

Comments from BHS Beds regarding the Virtual Site Inspection Plan (REP2-046)

The Society does not consider a VSI to be an adequate substitute for a physical inspection by the Inspector.

However, we acknowledge that this process should provide more helpful images than the small number of photographs presented in the Applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact assessment (APP-129 to APP-142) and therefore should be welcomed as a supplemental exercise, but not as a replacement for the ASI.

It should provide useful additional reference material for the Inspector following such a physical inspection, subject to the acknowledged issues regarding the hosting of the videos.

The walkover surveys also have the potential allow the Inspector (and others) to see views from the bridleways from rider-height level if the protocol is adjusted to achieve this.

Need for physical inspection

At paragraph 2.1.2, the Applicant expresses reservations about the use of UAVs in that footage may not replicate the experience of moving along a footpath/bridleway. We concur with this assessment.

But we consider that the 360-degree video walkovers will suffer from much the same issue. Although the footage can be recorded at a more suitable height (but see below) and will allow a viewer to experience differing views from the same location, it still will not replicate the overall experience of using the PRoW, the sense of openness, of the wonder of the big skies and of well-being that would be obtained from a walk or ride along these paths.

We still recommend that the Inspector visits in person the whole length of the bridleway from Manor Farm, Pertenhall along to the far western end of the development in order to understand why this route is so valued by the local community, not only by equestrians.

Comments on Survey routes

Survey route 9b – 360 walkover (L2 to L3)

In our response to the draft ASI itinerary (REP2-060), we asked that what is now Survey Route 9b should be extended to the western end of the site. The western most point in the virtual Survey Route is a bit further along the route than was originally proposed but the whole route is still not being covered. We ask that point L3 is moved to the far end of the site, to what is viewpoint 9 in the LVIA.

At 2.2.1, it is proposed that the footage will be captured at, or as close as practicable, to typical human eye level. This is of course ideal for representing the experience of walkers on the PRoW and probably cyclists as well. But equestrians' eyes are at a greater height (typically between 7 and 8 foot above ground, depending on the size of both horse and rider).

The Society asks that the recording for the surveys along bridleways should be at that height (ideally in addition to the walker height recordings). This is particularly relevant for Survey Route 9b, where we consider that the experience of a rider will be significantly different from that of a walker/cyclist.

The views from horseback, particularly when travelling east along the ridge, are notably more impressive than on foot, due to the topology of the land.

It is stated in 3.10.5 that views in each direction will be considered. In section 4 it is explained that if there are technical issues with hosting the videos, the Applicant will “undertake appropriate video capture from the source file to present a standard ‘single-frame’ video”. In this case, the Society asks that these single-frame videos should represent the views when moving in both directions (for all Routes).

Digital Survey 9a – Drone Survey (L1 to L2)

This is the only Drone survey proposed – all the others are video walkovers. The rationale for this is not explained, although I do accept that the issue of views is less significant on this section and the key issues are the pinch points on the track out of the farmyard, which can be inspected on a physical site visit. The drone footage is unlikely to add further information to the Inspector, though it may be helpful to others who do not attend that site visit

Digital Survey 1 – 360 walkover (A1 to A2)

The other survey Route that is a bridleway is Route 1. In this case, the terrain is such that the difference in views from walker height and from rider height are probably not so significant and, whilst it would be nice to have both levels, we do not regard it as a necessity. BHS Cambs have confirmed this view.

Digital Survey 10 – 360 walkover (M1 to M2)

This survey route is a byway and so an equestrian route. The key viewpoint on this section is just to the south of M2 where a wide field entrance allows a wonderful view to the east. It would be helpful to have this scene recorded at rider height as well, but we do not regard it as vital as for Route 9b. The rest of the route is bounded by tall hedges and whilst there may be occasional glimpses from rider-height of the views beyond they will be largely obscured.

But the value in a 360 walkover may be to show the Inspector what a PRow within a relatively narrow corridor looks and feels like – this will be the long-term experience of many of the PRow within the site, including Hail Weston bridleway 112/7 (Route A1 to A2) and the promised bridleway across site B. He will be able to compare this with the open experience on Route 9b.

Lines of sight for the proposed banksmen on Route 9 (a and b)

We ask that particular attention be given to the lines of sight available to the banksman proposed at the top of the access road into Site A (at the junction with the bridleway) and to the one proposed at the junction of BW37 and BW44. It would be worthwhile extracting stills from the walkover at each of these points along both these bridleways to show when the banksmen would be able to spot oncoming horses.

Summary

Provided this virtual survey is in addition to the proposed physical ASI, the Society considers that this approach could be helpful in terms of providing additional images and information to allow the Inspector to make an assessment of the impact of the development on the users of public rights of way.

However, we do not regard it as a substitute and our comments made on that draft itinerary (REP2-060) still stand.

We ask that:

- Survey route 9b is recorded at rider eye level
- Any single-frame videos (if required) represent the views when moving in both directions
- Attention is paid to the line of site of proposed banksmen on Route 9