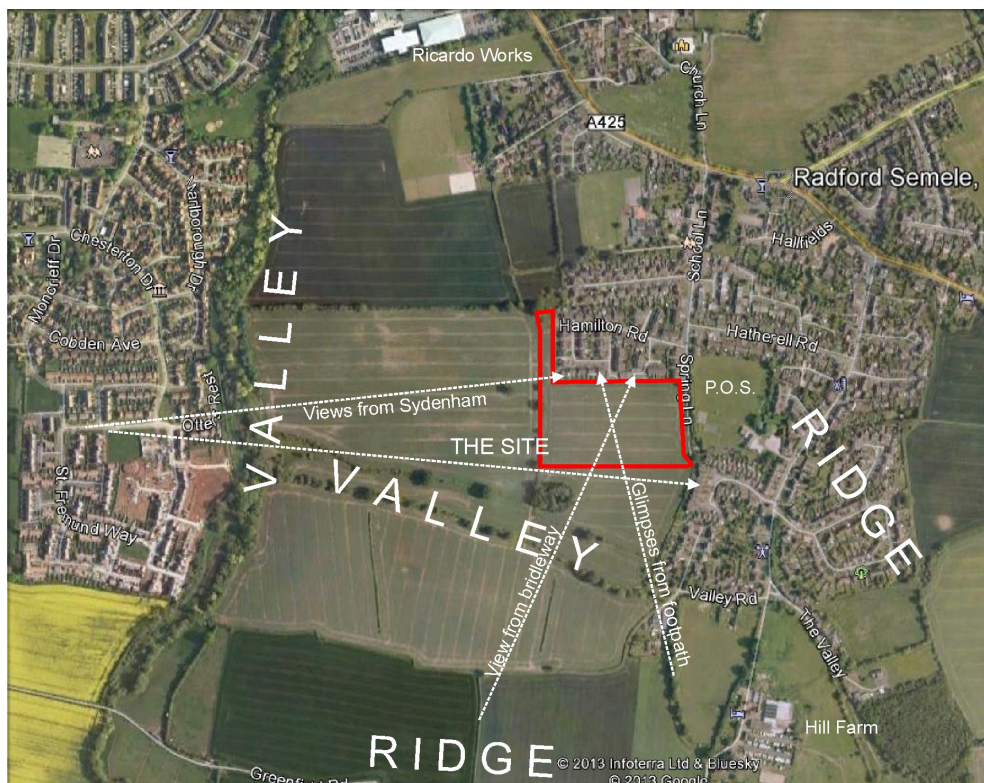
The site slopes by approximately 4 metres from a level of 72.0m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) in its north-east corner towards its south-west boundary, short of a landmark spinney of trees. The land surface has a gentle longitudinal concave shape to it, the slope at first being hardly noticeable and

then becoming steeper towards the south-west corner of the site. Land levels continue to fall beyond the site limits into the stream valley below, where they bottom at between 60.0m and 65.0m AOD before rising again to the farmsteads at Hill Farm and Radford Barn on the opposite ridge, 0.5km south of the site. Because of its high position and open southern aspect, there are views from the site across the stream valley to the Radford Barn Ridge.



VIEW SOUTH FROM THE SITE TO THE OPPOSITE RIDGE

Views west towards parts of Sydenham are hardly possible from the site, because the views are over the western boundary hedge and are mainly screened by it and by the hedgerow trees. Along the eastern edge of the site is a gappy thorn hedge of 1.6m height, a track leading to a single dwelling and then an intermittent row of semi-mature trees and shrubs growing alongside the fenced boundary of the adjoining recreation ground.



AERIAL

Landscape Character and Features

Except for the parish church and properties alongside the A425 and Offchurch Road, the village of Radford Semele largely occupies high ground at the north end of a ridge that runs south-north from Pounce Hill Farm east of Whitnash. Thus it is very much a hilltop settlement in character. Sydenham, by contrast, lies 1.0km from the centre of Radford within the valley landscape of the Whitnash Brook, a tributary of the Leam, the latter which flows within the communications corridor between Radford Semele and Leamington Spa along with the Grand Union Canal, a disused railway line and the A425 trunk road. Although a factory (Ricardo) occupies a site alongside the canal, there are no other developments between the two settlements. Whilst the character of the intervening countryside is essentially rural, because the properties on the urban edges are partially visible, the area has a distinctly urban-fringe feel.



THE WEST EDGE OF RADFORD SEMELE AT THE R/O GODFREY CLOSE

The Whitnash Brook, which flows south to north at the foot of the hillside that divides the two settlements, is a locally important wildlife corridor, a nature reserve and a managed landscape that adds value to the adjoining residential area. Active farming and also management of the Whitnash Brook environment has generally maintained landscape condition and avoided the type of landscape degeneration that often affects urban fringe areas.

A number of public footpaths pass across the farmland south of the site. Two such paths rise up the slope into the village from the stream valley below, one passing alongside the west boundary of the site and the other alongside the east boundary. The one on the west runs on the far side of the site's boundary hedgerow, culminating at the end of Hamilton Avenue, whilst the footpath on the east side of the site splits into two, with one spur heading on to Spring Lane and the other turning east along the south edge of the recreation ground and onto Lewis Road.

Beyond the stream valley to the south, the footpath that runs on the east side of the site continues southwards to pass Valley Farm and on up the opposite side of the valley to Hill Farm, and then on further along the ridge to Pounce Hill Farm. At Valley Farm there is also a bridleway that strides up the valley

side in a south-west direction to Radford Barn, where it continues westward to Whitnash.



THE FOOTPATH ALONGSIDE THE SITE'S WEST BOUNDARY HEDGE

The overall character of the landscape around Radford Semele is defined within the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines as being in the Dunsmore landscape character area and the Plateau Fringe landscape type. This represents a rather variable, often large-scale farmed landscape with undulating topography. Since the production and publication of the Guidelines in 1993, there have been a number of landscape studies undertaken for this part of Warwick District. A Landscape Character Assessment for Land South of Warwick and Leamington (Richard Morrish Associates Ltd for Warwick DC) was conducted in 2009 and concluded that *the retention of the 'green wedge' (of farmland east of Sydenham) is essential for the character of Radford – but that small-scale urban expansion on the Radford boundary could be achieved without harming the overall landscape setting.* In 2012 a further study by Richard Morrish entitled 'Options for Future Urban Expansion in Warwick District; Considerations for Sustainable Landscape Planning' refers to the entire field of which the development site is a part as a *large generally flat agricultural field at the western edge of Radford accessed from Spring Lane, identified in the SHLAA as R56.... It might be possible to develop this 6.0Ha site as a sustainable extension of Radford whilst retaining the main green wedge between the two settlements.....The site has mature hedge boundaries to the south and west as well as a landmark copse in the south-west corner. If adequately retained with landscape buffers, these features would help to integrate and enclose the new development.*

In November 2013 Warwick District Council published a 'Landscape Sensitivity and Ecological & Geological Study' that placed the proposed development site together with almost the entire swathe of countryside that surrounds Radford Semele and gave it a high sensitivity rating. It would seem an anomaly that the findings of the previous studies by Richard Morrish Associates regarding the site have not been given credence in the recent

landscape sensitivity study for the area, which, if concurring with the earlier studies, should have concluded that the site was not as sensitive to housing development as the remainder of the 'green wedge' and wider countryside.

Visual issues

As discussed above, the existing houses on the south side of Slade Meadow stand out on the ridgeline for views north across the intervening stream valley from the ridge in the vicinity of Radford Barn. Thus the Barn will have views of any development upon the site, as will the bridleways and footpaths that run to it from the north, west and east. Views of the development from Hill Farm, however, are less likely to be possible as they will be largely screened by the roofs of houses in Valley Road and Williams Road on the extreme southern edge of Radford Semele.



VIEW NORTH TOWARDS THE SITE FROM THE FOOTPATH TO HILL FARM

Views of the site from the west are currently hardly possible owing to the presence of the site's boundary hedge and trees, but any 2-storey housing development upon the site will be seen over the hedgerow from much of the open farmland on the valley slopes between Whitnash Brook and the village, until any intervening screening is established. Except for the footpath that runs alongside the site's western boundary and on through the stream valley to the south of the site, this open farmland is private land that is uninhabited and not open to the public.

Views towards the site from the adjacent recreation ground to the east are largely screened by the trees and shrubs along the recreation ground's boundary fence and by the broken hedgerow that bounds the site. However, it is probable that some filtered views of any housing developed upon the site will be possible, particularly in winter when the leaves are absent from the trees and hedges.

Properties that are presently overlooking the site will have their views modified by the development, insofar that their outlook will change from one of arable

farmland to a housing area, albeit one that is of low density and attractively designed with a significant measure of tree and shrub planting and landscaped open space. These properties comprise those on the southern side of Slade Meadow and the western side of Godfrey Close and Williams Road. Other views from properties that are likely to be partially affected, at least in the short term until boundary screen plantings are established, are those in the eastern sector of Sydenham with an aspect eastwards across the sloping fields towards the Radford Semele ridge.



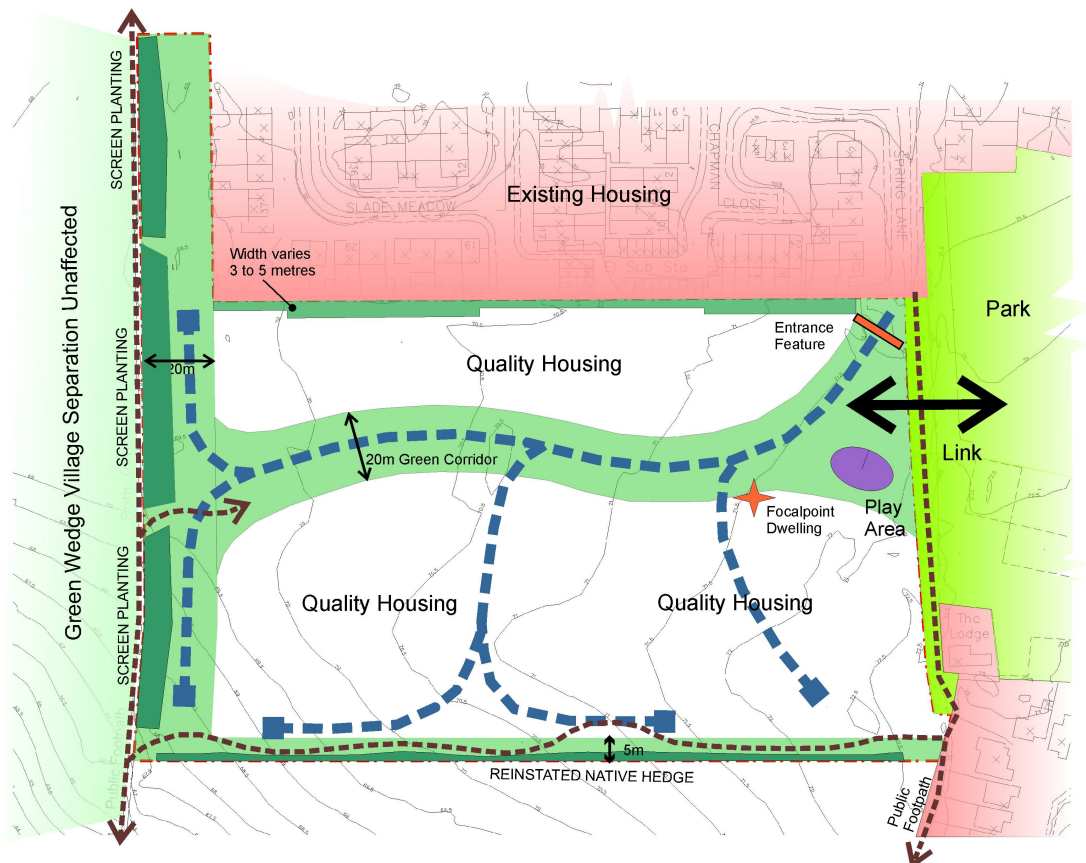
VIEW EAST TOWARDS THE SITE FROM ST. FREMUND WAY, SYDENHAM

Development Concept

In order to develop the site for housing with the least impact on landscape character and visual amenity, the following principles should be sought to be met:

- No encroachment into the green wedge that separates Leamington Spa from Radford Semele, the limit of which has been set by the properties on the west side of Slade Meadow;
- In order to achieve the above, positioning the most westerly homes of the proposed development no closer to the western boundary hedgerow than 20 metres;
- Retention of the site's existing hedges and hedgerow trees, and the 'gapping-up' of any short sections of the hedges that are missing;
- The establishment of a wide tree screen alongside the site's western boundary hedge, to extend northwards behind the rear gardens of extant properties on the west side of Slade Meadow, in order to deliver a dense high-level buffer that will more fully provide a visual separation between the urban edge of Radford and the green wedge/Whitnash Brook valley;

- Provision of a visual and pedestrian link between the park/recreation ground to the east of the site and a proposed new public open space and play area in the eastern sector of the development site;
- Creation of a landscaped corridor through the development site from the recreation ground to the site's western hedgerow and proposed landscape buffer;
- Employment of a range of high quality 2-storey houses in the design of the development, arranged on an open, irregular pattern to offer a more attractive and desirable living environment that will help improve the character of this part of the village;
- Allowance for pedestrian routes through the proposed development to link with the existing public footpath network;
- Establishment of a new native field boundary hedge (one of the recommendations for the Dunsmore and Feldon Character Area) along the southern edge of the site, including some hedgerow trees;
- Provision of a measure of planting between the existing surrounding homes and the site to help compensate for the interruption of countryside views and to soften the outline of the proposed new houses, without causing the casting of unacceptably dense shadows across rear gardens.



The above sketch represents the concept recommended to be adopted in any development proposals for the site.

Conclusions

The foregoing appraisal has demonstrated that, should the Spring Lane site be developed for housing in accordance with the concept outlined above, there would not be wide-ranging adverse landscape or visual effects caused that would harm the character of the countryside surrounding Radford Semele.

The development of the site for housing already figures as a possible option in the 2009 and 2012 landscape studies, because it was considered that such development would not impact upon the main green wedge that separates Radford Semele from Leamington Spa. Should the development proceed, the edge of the village would neither encroach further into the countryside nor reduce the width of the green wedge as both these extents have already been set by the developed edge of the village. Existing housing immediately to the north of the site at Hamilton Road/Slade Avenue faces the countryside unscreened and the leading edge of the housing has already reached the top of the ridge. Currently, views are clear and open of the existing housing from points along public footpaths south and south-west of the village. Therefore, any housing developed on the site would not be perceived as an isolated imposition into the landscape but will be seen from the south as the edge of the village being brought closer to the receptor. From the west, views towards Radford will be improved and the rural characteristics of the Green Wedge strengthened as the new woodland screens mature and shroud the housing that is presently visible from across the valley.

Whilst there are likely to be adverse effects caused to the visual amenity of residents who presently overlook the site and the surrounding farmland, the landscape measures proposed would establish an appropriate 'soft' interface between the proposed development and the existing homes so that the modified views are not unattractive. Once the proposed plantings have established and matured, the overall development will effectively aid the setting of Radford Semele and improve the appearance of the edge of the village for views towards it from the surrounding countryside.

In all, then, there is no reason in landscape or visual terms that the Spring Lane site should be dismissed as a suitable site to be allocated for housing.