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Assessment of Landscape and Visual Issues:

Land at Windsor Road APP 62524No.

Friends of Mannings Pit

March 2017



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### Introduction

This assessment has been carried out on instruction of the Friends of Mannings Pit. The assessment has been undertaken by Peter Leaver, a qualified and experienced landscape architect who has a background in both the preparation of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and in the assessment of LVIA for planning appeals. This assessment constitutes an independent appraisal of the submitted planning application information in relation to landscape issues.

The assessment considers the submitted LVIA; the definition of local landscape character; makes an assessment of landscape and visual impacts and sets out the relevant planning policy. In making a reassessment of impacts, the criteria set out in Appendix A of the LVIA have been used wherever appropriate. In the case of assessments of landscape value, where there are differences of opinion on methodology, the criteria at Table 1 below have been used.

## The Submitted LVIA

Methodology

The approach complies in general with accepted good practice, as set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact 3rd Edition (GLVIA3). However, there is a concern that the criteria for determining **landscape value** are too narrow for this site.

Value is a key component in assessing landscape sensitivity to development. Over or under assessment of value will have an impact on the assessment of significance of the proposed change. In particular, the submitted LVIA methodology does not consider:

Conservation interests

Recreation Value

Perceptual aspects

Cultural Associations

Natural England guidance (“An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” 2014[[1]](#footnote-1)) and GLVIA3 both suggest that local people can play an important part in the landscape assessment process at the local scale (see our detailed assessment below for more detail). The submitted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) paints a picture of an area that is valued locally for it’s landscape quality, scenic quality, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects (beauty, tranquillity), and local, popular cultural associations. However, the results of the applicants own consultation has not been taken into account in the LVIA assessment of value.

The submitted photographs

The submitted photos are stitched panoramas, not single frame images. It is recognised that this type of photograph is useful in conveying aspects of landscape character, however the panorama format does not represent the field of view. These photos, on their own, cannot be relied upon to convey visual impact.

Viewpoints cover an extensive area. However, the nature of the site and surroundings is that visual and landscape impacts are localised and only a few viewpoints cover the local area. Standard practice is that photographs are taken from publically accessible areas (eg public footpaths). However, much of the local landscape is criss-crossed by informal paths. (see DWP figure 1). There are clearly informal recreation areas close to the stream that are not represented in the submitted viewpoints.

Baseline Information

**Planning Policy:**

Para 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework is not referenced (A duty is put on decision makers to “protect and enhance valued landscapes”).

Local plan policies ENV15 and 16 are referenced. There is no reference to policy ENV1, which states:
“Development in the countryside will only be permitted where:- A) a rural location is required;  B) it provides economic or social benefits to the local community; and  C) it protects or enhances its beauty, the diversity of its landscape and historic character, the wealth of its natural resources and its ecological, recreational and archaeological value.”

While the general BAR policy is referenced in the LVIA, mention is not made of the fact that the site is outside the proposed development boundary of the town.

The SHLAA is referenced in the LVIA (paras 3.22 to 3.24). Decision makers are reminded that landscape assessments contained in the SHLAA are not based on the same rigorous methodology carried out as part of a LVIA.

**Landscape Baseline:**

The LVIA references the relevant published landscape character assessments.

Public access (LVIA para 3.37) does not take account of the obvious high levels of informal public access. There is ample evidence on site and from the Statement of Community Involvement that the local area is well used by local people.

Landscape Design Evolution and Strategy

**Site Analysis and Local Landscape Character**

Little attention is paid to the perceptual qualities of tranquillity and seclusion that are present in the local landscape context. LVIA Figure 6 (Landscape and Visual Analysis) does not refer to the change in slope on the site, which marks the edge of the Bradiford Water valley. A number of cross sections have been produced, but these don’t pick up the change of slope that are evident on site. DWP Figure 2 indicates the location and extent of the steep section of the valley side.

Assessment of Landscape Effects

**Landscape Value** of the local landscape character is under assessed, for the reasons set out below.

**The susceptibility** of the local landscape to housing development concentrates on the proximity of existing residential areas. No reference is made to the role the site plays in preserving the tranquillity of the Bradiford Water valley. My own assessment is that the valley in the local area is highly susceptible to development that impinges on its’ boundaries. (see details below). The susceptible area includes parts of the site that are on the skyline, the steep slope and the lower part of the site.

**Landscape Sensitivity**

Landscape sensitivity is a function of value and susceptibility. It therefore follows that if these factors are under assessed, then overall landscape sensitivity will also be underestimated.

**Magnitude of Change**

My assessment of magnitude of change in the wider landscape (at the landscape character type and area scale) broadly concurs with those of the submitted LVIA. At the local landscape scale, though, the assessments differ. Application of the criteria at Table A.3 of the submitted LVIA suggests that such a change would be of **high** magnitude. This assessment would be reduced to **medium** because the geographical extent of the impact would influence the landscape at a local scale. Impacts would be **adverse.** (see detail below).

Assessment of Visual Effects

The criteria for the assessment of visual effects is in line with current guidance. My assessment of visual impacts broadly concurs with those of the LVIA.

Cumulative Impacts:

The LVIA does not assess the impact of the development when considered cumulatively with Northfield Lane and Westaway Plain. The proposal is further forward than the building line of either of the previous developments. It is closer to the river and is lower down the river valley slope, impinging on areas of high landscape value and susceptibility.

The cumulative impact of increased visitor pressure on landscape features is not assessed. It is likely that increased numbers of people will visit the Bradiford Water valley and Tuttshill Woods as a result of this development and others locally. The LVIA does not make an assessment of the cumulative effect on landscape features (paths, streamside, woodlands) as a result of increased visitor pressure.

## Local Landscape Character

The proposal site sits within the context of an enclosed valley, constrained in the east by Tutshill Woods and to the west by housing on Windsor Road. The valley sides define the edges of the local landscape to north and south. This area, much as that defined in the submitted LVIA fig 6, is considered to be the “local landscape”.

The local area contains areas of differing character (the stream and valley bottom; the lower slopes leading down to the stream; the upper valley slopes on the north of Bradiford Water; Tuttshill Woods; upper valley slopes south of Bradiford Water). The local landscape displays many of the qualities representative of the landscape character type within which it sits (LCT 3H, Secluded Valleys). Those that are particularly susceptible to development pressure are:

* Unspoilt, secluded and secretive character
* Rich mosaic of water, hedges, small fields and woodland
* Important wildlife havens
* Narrow sunken lanes and stone bridges.

These qualities are more prevalent in the valley bottom; on the slopes leading down to the stream; on the upper valley slopes on the north of Bradiford Water and in Tuttshill Woods. (See DWP Fig 1)

Existing and proposed development are a detracting element on the upper, southern sides of the valley. In this area, the presence of residential development is a prominent element in the character of the local landscape (DWP Fig 1). On site, the steep valley slopes mark the division between the two main character areas.

To the south of the valley, housing development sits beyond the slopes of the Bradiford Water Valley. In the west of the local area, existing housing at Westaway Heights sits around 350m from the river (approx. 290m from the top of the steep river valley). At Lynboro that distance reduces to around 130m, but still between 15m and 80m back from the top of the river valley. The development of the Northfield Lane proposal is 150m – 190m back from the stream and a respectful 30 – 40m back from the top of the valley slope. The Westaway development is 180m from the stream at its closest and set back from the valley a similar distance as Northfield Lane.

The set back of development from the stream and the top of the steep valley side has meant that the Bradiford Water valley has retained its sense of seclusion and tranquillity, even though it is very close to extensive areas of development. The existing houses at Lynboro are much closer to the stream and, in winter, can be glimpsed between the vegetation that clothes the streamside. However, they are set back far enough from the top of the valley to appear to be part of a different local landscape character area. As a result, houses at Lynboro do not impinge greatly on the wildness or unspoilt rurality of the valley.

DWP Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the local landscape character areas and the profile of the slope that separates the upper, less sensitive area of the site from the lower areas.

## Landscape Value, Susceptibility and Sensitivity

Box 5.1 of GLVIA sugests a range of factors that can help identify a landscape value, as set out below: Paras 5.28 to 5.32 of the same guidance set out how the criteria for assessing landscape quality can be determined. In summary, the guidance states that:

* There cannot be a standard approach, the factors taken into account in assessment are dependant on individual project circumstances;
* There is a role for consultation - It is important to draw on information and opinions from stakeholders and local people;
* That there are a range of factors that can be considered:
	+ **Landscape quality / condition**
	+ **Scenic Quality**
	+ **Rarity**
	+ **Representativeness**
	+ **Conservation Interests**
	+ **Recreation Value**
	+ **Perceptual Aspects**
	+ **Associations**

A Role for Consultation

The Natural England guidance (“An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” 2014[[2]](#footnote-2)) and GLVIA3 both suggest that local people can play an important part in the landscape assessment process at the local scale. There is clearly a strong feeling in the local community that there are a range of values attached to the local landscape. The submitted SCI paints a picture of an area that is valued locally for it’s **landscape quality, scenic quality, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects** (beauty, tranquility)**,** and **local, popular cultural associations**.

“I understand the need for new housing and am not opposed to some of the developments in the Pilton area. That said the area proposed off Windsor Road is surely going a step too far for development. This has always been an area which local residents treasure. Time and technology move on but I strongly feel that this is one area that should be left alone for everyone to enjoy its beauty.” (from SCI summary of representations, no 58)

There is no evidence that the results of the applicants own consultation process have been taken into account in assessing landscape value. The baseline data used in the assessment does not include the SCI or results of other consultation (LVIA para A2.9). Although the LVIA at para A3.3 makes mention of the fact that

“Landscape value will vary in relation to the different stakeholders and different parts of society that use or experience a landscape”

1. There is no evidence that these local views have been taken into account in establishing the criteria for assessment of local landscape value (LVIA table A.1) or in the actual assessment (LVIA paras 5.11 – 5.14).

Factors in identifying Valued Landscapes

The factors noted above have been considered in order to reach an assessment of the value of the local landscape. The criteria at Table 1 have been used in making an assessment of degrees of value.

Landscape quality / condition

“Landscape Quality (or condition)is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.” (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England, October 2014)

**Visual Intactness**; There is visual integrity in the local landscape and a strong sense of place. The steep sided stream valley clearly separates the edge of Barnstaple to the south and the pastoral landscape to the north. The local landscape is well defined visually (by topography, woodland and housing). Visually, the landscape displays a mix of woodland and pasture characteristic of the landscape character type. Visual intactness is **high** in the valley floor, reducing to **medium** on the upper, southern slopes where existing housing is a detracting element.

**Functional Intactness**: The valley floor, lower slopes and north bank of the stream display **very high** functional intactness; there is a clear composition of landscape elements in robust form. The upper slopes are less functionally intact, with existing housing a detracting feature. **Low to medium.**

**State of Repair**: Fields and footpaths are in fair to good condition, with some evidence of visitor / cattle pressure at gateways. Fences, bridges and gateways are in a good state of repair generally. There are few if any signs of neglect or urban pressure on the landscape. The stream banks are in a fair to good state of repair, with localised areas of erosion due to public use. Hedgerows are generally in fair to good condition – well maintained and with some mature trees. The hedgerow dividing the application site is in fair condition only. Woodland is in good condition. There are a number of individual mature trees in the local area that are in good condition. Overall state of repair **medium to high**.

Scenic Quality

“the term used to describe landscape that appeal primarily to the senses.(primarily but not wholly the visual sense)” (GLVIA3 table 5.1)

The woodland and valley floor, along with the lower valley sides, are of **high** scenic quality, secret views of water and woodland; fields and buildings evoking a sense of timeless, unspoilt rurality. Further up the slope, as existing housing comes into view, scenic quality decreases to **low**, even though there are surprising long views towards the coast.

Rarity

Secluded valley landscapes, such as that at Manning’s Pit, are not uncommon in the northern part of the district. However, there are few such areas that are as accessible or as close to centres of population. There is limited potential for substitution of this landscape if it were to be lost. As such, the local landscape has a **medium** level of rarity.

Representativeness

Table 5.1 of GLVIA3 describes representativeness as:

“Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features and elements which are considered particularly important examples”

The valley displays special qualities of the host landscape character type (LCT3H) in respect of it’s unspoilt, secretive character, the rich mosaic of water, hedges, small fields and woodland; important wildlife havens and broadleaf woodland clothing valley sides. In this, it is **highly** representative of the qualities that are considered important in the LCT.

Conservation Interests

“The presence of features of wildlife, earth science, archaeological, historical and cultural interest can add to the value of a landscape as well as having a value in their own right” (**Table 5.1 GLVIA3)**.

Much of the area within the local landscape is valued for nature conservation purposes. The are to the north of the stream is SSSI and Shearford Lane a County Wildlife Site.

Recreation Value

The site and surrounding fields are privately owned. However, the area is clearly well used as a local recreational resource. In 2010, Natural England published “Nature Nearby - How to provide high quality access to the natural environment in green spaces close to home”. The guidance sets quality and access standards for accessible natural greenspace close to people’s homes. The site and surrounding landscape meet many of the criteria for the highest quality recreational natural greenspace, namely:

“Level 1

* Nature conservation areas, including SSSIs
* Local sites (including local wildlife sites, RIGs)
* Woodland
* Remnant countryside (within urban and urban fringe areas).

Level 2

* Formal and informal open space
* Unimproved farmland
* Rivers and canals
* Unimproved grassland “ (Nature Nearby, Natural England 2010, Annex 2 p48)

Evidence of public access goes beyond the rights of way in the local area. The site and neighbouring fields are criss crossed by well worn paths. The stream shows clear evidence of it’s use as an informal, natural play area.

Even though it is privately owned, the local area clearly has **high** recreational value as accessible natural greenspace.

Perceptual Aspects

“A landscape may be valued for its perceptual aspects, notably wildness and / or tranquillity” (table 5.1 GLVIA3).

The sense of tranquillity within the local landscape is highest in the valley bottom, where existing housing is obscured from view by streamside . Existing housing is set back from the top of the steep valley side, so that it does not impinge on the sense of wildness and tranquillity in the bottom of the valley. There is a **high** sense of tranquillity and wildness in this unspoilt, secluded valley.

Associations

The Friends of Mannings Pit have identified that the area of the Bradiford Valley has significant historic and cultural associations. Not only does it lie within the foreground of the westwards view from the Burridge Hill Fort, but important artists and writers have strong associations with the area. These include the Royal Academician Francis Richard Lee and the writer Saki (HH Monro).

The valley also has a no less valuable cultural place in the social history of the local community. These cultural associations are an important element of landscape character. The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as:

“…an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (quoted in submitted LVIA, para 3.3).

The Natural England guidance on landscape character assessment and earlier work by the Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage[[3]](#footnote-3) identify the importance of people’s perceptions in defining landscape:

“People’s perceptions turn land into the concept of landscape. This is not just about visual perception, or how we see the land, but also how we hear, smell and feel our surroundings, and the feelings, memories or associations that they evoke. Landscape character, which is the pattern that arises from particular combinations of the different components, can provide a sense of place to our surroundings.” Para 1.11 – Landscape Character Assessment CA and SNH 2002

Friends of Mannings Pit have amassed a body of evidence that illustrates the rich interaction between people and this very particular landscape (not repeated here). It is reasonable to assess that **high** value can be attributed to the local associations of the area and it’s contribution to the sense of place of Pilton and Bradiford.

**In summary**, the proposal site sits within the context of an enclosed valley, constrained in the east by Tutshill Woods and to the west by housing on Windsor Road. The valley sides define the edges of the local landscape to north and south. This area, much as that defined in the submitted LVIA fig 6, is considered to be the “local landscape”.

 Much of this local landscape displays qualities and characteristics of **high** value. The area that can be described as a **valued landscape** runs along the valley bottom, up to the top of the steep valley slopes to the north and south. The area of the site between the top of the valley slope and existing housing on Lynbro is considered to be of lower value, because of the detracting influence of existing housing. But it still holds important recreational value, is part of a rich local culture and is in a god stae of repair. Overall, it’s value is assessed as **medium.**

*Table 1 Criteria for Assessing* Value

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Typical Criteria |
| Very High | A clear composition of valued landscape components in robust form and health, free of disruptive detractors and with a strong sense of place. Areas containing a strong, balanced structure with distinct features worthy of conservation. All landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. No or limited potential for substitution. |
| High | Primarily containing valued landscape components combined in an aesthetically pleasing composition and lacking prominent disruptive visual detractors. Areas containing a strong structure with noteworthy features or elements, exhibiting a sense of place. Most landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Limited potential for substitution |
| Medium | Consisting primarily of valued landscape components combined in an aesthetically pleasing composition with low levels of disruptive visual detractors, exhibiting a recognisable landscape structure. Some landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Limited potential for substitution. |
| Low | Containing some features of landscape value but lacking a coherent and aesthetically pleasing composition with frequent detracting visual elements, exhibiting a distinguishable structure often concealed by mixed land uses or development. Few landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. |
| Very Low | Lacking valued landscape components or comprising degraded, disturbed or derelict features, lacking any aesthetically pleasing composition with a dominance of visually detracting elements, exhibiting mixed land uses which conceal the baseline structure. No landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. |

### Susceptibility

The submitted LVIA assesses the susceptibility of the local landscape to change as low – medium.

My assessment is that the valley sides, stream and woodland have a **high** susceptibility to housing development. There is little reference in this area to estate type housing development; the interaction of topography, land use and vegetation have little capacity to accommodate extensive development such as that proposed; there are few detracting features present.

Many of the qualities and characteristics that contribute to the value of the local landscape are also susceptible to development on the upper slopes of the valley. These include:

**High levels of visual and functional integrity** – susceptible to damage by development encroachment into the narrow visual envelope of the secluded valley.

**Scenic quality of timeless, unspoilt rurality** - susceptible to encroachment of modern development and associated noise, light pollution etc.

**Tranquillity and sense of wildness** - susceptible to encroachment of modern development and associated noise, light pollution etc. Susceptible to increased visitor pressure.

**State of Repair of Landscape Elements** – susceptible to increased visitor pressure.

My assessment is that the area at the top of the valley slopes has a **medium** susceptibility to development of the type proposed. There is existing reference to similar development locally, there are detracting influences as a result of existing housing and the landscape has some capacity to accept development of the type proposed.

DWP Figure 2 indicates areas of higher and lower susceptibility and value in the local landscape.

### Sensitivity

Taking into account judgements on landscape value and susceptibility, my assessment is that the valley bottom and lower slopes, Tuttshill Woods and upper part of the northern valley slopes have a **high** sensitivity to the type of development proposed. The top of the valley, adjacent to Lynbro Road, has a **medium** sensitivity.

## Landscape Impacts

The proposal differs from other recent housing approvals in the local area in terms of its impact on the valued Bradiford Water valley. The eastern part of the proposed development sits right at the top of the steep sided valley. On the western part of the site, the proposed development runs down the slope towards the river.

The visual and functional integrity of the valley would be compromised by the encroachment of development into the lower valley slopes. The clear separation between residential areas to the south and rural character to the north afforded by the existing development set back would be lost. Housing would be an incongruous addition to the existing rural character of the valley.

Development on the upper slopes would detract from the quality of timeless, unspoilt rurality evident in the valley.

The proposed development would be closer to the valley floor than other recent approvals at Northfield and Westaway Plain. The development would bring noise, movement and street lighting into the valley. This physical proximity would have a detrimental impact on areas that currently display high levels of tranquillity, wildness and seclusion.

This encroachment on the valley would have a large adverse impact on the qualities of tranquillity and seclusion in the local landscape. These impacts would be greatest in the area west of Shearford Lane. Impacts would be permanent and their reversal would not be practical. Application of the criteria at Table A.3 of the submitted LVIA suggests that such a change would be of **high** impact. This assessment would be reduced to **medium** because the geographical extent of the impact would influence the landscape at a local scale. Impacts would be **adverse.**

The proposed mitigation is in the form of a narrow hedge sitting below the proposed housing. Such a small scale landscape feature would not substantially reduce the impact of development.

## Visual Impacts

Visual impact assessment combines the sensitivity of a receptor (a person looking at the view) with the extent to which that view changes. It differs from landscape character assessment in that only one of the perceptual aspects is considered (sight) and no account is necessarily taken of changes in the receptors sense of seclusion or tranquillity.

The submitted LVIA includes viewpoints on the local right of way network. There are other locations, next to the stream and on informal paths through the Bradiford Water valley, where adverse visual impacts can be anticipated.

Visual impacts, like landscape impacts, are anticipated in the local landscape context. The development will encroach upon views where there is currently little or no development context. The LVIA assesses **moderate and major adverse** visual effect in the local landscape area to the west of Shearford Lane, these effects decreasing with distance from the site. My own assessment broadly concurs with the LVIA, although it is based on an assessment made with the benefit of wireframe images or photomontages to prove the extent of visibility on the land to the east of Shearford Lane.

## Summary

The effect of the proposals are localised – the development will have visual and landscape impacts on an area that is well defined. The issues for decision makers centre on how valuable this local landscape is what the impact of the development will be on its character and qualities.

Local Landscape Character

The proposal site sits within the context of an enclosed valley, constrained in the east by Tutshill Woods and to the west by housing on Windsor Road. The valley sides define the edges of the local landscape to north and south. This area, much as that defined in the submitted LVIA fig 6, is considered to be the “local landscape”.

Value

 Much of this local landscape displays qualities and characteristics of **high** value. The area that can be described as a **valued landscape** runs along the valley bottom, up to the top of the steep valley slopes to the north and south. The area of the site between the top of the valley slope and existing housing on Lynbro is considered to be of lower value, because of the detracting influence of existing housing.

Susceptibility

Many of the qualities and characteristics that contribute to the value of the local landscape are **highly** susceptible to development on the edges of the valley. These include:

**High levels of visual and functional integrity** – susceptible to damage by development encroachment into the narrow visual envelope of the secluded valley.

**Scenic quality of timeless, unspoilt rurality** - susceptible to encroachment of modern development and associated noise, light pollution etc.

**Tranquillity and sense of wildness** - susceptible to encroachment of modern development and associated noise, light pollution etc. Susceptible to increased visitor pressure.

**State of Repair of Landscape Elements** – susceptible to increased visitor pressure.

Sensitivity

The valley bottom and lower slopes, Tuttshill Woods and upper part of the northern valley slopes have a **high** sensitivity to the type of development proposed. The top of the valley, adjacent to Lynbro Road, has a **medium** sensitivity.

Magnitude of Change and overall effect

Development encroachment on the valley would have a large adverse impact on the qualities of tranquillity and seclusion in the local landscape, its functional and visual integrity and its perceptual qualities. These landscape and visual impacts would be greatest in the area west of Shearford Lane. Landscape impacts would be permanent and their reversal would not be practical. Application of the criteria at Table A.3 of the submitted LVIA suggests that such a change would be of **high** magnitude. This assessment would be reduced to **medium** because the geographical extent of the impact would influence the landscape at a local scale. Combined with a high sensitivity, overall landscape effects on the Bradiford Water valley are considered to be **Moderate to major** adverse.

Visual impacts in the same area would be **major adverse** and **moderate adverse.**

Planning Policy

Paragraph 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires the planning system to contribute to “protecting and enhancing valued landscapes”. North Devon Local Plan policy ENV1 has much the same stance, requiring development in the countryside to protect and enhance its beauty and the diversity of its landscape. My assessment is that the local landscape around Mannings Pit is a valued landscape. The predicted moderate and major adverse landscape impacts would fail to protect and enhance this valued landscape.

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland - 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)