Industrial development, Brooklands Way, Leek

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

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Leekbrook Developments Ltd /
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Contract

This report describes work commissioned by Roxana Stoica of Axis Architecture on behalf of Leekbrook Developments Ltd. by an email dated 24th August 2015. Nick Allin and Marie Lagerwall of JBA Consulting carried out this work.

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Purpose

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Executive summary

JBA Consulting was commissioned to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of a proposed extension to the Leekbrook (Brooklands Way) Industrial Estate, 2.7km S of the town of Leek. The planning authority is Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

The development site is a single field of semi-improved grassland with scattered trees and boundary scrub or woodland, immediately adjacent to the existing Brooklands Way Industrial Estate at Leekbrook. The National Grid Reference is E399412 W353753.

The character of the site is heavily influenced by both local topography and the adjacent existing development. The valley floor location with steep wooded slopes provides a strong sense of enclosure and limits views in most directions. The field is largely wet, semi-improved grassland used for grazing, with a tributary of the River Churnet along the northern boundary. Rising steeply to the south, it climbs through a transition from scrub to the dense, semi-ancient woodland of Twinney Wood, along the southern boundary.

The site has ecological value, designated as a county Site of Biological Importance, which reflects the range of habitats and species-rich grassland present. These natural features provide landscape and visual interest, alongside the varied topography and glimpses of more elevated, rural landscapes. However, the site is dominated by the adjacent industrial estate, particularly the tall steel sheds of the Esterchem works. These are painted a terracotta colour, a strong statement that makes no attempt to hide the functional nature of the development but arguably referencing the 19th century brick textile mills that are prominent local features.

Overall, the site landscape is one of contrasts. The intimate, enclosed grassland, woodland and stream offers an attractive mosaic of habitats set within varied, steep topography, but commanded by the pervasive presence of the industrial estate.

The effects of the proposed residential development on landscape character, designated landscapes and visual amenity have been assessed. Where effects may be material to the planning process, these are described as **significant**.

Landscape effects arise from an irreversible change to much of the development area through the loss of grassland, a small number of trees and minor areas of scrub and young woodland. New features will include the industrial units and hard elements such as roads and service yards, alongside lighting, noise and movement of traffic. However, it should be noted that the watercourse will not be disturbed and there will be only a very limited impact on the surrounding woodland.

At a site level—within around 500m—the magnitude of change is considered to be high, given that the proposals will bring about a fundamental change in the landscape character. The resulting effect on **the site character** would therefore **moderate-substantial adverse**, which is a **significant effect**. Effects will reduce with distance, particularly due to the enclosed topography and spatial disconnection arising from the steep wooded slopes. The overall effect on Landscape Character Type 1c, Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys, Sub-area Cheddleton and Longsdon—as described in the Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment—is considered to be moderate adverse.

No direct effects are expected for the adjacent LCT Sub-Type 5b, which lies immediately to the south and west of the site. Indirect effects will arise where the development influences visual or perceptual qualities that inform sensitivity; in this case the extensive views that encompass wooded valleys. The effect is locally moderate but slight adverse overall.

No significant effects are expected for national or local landscape designations. Long-distance, glimpsed views may theoretically be possible from the western edge of the Peak District National Park, but the effect is considered to be locally negligible at most.

Effects on visual receptors are constrained by the varied local topography. Views are completely screened from the south by the adjacent ridgeline, whilst high ground around

Lowe Hill and Birchall prevents views from Leek. Further screening arises from the woodland that frequently covers the steep valley slopes.

A **significant (moderate-substantial adverse) effect** is expected for a bridleway (the contiguous **Cheddleton 36b and 36c**) that runs from Fynneylane Farm to Ashenhurst, where open views are available east of the site, although the existing development is visible. Short-duration views may also be expected from a section where the route adjoins the southern site boundary.

No significant effects are expected for any other public rights of way; effects are moderate adverse at most. Footpath Leek Town 31 that runs adjacent to the site will be diverted, but sensitivity is considered to be low due to the industrial context and lack of apparent use along the northern edge of existing estate. Views from the Footpath C37, which climbs towards Fynneylane Farm, are largely screened by woodland, other than a short low-sensitivity section close to the site. Localised glimpses will be available from more distant locations, including short sections of footpath near Revedge Farm, Lowe Hill, Ladderedge and the elevated, open slopes of Morridge, above Bradnop. However, in these cases, although sensitivity may be high, the development will occupy only a very small proportion of what are often expansive views.

No significant effects are expected for recreational trails. A localised, moderate (at most) adverse effect is expected for a short section of the Staffordshire Way, close to Ladderedge; the overall effect is considered to be negligible.

No significant effects are expected for road receptors. Views are likely to be limited to a short section of the A523 near Poolhall and elevated unclassified roads above Bradnop. Effects are considered to be negligible.

An assessment of visibility from **residential receptors** is provided, based on observations from publically-accessible locations and aerial mapping; it was not possible to determine the use of rooms, the value attributed by residents to views, or the level of localised screening.

Moderate adverse effects may be expected for Roost Hall Farm and Lowe Hill House, where the development will be visible as a minor expansion of the existing feature or as a new feature, respectively. For more distant receptors, effects may potentially be moderate adverse at most. However, due to the localised effects of screening by topography, woodland and isolated vegetation, effects are largely considered here to be being negligible.

An assessment of cumulative effects on the landscape and visual resource was undertaken. Effects were considered in relation to the existing Industrial Estate and functional agricultural barns within the surrounding countryside.

A **significant (moderate-substantial) cumulative effect** is expected for the local Landscape Character Type 1c (as noted above), given that the development will result in an appreciable extension of this character within the valley. However, these significant effects are localised and the overall cumulative effect on Type 1c is considered to be moderate adverse.

Significant (moderate-substantial) cumulative effects are expected for a single bridleway, **Cheddleton 36(a)**, which runs from Fynneylane Farm to Ashenhurst. The development will result in combined views and extend the influence of the site. No significant cumulative effects are expected for any other visual receptors, including residential properties.

Despite these cumulative effects, it may be preferable to concentrate this type of development close to existing sites. This would avoid straggling or spreading of incongruous features within rural areas that may result in more frequent or greater cumulative effects.

Mitigation has been incorporated into the design, in order to reduce some of the adverse effects that will arise from the development. Although opportunities to screen views and offset the loss of more valued landscape elements are very limited, proposals will include new tree and hedge planting, translocation of species-rich grassland, a new ecological balancing pond; and new structure planting along the site access road and diverted footpath to create green corridors.

Further detailed design development could include the provision of features such as outside seating areas for employees and internal circulation routes within the site. The surrounding woodland is evidently valued by workers on the existing Industrial Estate, as indicated by bird feeding stations and groups of outdoor chairs to the rear of buildings.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

JBA Consulting was commissioned to undertake a landscape and visual assessment of a proposed extension to an industrial estate at Brooklands Way, near Leek. The planning authority is Staffordshire Moorlands Borough Council.

The LVIA has been prepared as part of the process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and will form a chapter within the Environmental Statement (ES).

This study aims to assess the effects of the proposal on the landscape and visual resource of the area. The assessment has involved the following key stages:

- desk-based research to determine the scope of the study
- preparation of Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) figures
- desk-based research to establish the landscape and visual baseline and identify potential receptors
- field work to verify the ZTV and baseline studies and ascertain how the landscape and visual resource would change
- assessment and reporting of potential effects

The process is supported by the use of viewpoints to illustrate and evaluate effects at key sites relevant to the proposal, but the assessment of effects is not confined to these key viewpoints.

The report also includes a review of planning and other policy relevant to landscape and visual considerations in the area, which has helped inform the scope of the study and the assessments.

1.2 Description of the development

1.2.1 Proposed development

The application site is approximately 5.6 ha of which approximately 4ha will be developed.

In development will comprise the following elements:

- Thirteen new B2 industrial units, for commercial storage and industrial use;
- New access road with footway, along with surfaced service/parking areas associated with each industrial unit.
- New tree planting, habitat areas and provision of a balancing ecological pond (1140m2)

The development site is a single field of semi-improved grassland with scattered trees and boundary scrub or woodland, immediately adjacent to the existing Brooklands Way Industrial Estate at Leekbrook, 2.7km south of the town of Leek. The National Grid Reference is E399412 W353753.

1.2.2 Proposed changes to the landscape

Construction phase

During construction, the main activity and infrastructure would include:

- Ground clearance including removal of vegetation, levelling and construction of retaining walls
- Construction of services, roads and access/parking areas

- Construction of industrial units and access roads, including elements such as signage, lighting and fencing
- Soft landscape works including tree and hedge planting, seeding and creation of ecological balancing pond
- Translocation of habitats
- Temporary closure and diversion of existing footpath

Operational phase

During operation, the main activity and infrastructure would include:

- Presence of new industrial units and access routes
- General day to day movements from vehicle traffic
- Noise, lighting
- Maturing of the soft landscaping and habitat areas, including tree planting
- New public footpath route

2 Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to assess the effects of the proposal on the landscape and visual resource of the area. It forms part of an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA). In line with current industry guidance for EIA developments, effects that may be important in the planning process are identified and described as *significant*.

Landscape and visual effects, whilst interrelated, will be considered separately in the assessment.

2.1.1 Outline of assessment process

The assessment of landscape and visual effects has been prepared with reference to *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 3rd edition (GLVIA3), published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in 2013.

The assessment has involved the following key stages:

- desk-based research to determine the scope of the study
- preparation of Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) figures
- desk-based research to establish the landscape and visual baseline and identify potential receptors
- field work to verify the ZTV and baseline studies and ascertain how the landscape and visual resource will change
- assessment and reporting of potential effects

The process is supported by the use of viewpoints to illustrate and evaluate effects at key sites relevant to the proposal, but the assessment of effects is not confined to these key viewpoints.

2.1.2 Assessment terminology

In order to determine the scale of effects, two key aspects should be established. These are nature of the landscape or visual receptor likely to be affected, often referred to as its *sensitivity* and the nature of the effect likely to occur, which is often referred to as the *magnitude* of the likely change. These two results are combined to form a judgement of the scale of the effect. Consideration of the scale of the effect then enables a judgement to be made as to whether the effect is *significant*. This process is further described in Section 2.7.

2.1.3 Professional judgement

GLVIA3 recognises that professional judgement is an important concept within LVIA. Whilst there is scope for quantitative measurements of some factors, in many situations the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements that are based on reasoned and informed justifications.

2.1.4 Limitation of the assessment

The assessment and the prediction of effects during the life-span of the development are based on the available background information and supplied drawings of the proposal and involve a degree of informed professional judgement.

2.1.5 Assessment of residential receptors

The assessment of visual effects on residential receptors is an outline assessment only, it is not a detailed Residential Amenity Assessment. This is further detailed in Section 2.6.

2.1.6 Assessment of effect during construction

An assessment of effects specifically related to the construction phase has been noted where appropriate. Given the nature of the development, effects during this phase are likely to be of a similar scale and are not assessed within a separate section. Access would be through the existing Industrial Estate.

2.1.7 Timing of surveys

Surveys and fieldwork were carried out in September 2015 when deciduous trees were in full leaf. The effects of screening by vegetation were therefore high. Where deemed relevant, consideration of seasonal vegetation has been given within the assessment.

2.1.8 Glossary

Some of the terms used within the assessment have a specific meaning. A glossary of these terms is provided in Appendix A. The definitions are based on those provided within GLVIA 3.

2.2 Determining the scope of the study

The scope of the LVIA was defined through desk-based research. Key matters reviewed in determining the scope were:

- The extent of the study area.
- Draft Zones of Theoretical Visibility (ZTVs).
- Sources of relevant landscape and visual information.
- The nature of the possible landscape and visual effects.
- The main receptors and any specific viewpoints.
- The extent and appropriate level of detail for the baseline studies to be proportionate to the scale and type of development proposed.
- Methods to be used in determining the significance of effects.
- Methods to be used for the production and presentation of photomontages.

2.2.1 Consultation

Consultation has been undertaken by the agent (Axis Architecture) in the form of an EIA Screening Request, with subsequent discussions between JBA and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council in relation to LVIA methodology and viewpoint selection.

The Screening Opinion (issued 9th April 2015) confirmed that an EIA was required. The following comments from the LPA have relevance to the LVIA:

…The cumulative impact on the landscape of this proposal together with the other industrial estate development needs to be considered in respect of matters such as…visual/physical…impact.

The site is within the defined County Landscape Character Type: Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys, and is middle ranked in landscape quality terms across the Staffordshire County context, however it is considered that this particular site has a high quality landscape.

Footpaths 31 and 32 would have to be diverted. It is noted that obtaining a diversion is a separate process however there is significant concern that the diversion is too circuitous and would not be achieved as shown.

The relationship between the proposed development and the landscape character and topography will need to be considered.

Under *Characteristics of the Potential Impact*, it notes:

The development would completely and irreversibly change the character of the proposed application site with clear built development encroachment and have a significant impact upon matters such as (but not necessarily limited to)…trees [and] the public footpath network.

The Screening Opinion concludes as follows:

It can be anticipated that an EIA for this proposal would need to include specific consideration of landscape character, inter-relationship of the proposal with the landscape and visual impact not only from the Public footpath network but also from surrounding residential properties and wider vantage points.

Cumulative impacts may arise in relation to several of the above when the form and extent of the existing industrial estate is taken into account.

Correspondence took place between the JBA Landscape team and Arne Swithenbank at SDC. On 3rd September, Arne responded in relation to the scope and potential viewpoints:

As regards cumulative impacts… firstly it is a matter of identifying from the landscape scoping where there might be cumulative interconnections. Chiefly this will be the cumulative impacts by association with the existing industrial estate buildings but it could also refer to cumulative impacts created with farm buildings in the vicinity - the farm, Yew Tree Farm, immediately south of the site on Cheddleton Heath Rd / Fynney Lane could be a case in point.

Notably Fynney Lane Farm (east of Yew Tree) is a Grade II Listed Building and consideration of the impacts on its setting will be a key consideration.*

A further response from Arne in relation to viewpoint choice, following the site visit, was provided on 22nd September. This noted agreement with LVIA viewpoints 1, 2 3 and 5, but also queried possible additional viewpoints at Ashenhurst Hall Farm, Lowe Hill, Twillow Heath and Morridge.

The response also commented on the likely height of the development and whether it would be greater than 9m. Photographs were provided by SDC for locations at Lowe Hill, which was described as a 'sensitive spot'; and an elevated location above Bradnop, from where it was considered that the site may be visible.

2.3 Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

The purpose of identifying the ZTV is to define the extent or zone within which the proposed development may be visible. The ZTV is the preferred term as it indicates those locations from which the proposed development may appear as a component of the view.

It provides a means of identifying potential receptors (areas of land used by the public and individual/groups of buildings) so that an assessment of effects on identified receptor locations can be undertaken. It also assists in the assessment of effects on different landscape character types and designated sites as it indicates whether a view may be obtained in these areas.

The ZTV does not guarantee that a development will definitely be, or not be, visible from any given location, nor is it representative of the sensitivity to change, the magnitude of change or the significance of impact at any receptor location. The ZTV is computer-generated using topographical data overlain on an Ordnance Survey base map.

Computer-generated ZTVs are a widely used tool in visual impact assessments. It is common practice for ZTVs to be prepared using Digital Terrain Models (DTMs) which are a 'bare earth' representation of the topography of an area. DTMs do not account for the screening effect of buildings, vegetation and other such structures.

For this study, a bare earth ZTV (Figures 2a), based on a DTM derived from Ordnance Survey Landform Panorama data (based on 10m height contours at a scale of 1:50,000) available from OS Open Data, was prepared using GIS software by placing a polyline representing the footprint of the development site at the appropriate height, in this case 9m, the maximum height for the units proposed. Further details of this process can be found in Section 4.1. The ZTVs were generated for receptors (viewers) of a height of 1.65m, as recommended by the GLVIA3 guidance. As mentioned above, these bare earth ZTVs do not take into account the effects of screening by buildings or trees and may be thought of as worst case scenario.

To further inform the assessment, an additional 'screened' ZTV was created (Figure 2b), using nominal heights of 8m (for an average two storey property) and 12m (for typical woodland) 'stamped' onto the bare earth terrain model. These ZTVs give a more realistic impression of theoretical visibility for the proposed development, taking into account the screening effects of built form and vegetation. However, they do not account for the additional filtering effect of hedgerows and isolated mature trees, although these are less robust during the winter months. In addition, woodland may be subject to management and removal.

It should be noted that the process of generating ZTVs relies on the resolution of the data used to generate it, and is therefore never entirely accurate. Whilst not always reflecting real-life visibility, ZTVs do give a useful illustration of theoretical visibility.

The following ZTVs have been produced and are illustrated in Figures 2a and 2b:

- visibility to development proposal as bare earth with no screening: Figure 2a - 3km radius
- visibility to development proposal accounting for the screening effect of buildings (assuming 8m height) and woodland (assuming 12m height): Figure 2b - 3km radius

2.4 Viewpoints

A viewpoint is a location from where a view of the proposal may be gained; a number of viewpoints have been chosen in order to support the assessment of landscape and visual effects and illustrate effects at key locations.

The viewpoints are carefully selected to be either:

- Representative viewpoints: those selected to represent the experience of different types of visual receptors, where a large number of viewpoints cannot all be included individually and where significant or notable effects are unlikely to differ. For example,

viewpoints may be chosen to represent views of users of a number of footpaths or bridleways. Viewpoints may also be selected to reflect visual elements that inform the landscape resource.

- Specific viewpoints: important key viewpoints within the landscape. Examples of these may include local visitor attractions, settlements, routes valued for their scenic amenity, or places with cultural landscape associations.
- Illustrative viewpoints: those chosen specifically to demonstrate a particular effect or specific issues, e.g. restricted visibility at certain locations.

Viewpoints are initially selected as those places from where a proposed development is likely to be visible and would result in significant or notable effects on the view and the receptors. This is informed by the ZTVs and other maps, fieldwork observations and information on other relevant issues such as access, landscape character and popular vantage points.

A range of views and viewers are represented through the choice of viewpoints. Factors which were considered in selecting the final viewpoints to be used for the assessment include:

- Landscape character type (separate and combinations of type).
- The presence of nationally designated landscapes and/or Areas of High Landscape Value within local planning policy, recreational routes, local amenity spaces.
- Visual composition, for example focused or panoramic views, simple or complex landscape pattern, vistas or glimpses.
- Distance from the proposed development (short, medium and long range views).
- Aspect and elevation.
- Viewer type.
- Activities of the receptors, for example those at home, work, travelling in various modes or carrying out recreation.
- Modes of movement, for example those moving through the landscape or stationary.

For this study a series of viewpoints have been identified to aid the assessment of effects. Four of these have been selected and illustrated to show the site location and surrounding features within the view to give a more realistic illustration of the visibility of the proposal.

For all viewpoints, photographs were taken with a digital SLR camera with a 50mm equivalent lens. The camera was tripod mounted in a portrait orientation to minimise distortion and enable an accurate location to be determined. A series of images suitable to stitch together to form a panoramic image was taken in accordance with the SNH guidance and the following information was recorded and is supplied:

- Precise location 12 figure OS grid reference.
- Viewpoint altitude in metres Above Ordnance Datum (m AOD) interpolated from DTM/OS mapping.
- Viewing height in metres.
- Horizontal field of view (in degrees).
- Distance to development.
- Date of assessment.
- Weather conditions and visual range.

The following information is described in the assessment:

- Description of location (receptor).
- Description of nature of existing view and likely change during development life-span.
- Description of magnitude of impact and sensitivity of visual receptors.
- Summary of the significance of the potential impact.

Each viewpoint is displayed on one page and illustrated by three images: the first or top image is a panorama containing the extent of the proposal, the second or middle image is the same panorama with corresponding wireframe featuring 9m markers for the N, NW, SW, SE and NE corners of the proposal site, and the third or bottom image is the panorama, wireframe and additional markers to highlight both horizontal and vertical extents of the proposal.

2.5 Baseline studies: landscape

2.5.1 Introduction

For the purposes of LVIA, the landscape is considered to be a resource in its own right, The European Landscape Convention (2000)—which is noted in GLVIA3—provides the following definition of landscape:

Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

The assessment of landscape effects considers the effects the proposed development or change will have on this landscape resource.

Landscape effects that may arise include a change, loss or addition of elements; features, aesthetic or perceptual aspects that contribute to the distinctiveness or character of the landscape.

2.5.2 Establishing the landscape baseline

To enable the assessment of the effects of a proposed development or change, the landscape baseline, or starting point must be established. This enables the identification of landscape receptors and the effects of the proposed changes on these landscape receptors can then be considered. In this study the landscape baseline studies consider the following:

Landscape character - the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape and how this is perceived by people. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement but also encompasses its perceptual and aesthetic qualities. It creates the particular sense of place of different areas of the landscape. Assessment of the effect of the development on landscape character is a crucial element of the landscape assessment.

Landscape designations - sites with landscape designations are considered in addition to the overall landscape character areas, to enable site specific judgements of effects on particularly valued sites.

These studies can then be considered in conjunction with the ZTV, to enable a list of potential landscape receptors to be compiled.

2.5.3 Determining landscape sensitivity

The next stage is to determine the sensitivity of the landscape receptors to the type and scale of development proposed. In order to do this, the *susceptibility* and *value* of the receptor are considered, although within the assessment these may not always be explicitly noted. In many cases, it is considered sufficient to describe only the sensitivity, which is informed by an overall professional judgement.

Susceptibility is the *ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline and/or the achievement of planning policies and strategies* (GLVIA3).

Where noted, susceptibility is described as follows:

- High – where undue negative consequences are expected to arise from the proposal.

- Medium – where undue negative consequences may arise from the proposal.
- Low – where undue negative consequences are unlikely to arise from the proposal.

Susceptibility may be informed by existing Landscape Character Assessments, which often note sensitivity. However, this is frequently 'intrinsic' or 'inherent' sensitivity, which may not directly relate to the type of development proposed. In such cases, a judgement must be made as to how this sensitivity might relate to the development in question.

The **value** of a landscape receptor is informed by designations, planning policy and documents, the contribution of special (cultural, historic or conservation) contributors or associations, scenic quality, rarity, recreational value and aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities. These are again reinforced by judgements, particularly where no designations are established. Conversely, care should be taken not to rely on designations as the sole indicator of value; this should be reinforced by rationale where necessary. Where noted, value is described as follows:

- High – landscapes with national or international designations on account of landscape value, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts or World Heritage Sites.
- Medium – landscapes of local value, subject to additional policy protection (such as Areas of High Landscape Value), or where it is considered that particular features or appreciation of the landscape is of greater value than other nearby areas.
- Low – landscapes that are not subject to designation but may be valued at a community or local level.
- Minimal – landscapes that are degraded or exhibit little or no community or local value.

Sensitivity combines the judgements made for susceptibility and value, as described above. Three levels of sensitivity are recorded:

- High sensitivity – a landscape of high value and a particularly distinctive character that is susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed;
- Medium sensitivity – a landscape of valued characteristics reasonably tolerant of change of the type proposed; and
- Low sensitivity – a landscape of relatively low value or importance which is potentially tolerant of substantial change of the type proposed.

Within the assessment, an overall assessment of sensitivity is only provided, through professional judgement, where this is considered sufficient to allow an informed assessment of the receptor.

Other landscape considerations

The considerations noted above are further informed by general observations regarding the condition and quality of the landscape. These support the overall narrative and judgement of sensitivity. Landscape quality or condition may relate to the level of management, distinctiveness, number of detracting features, pattern, unity, structure, sense of place, function, definition and aesthetic value.

Areas of landscape quality may not necessarily correlate directly with landscape character areas or designated sites as defined by statutory agencies or local planning authorities. Where it is considered that this is the case, mention is made within the description and sensitivity evaluation.

2.5.4 Magnitude of landscape change

Effects on landscape receptors are assessed in terms of their magnitude of change. This is a combination of the size or scale, geographic extent of the area influenced and the duration and reversibility of the impact. Within the assessment, size and scale or extent may not always be noted. In many cases, it is considered sufficient to describe only the magnitude of change, which is informed by an overall professional judgement.

Size and scale concerns the amount of existing landscape elements that will be lost, the extent to which these represent or contribute to the character of the landscape. It also relates to the degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the landscape are altered through removal or addition of new features, such as hedge loss or introduction of tall features on skylines.

Size and scale, where noted, may be rated as follows:

- Large – major change to the existing landscape including key elements, characteristics and qualities.
- Medium – partial or noticeable change to key elements, characteristics and qualities.
- Small – some discernible but largely minor change to key elements, characteristics and qualities.
- Negligible – very minor or virtually imperceptible change to key elements, characteristics and qualities.

The geographical extent over which landscape effects are felt is distinct from the size or scale. For example, large scale effects may be limited to the immediate site area. Again, extent is subject to a degree of professional judgement, but where noted these may be rated as follows:

- Wide – influencing several landscape types or areas, beyond around 5km.
- Medium – generally within the local character area or up between 1 and 5km.
- Local – the site and immediate surrounds, up to around 0.75 to 1km.
- Site – within around 0.75km of the site.

The duration of the effect relates to the time period during which the changes to the landscape will occur. This is rated as follows:

- Long-term – beyond 10 years.
- Medium-term – 2 to 10 years.
- Short-term – up to 2 years.

The **magnitude of change** is a product of the size/scale, extent and duration of the impacts. This is judged as a four-point scale:

- High – notable and long term change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive, long term change over a more limited area.
- Medium – moderate, short term change over a large area or moderate long term change in localised area.
- Low – slight long term or moderate short term change in landscape components.
- No change/negligible – no discernible/virtually imperceptible change to the landscape's resources.

Within the assessment, size and scale or extent may not always be noted. In many cases, it is considered sufficient to describe only the magnitude of change, which is informed by an overall professional judgement.

2.6 Baseline studies: visual

2.6.1 Introduction

Visual effects relate to how the development may affect the views available to people and their *visual amenity*. Visual amenity is the visual quality of a site or area as experienced by residents, workers or visitors. Visual receptors are people that experience the view. Development can change people's direct experience and perception of the view depending on existing context, the scale, form, colour and texture of the proposals, the nature of the activity associated with the development, and the distance and angle of view. Visual effects can be experienced through development intruding into existing views experienced by residents and

day to day users of the area, and the views of tourists and visitors passing through or visiting the area.

2.6.2 Establishing the visual baseline

Identification of potential visual receptors is informed by desk and field studies in conjunction with consideration of the ZTVs for the proposed development, to identify places where people might be expected to receive a view of the proposed development. Once receptors have been identified, it is necessary to document the following information, though the degree of detail required will vary depending on the nature of the receptor and the view experienced:

- Type, relative numbers and activities of potential receptors.
- The nature, composition and characteristics of the existing views, for example the nature and extent of the skyline, aspects of vertical scale and proportion, key foci, and elements which interrupt, filter of otherwise influence the view.

2.6.3 Determining visual receptor sensitivity

In order to determine the scale of visual effects, it is necessary, as with the assessment of landscape effects, to determine the sensitivity of the receptor. This is achieved through the consideration of the susceptibility of the receptor and the value of the view. Within the assessment, susceptibility and value may not always be noted. In many cases, it is considered sufficient to describe only the sensitivity, which is informed by an overall professional judgement.

Visual receptor **susceptibility** is a function of receptor type, location and activity. In assessing visual receptor susceptibility, factors such as the following have been accounted for with a degree of professional judgement:

- Receptor activities – for example, relaxing at home, undertaking leisure, recreational and sporting activities, at work.
- Movement/duration – whether receptors are likely to be stationary or moving, which influences how long they will be exposed to the change.
- Orientation – of receptors in relation to the development.
- Purpose/expectation – of receptors at that location.
- Context – the quality of the landscape.
- Importance of the view/location – popularity of location as indicated by existence of designations or local value.

The **value** of the view that is experienced may relate to associated landscape or planning designations, cultural references or the presence of facilities (car parking, interpretation boards, signage) that may emphasise importance.

In this assessment, **sensitivity** is judged as a combination of susceptibility and value and is ranked as follows:

- High – visitors to promoted or valued viewpoints especially those with panoramic views; viewpoints noted within planning guidance or policy; nationally important recreational routes where views in highly valued landscapes are available; receptors in homes with designed views across the landscape.
- High-medium – receptors to local viewpoints, Public Rights of Way, local trails, local landmarks with key views; visitors to heritage or tourism sites where views are important.
- Medium – receptors travelling along cycle routes or local roads that are considered to be of scenic value.
- Medium-low – users of most road and rail routes.
- Low – receptors that are fast-moving (due to speed on roads and motorways) or because they are engaged in an activity not concerned with the landscape or view (such as work or sport).

As with all aspects of the methodology, these definitions are not rigid; where professional judgement has been applied, this would be noted in the narrative.

2.6.4 Visual receptor magnitude of change

The assessment of the magnitude of change on visual receptors follows similar principles to landscape assessment in terms of size or scale, the geographic extent of the area influenced and its duration and reversibility. Within the assessment, size and scale or extent may not always be noted. In many cases, it is considered sufficient to describe only the magnitude of change, which is informed by an overall professional judgement.

Size and scale concerns the relative change in the elements, features, qualities and characteristics that make up the view.

Size and scale, where noted, are rated as follows:

- Large – major change to the existing view including key elements, characteristics and qualities.
- Medium – partial or noticeable change to elements, characteristics and qualities within the view.
- Small – some discernible but largely minor change to key elements, characteristics and qualities within the view.
- Negligible – very minor or virtually imperceptible change to key elements, characteristics and qualities such that the view essentially remains unchanged.

Where specifically noted, the geographical extent over which visual effects is described as follows:

- Wide – influencing most of a view or receptor (over half).
- Medium – generally between one quarter or one half of a view or receptor.
- Small – generally less than one quarter of a view or receptor.
- Limited – generally affecting only a small part of the receptor.

The duration of the effect relates to the time period during which the changes to the landscape will occur. This is rated as follows:

- Long-term – beyond 10 years.
- Medium-term – 2 to 10 years.
- Short-term – up to 2 years.

The **magnitude of change** is a product of the size/scale, extent and duration of the impacts. These are judged as a four-point scale:

- High – where the development causes a very notable (or significant) change in the existing view for a sensitive receptor.
- Medium – where the development would cause a very noticeable change in the existing view.
- Low – where the development would cause a noticeable change in the existing view.
- Negligible/no change – where the development would cause a barely perceptible change in the existing view.

2.7 Assessment of effects

The next step is to determine the scale of effects. This is evaluated by combining the sensitivity (or nature) of the landscape or visual receptor and the magnitude (or nature) of change. The following matrix provides an objective rationale for determining the scale of effects, in order to provide consistency and transparency to the process; however a degree of professional judgement is a key element of the evaluation.

Table 7-1: Scale of effects matrix

		Sensitivity to change (nature of receptors)		
		Low	*Medium*	*High*
Magnitude of Change resulting from impacts identified	*No Change/ Negligible*	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
	Low	Slight	Slight - Moderate	Moderate
	Medium	Slight - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Substantial
	High	Moderate	Moderate - Substantial	Substantial

The scale of effects detailed above can be classed as Beneficial, Neutral or Adverse.

2.7.1 Classification of landscape effects

Adverse landscape effects occur when features or key landscape characteristics such as established planting, old buildings or structures which—when considered singularly or collectively—help to define the character of an area are lost, or where new structures out of scale or character with the surroundings are introduced.

- **Substantial adverse landscape effects** occur where the proposals are at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and would be a dominant feature, resulting in considerable reduction in scenic quality and large scale change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
- **Moderate adverse landscape effects** occur where proposals are out of scale with the landscape, or inconsistent with the local pattern and landform and may be locally dominant and/or result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
- **Slight adverse landscape effects** occur where the proposals do not quite fit with the scale, landform or local pattern of the landscape and may be locally intrusive but would result in a minor reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.

Neutral landscape effects arise when the change proposed results in no discernible improvement or deterioration to the landscape resource. The proposals sit well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and / or would not result in any discernible reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.

Beneficial landscape effects occur where derelict buildings, land or poorly maintained landscape features are repaired, replaced and maintained or where new features are introduced such as new tree planting which helps to define landscape structure where none currently exists. Beneficial landscape effects can be slight, moderate or substantial.

2.7.2 Classification of visual effects

Adverse Visual Effects occur when the proposed development will introduce new, non-characteristic, discordant or intrusive element/s into views.

- **Substantial adverse visual effects** occur where the proposed development would cause a considerable deterioration in the existing view or visual amenity.
- **Moderate adverse visual effects** occur where the proposed development would cause a noticeable deterioration in the existing view or visual amenity.
- **Slight adverse visual effects** occur where the proposed development would cause a barely perceptible deterioration in the existing view or visual amenity.

Beneficial visual effects occur when the proposed development would enhance the quality of the receptor's view e.g. by creating a new focal point in a degraded landscape that includes a range of existing detractors. Beneficial visual effects can be slight, moderate or substantial.

The scale indicates the importance of the effect, taking into account the sensitivity (or nature) of the receptor and the magnitude (or nature) of the effect. It is usually rated on the following scale of effects:

- **Substantial** indicates an effect that is very important in the planning decision making process.
- **Moderate - substantial** indicates an effect that is, in itself, material in the planning decision making process.
- **Moderate** indicates a noticeable effect that is not, in itself, material in the planning decision making process.
- **Slight** indicates an effect that is trivial in the planning decision making process.
- **Negligible/No Change** indicates an effect that is akin to no change and is thus not relevant to the planning decision making process.

2.7.3 Overall importance of the effects

The final step is to judge the overall importance of the effects. Effects may be described as ***significant*** in projects that are subject to EIA. Significant effects are defined as those that are moderate-substantial or substantial. However whilst an effect may be notable, it does not necessarily mean that such an effect would be unacceptable. Account is taken of the effect that any mitigation measures—for example planting or landform—may have in terms of minimising potentially detrimental effects or improving the landscape composition of the area.

3 Landscape Policy

3.1 National Planning Policy

3.1.1 National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) must be taken into account in the determination of planning applications. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Within the twelve core planning principles, it notes that planning should:

- *proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the …industrial units… and thriving local places [needed]…*
- *always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings*
- *take account of the different roles and character of different areas… supporting thriving rural communities…*
- *contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution.*

Within the section *Requiring Good Design*, the framework stipulates that:

The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.

It states that planning decisions should aim to ensure that all developments:

- *will function well not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- *create attractive and comfortable places [to] work…*
- *…[incorporate] green and other public space as part of developments…*
- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.*

The section *Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment* states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, inter alia, *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes*.

3.1.2 Planning Practice Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework is accompanied by a suite of Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) that provides advice on many aspects of the planning process. Sections particularly relevant to this report include those on:

- Open space, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space
- Natural Environment, including Landscape

The section on design highlights the different scales to be considered in ensuring good design, from layout—or the way buildings and spaces relate to each other—through to form, scale, detailing and materials.

The section on public rights of way highlights their importance as a *component of sustainable transport links* and states they *should be protected or enhanced*.

The landscape section refers to the principle that *planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside*. The guidance refers to the use of landscape character assessment at a national and local level as a tool to *help inform, plan and manage change*.

3.2 Local Planning Policy

3.2.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Local Plan

The development plan for Staffordshire Moorlands consists of a portfolio of Local Development Documents (LDDs) which set out the spatial planning strategy for the District. Collectively, these are known as the Local Plan. LDDs of relevance to this application include the Core Strategy, Site Allocations Plan Document, Policies Maps and Supplementary Planning Documents.

Core Strategy

The Core Strategy is a strategic District-wide plan that provides the framework for other Local Plan documents such as the Site Allocations DPD.

Core Policies of relevance to landscape and visual issues in relation to the proposed development are described below. The Evidence Base—a list of documents that informs the Core Strategy—includes the Landscape and Settlement Character Appraisal (Section 5.1.2) and the subsequent detailed assessment of the Churnet Valley (Section 5.1.3).

Spatial Strategy SS1 Development Principles states the at the Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environment improvement of the District, including a *...healthy, safe, attractive and well-maintained environment*, with development that is undertaken in a way that *protects and enhances the natural and historic environment of the District*.

It goes on to state that *all proposals for redevelopment will be considered in the context of the District-wide Spatial Strategy and with regard to both its direct and indirect cumulative impact over the long-term.*

SS5a Leek Area Strategy makes general reference to employment and growth opportunities, noting that future needs can be met through, inter alia, *improving and intensifying the use of existing employment areas at…Leekbrook.*

The special character and role of Leek as a visitor destination should be strengthened by, inter alia, *protecting and improving the setting and historic character of the town and increasing access into the countryside by foot…*

Spatial Strategy SS6c Other Rural Areas Area Strategy relates to countryside areas outside the development and infill boundaries of towns and villages outside the Site Allocations DPD. It states the quality of the countryside should be enhanced and conserved by giving priority to *the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring that all development proposals to respect and respond sensitivity to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscapes.*

Spatial Strategy SS7 Churnet Valley Area Strategy references the area as being identified for sustainable tourism and rural regeneration. It states the support will be given to the measures that *enhance [and] protect the landscape character and heritage assets of the Churnet Valley…* It goes on to note that *the consideration of landscape character will be paramount in all development proposals in order to protect and conserve locally distinctive qualities and sense of place and to maximize opportunities for restoring, strengthening and enhancing distinctive landscape features*.

Policy E2 Existing Employment areas states that employment areas and premises should not harm the amenity of nearby residents.

Policy DC1 Design Considerations states the importance of good design that reinforces local distinctiveness and positively contributes to the special character and heritage of the area, referencing the Council's Design SPD (refer to Section 3.2.2). It states the new development should:

- *be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance;*
- *create, where appropriate, attractive, functional, accessible and safe public and private environments which incorporate public spaces, green infrastructure including making provision for networks of multi-functional new and existing green space (both public and private) in accordance with policy C3, landscaping, public art, 'designing out crime' initiatives and the principles of active design;*
- *incorporate sustainable construction techniques and design concepts for buildings and their layouts to reduce the local and global impact of the development…protect the amenity of the area, including residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory …outlook, privacy and soft landscaping;*
- *promote the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and re-creation of biodiversity…where appropriate;*

Policy DC2 Historic Environment states that the Council will safeguard and, where possible, enhance the *…historic environment, areas of historic landscape character and interests of acknowledged importance, including in particular…the setting of designated assets, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens.*

Policy D3 Landscape and Settlement Setting states:

The Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:

1. Resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape or the setting of a settlement and important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;

2. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;

3. Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape;

..

5. Recognising and conserving the special quality of the landscape in the Peak District National Park, and ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the National Park.

Reference is made here to the Landscape Character Assessments noted in the Evidence Base documents described above.

Policy R1 Rural Diversification relates to rural areas outside the development boundaries of town villages, stating that appropriate development should not harm the rural character of the area.

Policy C3 Green Infrastructure states that the District will, inter alia:

- *Link existing and potential sites of nature conservation value and historic landscape features, create new wildlife habitats, increase biodiversity, and increase tree cover where it is appropriate to the landscape;*
- *Enhance the natural, man-made and cultural features that are crucial to the local landscape and create opportunities for the restoration of degraded landscapes and the enhancement of the urban fringe;*
- *Create appropriate access for a wide range of users to enjoy the countryside, including improved linkages to and provision of formal and informal recreation opportunities and accessible woodland areas, encouraging walking, cycling and horse riding*

Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD)

This document will identify land for future development to help deliver the objectives set out n the Council's adopted Core Strategy. The draft document is currently undergoing consultation, with the Council expecting to consult on the preferred options early iin 2016.

Policies Map

The development boundaries and Green Belt boundaries within the 1998 adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan are still in force until such time as they are reviewed as part of the Site Allocations work noted above.

Policies relating to Special Landscape Areas have been replaced by more general protection through the Core Strategy and Landscape Character Assessment SPGs.

3.2.2 Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

SPG and SPDs constitute a material consideration in planning applications.

Churnet Valley Masterplan

This document was adopted in March 2014. It reflects the identification in Core Strategy policy SS7 (Section 3.2.1) that a Masterplan will be produced, providing a comprehensive framework for future development in the Churnet Valley. It identifies opportunities and

measures to help regenerate and manage the area that are sensitive to and enhances the valley's sensitive heritage, landscape and ecology. However, it should be noted that the Site Allocations DPD, currently undergoing consultation, will allocate land for development.

The SPD covers a wide range of issues and general guidance; there are no specific policies. The overarching principals are of sustainability and enhancement to the natural, built and historic environment of the area.

Eight 'Character Areas' are described as part of a Spatial Strategy, for which each is described a role, key activities and key actions; alongside a number of 'Opportunity Sites' that are identified as having the potential to deliver the strategy. The site is within the Leek Character Area but no specific reference to the site or the immediate surrounds is given within the SPD.

4 ZTVs and viewpoints

4.1 ZTV studies

The production of ZTVs is described in Section 2.3. Examination of the bare earth and screened ZTVs informs initial judgement as to which landscape and visual receptors should be either scoped out or subject to further assessment.

It should be noted again that the ZTVs display only theoretical visibility. The bare earth ZTV indicates the effects of topography, and the screened ZTV accounts for the effects of screening through built form and woodland. However, further screening through isolated trees, vegetated field boundaries, hedgerows and gardens will occur, and the height of built features may exceed the parameters used in the production of the screened ZTV.

This is more likely with increasing distance from the proposal, towards the outer edges of areas of potential visibility. Conversely, there may be occasions where the height of woodland or buildings is less than these parameters.

In addition to the above points, the ZTVs produced for this assessment were generated on the basis of a polyline representing the footprint of the development site and set at a height of 9m, the maximum height for the units proposed. The precise layout of the proposal is still to be finalised, but given the units would not cover the full extent or footprint of the proposal site, the approach used for generating the ZTVs is likely to result in zones of theoretical visibility that are broader and more generous than would real-life visibility.

The bare earth ZTV (Figure 2a) clearly indicates the influence of topography on visibility. Views are completely screened from the south by the adjacent ridgeline, whilst high ground around Lowe Hill and Birchall prevents views from Leek. The orientation of the Leek Brook valley allows greater visibility towards the east—including rising ground to Morridge—and west around Ladderedge.

The screened ZTV (Figure 2b) illustrates the effect of buildings and woodland on screening. Site visits verified the distribution of the visibility shown. The dense woodland to the sides of the valley appreciably reduces views, particularly to the northeast around Ashenhurst Mill and to the west along the Leek Brook valley.

4.2 Viewpoints

4.2.1 Viewpoint selection

The initial set of viewpoints considered for this study, 11 overall, are described in Table 3-1 below. The table provides reasons for consideration and exclusion where applicable. This initial selection was informed by ZTVs, desk-top analysis, preliminary site work and later examination of site photographs.

The final selection of four viewpoints was established after a site visit that took place on 10 September 2015 and subsequent correspondence with the LPA (refer to Section 2.2.1). The

viewpoints are described below in Section 3.2.2, with viewpoint locations shown on Figure 3 and annotated photo views on Figures 4a to 4e.

Table 4-1: Viewpoints considered for inclusion

Name of Viewpoint	Distance/ direction from edge of proposal site	Reason	Included/ not included	Viewpoint and figure number
Leek Town 31 footpath	0.18km NW	View from a Public Right of Way adjacent to the proposal site	Not included: low sensitivity	
Cheddleton 37 footpath, Fynneylane Farm	0.26km SE	View from a Public Right of Way next to Finneylane Farmhouse	Included	Viewpoint 1, Figure 4a
Cheddleton 36(c) bridleway	0.41km E	View from a Public Right of Way east of the proposal site	Included	Viewpoint 2, Figure 4b
Leek Town 30 footpath near Sheephouse Farm	0.6km N	View from a Public Right of Way north of the proposal site	Not included: limited views at right angles to direction of travel	
Bradnop and Cawdry 8 footpath	0.96km NE	View from a Public Right of Way north-east of the proposal site	Not included: VP 3 from Revedge Farm more open and included in preference	
Leek Town 29 path, near Lowe Hill	1.43km N	Elevated views from a public right of way	Included (requested by LPA)	Viewpoint 4, Figure 4d
Longsdon 19 footpath, Mollatts Wood Road	2.8km NW	Views from public footpath close to residential areas	Included	Viewpoint 5, Figure 4e
Bradnop and Cawdry 11 and 12 footpaths, Revedge Farm	1.36km E	Elevated views from public footpaths to the east	Included	Viewpoint 3, Figure 4c
Cheddleton 36(c) bridleway, east of Fynneyland Farm	0.07k S	Glimpsed views from bridleway	Not included: VP 2 more open and included in preference	
Twillow Heath	2.63km NE	Distant views from isolated residential receptors and unclassified road	Not included: views unlikely	
Blakelow Road, Morridge	3.84km NE	Distant views from edge of Peak District National Park	Not included: views unlikely	

4.3 Illustrative viewpoints: baseline and assessment of effects

Viewpoint 1: Cheddleton 37 footpath, Fynneylane Farm

Figure 4a

Grid reference: 399567,353545. 200m AOD, 0.26km S

Reason for viewpoint

To illustrate views from a local Public Right of Way (footpath) within the setting of a Grade II* listed building.

Key visible features within the view

The view looks north across a small pasture grazed by cows at the time of visit, with the dense deciduous woodland of Twinney Wood immediately to the north. The woodland slopes steeply down to the proposal site, but open views are available that allow distant prospects of the wider countryside. These include the setting of Leek—with 20th century housing development around Westwood—and the distant outline of The Cloud; rising farmland towards Lowe Hill; and the prominent Ramshaw Rocks. Further east, Morridge can be glimpsed, marking the western edge of the Peak District.

Receptors

Recreational users of Cheddleton Footpath 37 and adjacent Cheddleton bridleways 32(b) and 35.

Sensitivity to change

The footpath is accessible and offers a link from the Brooklands Way industrial estate to the wider path network, whilst the view represents the setting of the attractive Grade II* listed Jacobean Fynneylane Farmhouse. Modern intrusions are visible in the form of residential development around Leek but generally sensitivity is considered to be high.

Magnitude of change

A combination of a steep drop in topography and woodland is expected to screen the development, as demonstrated on the wireframe. Although deciduous, Twinney Wood is noticeably dense and even when leafless is likely to prevent views. Glimpses may theoretically be possible, therefore the magnitude of change is considered to be negligible.

Effect

No change or negligible at most.

Viewpoint 2: Cheddleton 36(c) bridleway, east of Fynneylane Farm

Figure 4b

Grid reference: 399828, 353764. 197m AOD, 0.41km E

Reason for viewpoint

To illustrate views from a local Public Right of Way (bridleway) with open views towards the proposal site.

Key visible features within the view

The view looks west along the valley of the tributary (Leek Brook) within which both the existing and proposed development are located. The steep, narrow, wooded valleys that are characteristic of this area are well-represented in the view. Elements include the brick Victorian Gothic former water tower at the St. Edward's Hospital site (now a residential development); longer range-views towards the Potteries and 20th century housing around Ladderedge. However, it is the industrial buildings at Leekbroook that provide a focus for the view, being highly incongruous in the otherwise largely rural setting. The Esterchem buildings (left of view) are painted a striking terracotta colour, which highlights their presence but

possibly reflects the brick red architecture of the surrounding Victorian mills and in a somewhat unapologetic manner. There is no attempt to disguise the industrial function with muted or recessive colours, which is arguably successful although open to debate.

Receptors

Recreational users of Cheddleton Footpath 36(c), which links Fynneylane Farm with Ashenhurst Hall Farm. Views are expected mainly for receptors travelling east to west.

Sensitivity to change

The bridleway appears well-used and offers an accessible route from Cheddleton Heath to Leek and elevated areas to the west. The view is expansive and attractive but with the strong visual presence of the industrial estate. Sensitivity in this particular view is medium.

Magnitude of change

The development will extend the influence of industrial buildings both toward the viewpoint and outside the existing field of view. The site will continue to be contained within the wooded valley but will become much more dominant. The magnitude of change is medium-high.

Effect

Moderate-substantial adverse at most.

Viewpoint 3: Bradnop and Cawdry Footpaths 11 and 12, Revedge Farm

Figure 4c

Grid reference: 400759, 353721. 260m AOD, 1.36km E

Reason for viewpoint

To illustrate views from local Public Rights of Way (footpaths) with open views towards the proposal site and beyond.

Key visible features within the view

The view is expansive, looking west from the elevated field immediately adjacent to a modern barn at Revedge Farm. The mosaic of steep, narrow valleys, woodland and small-scale pasture that is typical of the Churnet valley is clearly visible in the view, as an attractive and pleasing landscape that stretches towards the Potteries and the Cheshire Plain, visible in clear weather. Features in the view include Yew Tree Farm; the brick Victorian Gothic former water tower at the St. Edward's Hospital site (now a residential development); and 20th century housing around Ladderbanks and to the fringe of Leek. Although forming only a small element in the view, the existing Leekbrook Industrial Estate is a noticeable as a contrasting, somewhat incongruous feature set within an otherwise largely rural landscape. The Esterchem buildings are visible as terracotta coloured, shed-like structures.

Receptors

Recreational users of Bradnop and Cawdry Footpaths 11 and 12, which links Roost Hill with Revedge Farm. The view is partially representative of views from Roost Hill Farm.

Sensitivity to change

Footpath 12 is accessible although no access from footpath 11 through the hedge along the lane near Roost Hill Farm could be found. The view is attractive but includes the industrial detractor; sensitivity is medium-high.

Magnitude of change

The development will slightly extend the influence of the Industrial Estate, although much of the new site will be screened by topography. The magnitude of change is low.

Effect

Moderate adverse at most, or slight-moderate adverse.

Viewpoint 4: Leek Town 29 Path, near Lowe Hill

Figure 4d

Grid reference: 399395, 355176. 238m AOD, 1.43km N

Reason for viewpoint

To illustrate views from a well-used public footpath with elevated views close to Leek.

Key visible features within the view

The view is expansive, dominantly rural with very few built elements visible. It is largely composed of a patchwork of pasture, hedgerows, numerous mature hedgerow trees and coalescing areas of woodland. The network of valleys that permeate the area are visible through the rise and fall of topography. Isolated farmsteads include Yew Tree Farm and The Cockett Farm, the latter set on the rising slopes of Ferny Hill. More distant human influences can be glimpsed through the large-scale built form of the John Pointon waste processing site beyond Cheddleton. Three small-scale wind turbines are visible to the far west of the view, on the slopes of Morridge. High-voltage transmission lines can be glimpsed on the distant horizon above Wetley Rocks.

Receptors

Recreational users of the Leek Town 29 path and Leek Town 29 bridleway. Both routes are close to Leek and provide easy access to the countryside and recreational amenity value to residents.

Sensitivity to change

The route is clearly well-used and offers attractive views towards the Churnet Valley and the slopes of Morridge, with few detractors. Sensitivity is considered to be high or medium-high.

Magnitude of change

Based on wireline data and existing site plans, the development is likely to be screened by woodland and topography, although glimpses may theoretically be available, possibly during the winter months. The magnitude of change is considered to be negligible, although in a worst-case scenario this may be low.

Effect

Negligible, or moderate adverse as a worst-case scenario.

Viewpoint 5: Longsdon 19 path, Mollatts Wood Road

Figure 4e

Grid reference: 396698, 354197. 200m AOD, 2.75km WNW

Reason for viewpoint

To illustrate views from a well-used public footpath with elevated views west of Leek.

Key visible features within the view

The view is panoramic and dominated by the long expansive of Morridge, an open ridge that marks the western boundary of the Peak District National Park. The middle distance consists of ridges and wooded valleys that represent tributaries of the River Churnet, with 20th century housing development visible to the western edge of Leek and Birchall. Further to the south (right), the landscape is more steeply incised with wooded valley around Cheddleton Heath and Ferny Hill. Distant elements include the transmission mast at Mount Road and turbines on the slope of Morridge. In the foreground, the scene is dominated by a clutter of agricultural fencing and 33kv overhead transmission lines.

Receptors

Recreational users of the Longsdon 19 path, which is easily accessible from residential areas at Ladderedge and Mollatts Wood Road with Horse Bridge. The route also offers a link

between Ladderedge and Deep Hayes Country Parks, as well as forming part of the Staffordshire Way and the E2 European Walking Route.

Sensitivity to change

The route is clearly well-used and offers attractive views of the countryside within reach of population centres, although the countryside has a slightly domesticated character. Sensitivity is high.

Magnitude of change

Views of the existing development are screened by woodland. However, the open field of the development site is visible and the proposal will result in the industrial development as a new element in what is otherwise a dominantly rural view. However, the view is a panoramic one and the site forms only a very small proportion of the overall aspect. The magnitude of change is low.

Effect

Moderate adverse.

5 Landscape baseline and assessment of effects

This section provides a description of the baseline conditions for key landscape receptors, along with an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development.

The landscape character of the area under consideration can be assessed at a variety of different scales, from national to site-based. Desk-based and site-based studies considering these differing scales are outlined below. A number of existing published studies relate to the area under consideration and provide a basis for the assessment of the landscape character and impacts.

5.1 Landscape character: baseline

5.1.1 National – National Character Areas

England has been divided into areas with similar landscape character, called National Character Areas (NCAs). The resulting map subdivides England into 159 NCAs and provides an overview of the differences in landscape character at the national scale. Each NCA is accompanied by a character description explaining the influences and features which determine the character of the area.

The proposal site lies within **National Character Area 64 – Potteries and Churnet Valley.** The key characteristics of NCA 64 that are particularly relevant to the study area are:

- *Dissected hills and small plateaux, cut by river valleys and steep ravines contrast with the industrial and densely settled conurbation of the Potteries.*
- *The well-wooded character throughout the Churnet Valley contrasts strongly with the urban, sparsely wooded landscapes of the Potteries.*
- *Ancient semi-natural woodland occurs predominantly in the valleys with grasslands and grazing marsh within valley bottoms, especially the lower reaches of the Churnet.*

The NCA profile defines a range of Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) thus:

- *Manage, expand, link and buffer the characteristic semi-natural woodland and protect the ancient woodland, for example in the Churnet Valley, reducing habitat fragmentation to benefit landscape character, biodiversity, resource protection and regulation;*

- *Restoring typical zones of woodland types from willow carr and wet alder woodland on valley floors, ash woodland on the richer soils, to oak/birch woodland on upper slopes, in order to reduce fragmentation of woodland habitat and strengthen the historic character of the area*
- *Encouraging the maintenance of semi-natural woodland enclosing characteristic ancient woodland pasture where it does not compromise other habitats; and encouraging new planting of native woodland that will link blocks of woodland, thus reducing habitat fragmentation and reinforcing a sense of history.*
- *Managing existing native woodland to ensure that it is in good ecological condition with appropriate species, diverse structure and habitat features for woodland biodiversity.*
- *Protecting native woodlands and wetlands along stream and river corridors by buffering to maintain the integrity of wetland habitats, planting new riparian woodland*
- *In urban areas, planting blocks of trees and street trees to provide shade, thus mitigating the effect of the urban heat island, increasing water infiltration rates and purifying the air.*

NCAs are high-level, strategic assessments which cover a comparatively wide area. They would not normally be assessed in relation to a proposal of this scale. It is considered unlikely that the proposed residential development would have an influence on landscape character at a National Area scale. This study therefore focuses on the local landscape character and assessments described below.

5.1.2 Local – Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (LSCA), Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (2008)

This study forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan (Section 3.2.1). It comprises 3 elements:

- Landscape Character Assessment
- Settlement setting assessment
- Review of Visual Open Space Designations

The study identifies ten Landscape Character Types (LCT) within the District. For each LCT, key characteristics are identified, alongside the main planning and management issues. The capabilities and sensitivities of the LCT to accommodate change are provided, in line with a 2000 report *Planning for Landscape Change* (PLC), an SPD which supported the now revoked Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan. This sensitivities described are 'inherent', in that they do not relate to any particular type of development.

It should be noted that boundaries between LCT are not always readily distinguishable on the ground and there may be a transition zone where features from both adjoining character types are present.

The site is within the **Dissected sandstone cloughs and valleys LCT**, which extends from Leek south along the valley of the River Churnet towards Oakamoor.

Key characteristics relevant to the site area include:

- Deeply incised wooded valleys with narrow winding watercourses
- Stone buildings and walls
- Sheep and cattle farming with smallholdings
- Large broadleaf woodlands with newer conifer plantations
- Narrow sunken lanes with hedgebanks and tall hedges that limit views
- Dominant views to higher ground

The PLC SPD identifies the LCT as locally very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Landscape planning guidelines relevant to the site include:

New planting should take account of landform, landscape scale and field pattern. In the valley bottoms, small to medium scale planting is appropriate, taking account of the smaller scale.

Immediately to the east and south-east of the site is the **Ancient slope and valley farmlands LCT**. This encompasses a number of areas in the district, this being an isolated area to the east of Leek.

Key characteristics that may be influence or be influenced by a development outside the LCT include:

- Strongly undulating or sloping landscape cut by small scale steep sided stream valleys
- Extensive views from higher ground
- Intimate wooded valleys

The PLC SPD identifies this LCT as an area that is not particularly sensitive to change.

The site lies to the southern edge of Leek, as defined in the Settlement Setting Assessment as the setting of Leek. The valley and the wooded slopes are demarcated as 'Important landscape setting to settlement', although there is no more specific reference within the report other than to note that it forms a 'green wedge' to the southeast of the town.

5.1.3 Local – Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment (2011)

The Churnet Valley LCA is intended to support the Churnet Valley Masterplan SPG (Section 3.2.2). The study describes six Landscape Character Types (LCT) which are equivalent to the LCTs identified in the 2008 Staffordshire Moorlands LCT (Section 5.1.2 above). However, the LCT are subdivided, where appropriate, into geographical Sub-areas and accompanied by a more detailed narrative. This includes a details of key characteristics, landscape change or incongruous features, character analysis, planning and management issues and guidelines.

The site lies within **LCT 1c Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys; Sub-area Cheddleton and Longsdon**. This LCT extends around the southwest edge of Leek, encompassing Cheddleton, the valley of the Leek Brook and the River Churnet.

Key characteristics of this Sub-area in relation to the LCT as a whole and relevant to the site surrounds include include:

- More smaller valley features
- More open and undulating cloughs
- Settlements of Leek and Cheddleton
- Sheep and cattle farming with smallholdings
- Industrial development
- Busy main roads
- Views from higher ground

Strengths include the distinct wooded valley sides, and intimate valleys and wooded roads. Weaknesses include busy roads and industrial estates.

Under the section 'Landscape Planning Guidelines', it notes that hedges should be maintained and new planting should take account of landform, landscape scale and field pattern. It notes that recent development at Leekbrook does not sit well with the landscape, whilst the landscape character and structure of the Sub-area have been diminished and are weaker respectively. More specific reference to Leekbrook states:

Consideration should be given to the quality of the landscape in Leekbrook, with improvements to landscape infrastructure and screen planting to reduce the negative impact of the housing development and industrial estate.

Land management guidelines support new woodland planting, maintenance and management of hedgerows, alongside the maintenance and enhancements of water bodies, streams and wet woodland.

Immediately to the south and east of the site is the **LCT Ancient Slope and Valley Farmlands Sub-Type 5b – East Leek**. It encompasses high ground to the east of Leek, extending southwest towards Ferny Hill.

Key characteristics that may be influence or be influenced by a development outside the LCT include:

- Strongly undulating or sloping landscape cut by small scale steep sided stream valleys
- Small scale mainly ancient irregular fields bounded by trees, hedgerows and dry stone walls
- Extensive views from higher ground between gaps in vegetation.
- Intimate wooded valleys

Noted strengths include the contrast of intimate valleys with extensive views, whilst Threats notes the expansion of Leek into sensitive landscapes.

5.1.4 Staffordshire Moorlands Historic Environment Character Assessment (2010)

This study identifies 11 Historic Environment Conservation Zones (HECZs) in the district, based around three historic towns and 12 historic villages. The site is not within an HECZ, but is located close to the south of LLHECZ 3 Birchall Wood and Lowe Hill. Of relevance to this study are the references to the strong woodland character which contributes significantly to local distinctiveness and the appreciation of the communal value of heritage assets through the numerous public rights of way that cross the zone.

5.1.5 Site character and fabric

The application site measures 5.42 hectares, although the developable area is 4 hectares. This is contained entirely within a single field, located immediately to the east of the existing Leekbrook Industrial Estate and within the valley of a tributary of the River Churnet. Given the enclosed nature, the site character is considered here to be relatively restricted, within around 500m of the application boundary.

The field measures around 550m east-west and 150 north south. It slopes steeply from the watercourse at around 150m AOD to 200m AOD at the southeast corner. The northern part of the site is relatively low-lying.

The site is within the Twinney Wood and Grasslands Site of Biological Importance (SBI) as designated in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Plan. SBI are considered to contain the best remaining areas of semi-natural habitat in the county, based on the results of surveys and selection criteria. The site contains a range of habitats which include species-rich semi-improved grassland, marshy grassland, acid grassland, semi-natural broadleaved woodland to the south and the stream to the northern boundary.

Much of the site comprises rough grassland which was used for sheep grazing at the time of visit, with occasional cattle trods visible. Parts of the grassland have been improved although recent surveys suggest it still retains sufficient botanical interest to retain the SBI status (refer to separate Ecology report and EIA chapter). The lower (northern) part of the site has been drained but the upper grass slopes are marshy. These then pass into Hawthorn scrub and Silver Birch woodland alongside Sycamore, Rowan, Pendunculate Oak, Ash, Crab Apple, Hazel, White and Goat Willow. The edge of the wood is slightly raised, forming a low, dry embankment.

A hedge to the eastern boundary comprises a mix of mature Ash with Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Dog Rose with occasional Holly and Hazel, along with a dense bramble understorey. The northern boundary comprises the watercourse, with mature, suckering Alder trees either side, with occasional Ash, Hawthorn and Hazel. A single, isolated, mature Oak is located within the centre of the site, with two young-mature Oaks located close to the western edge.

The western boundary comprises a barbed wire or steel mesh security fence, with a parallel timber post-and rail to the inside, demarcating the public footpath that runs along this side of the site. A timber field gate allows vehicle access along a track from Brooklands Way. A post and wire fence runs along the southern boundary where gaps in the woodland exist.

Visually and perceptively, the site is heavily influenced by the both topography and the adjacent Leekbrook Industrial Estate. The valley floor location with steep wooded slopes provides a strong sense of enclosure and limits views to the north and south other than occasional glimpses of the surrounding pastoral land. The east-west orientation of the valley allows longer-distance views in these directions, although these are also constrained, with Ladderbanks to the west being the limit of visibility.

The industrial infrastructure of Leekbrook comprises tall, terracotta coloured corrugated steel sheds of the Esterchem works, alongside stainless steel flues and grey silos. The unit to the north is a lower, steel-clad, green painted single storey building, with a low-pitched corrugated steel roof. Areas of hardstanding surround the buildings, which are used for parking, access, storage and delivery. No screening is present, although the larger foreground units generally screen buildings further to the west. Altogether, the assemblage creates a very incongruous scene that strongly informs the wider character of the valley. Despite this, no attempt has been made to hide the functional and industrial form or purpose; the terracotta finish arguably referencing—intentionally or otherwise—the 19th century brick textile mills that form prominent features in both Leek and along the Churnet valley.

The wider character includes heavy traffic along the A520 to the west alongside 20th century residential development to the north around Leek, but also a more tranquil, pastoral landscape of small-scale fields, wooded valleys an only occasional farmsteads to the east and south.

Overall, the landscape is one of contrasts. The intimate, enclosed grassland, woodland and stream offers an attractive mosaic of habitats set within varied, steep topography, but commanded by the pervasive presence of the industrial estate.

5.2 Landscape character: assessment of effects

The site character generally accords with the descriptions of the LCT 1c (Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys: Sub-area Cheddleton and Longsdon), as defined in the Churnet Valley LCA. It displays some of the published key characteristics such as the smaller valley features, wooded valley sides and industrial development.

The elements that make up the site (the landscape fabric) are considered here to be of medium-high value. It is not subject to any local or national policy protection on account of landscape or scenic value. However, these elements have ecological value, as recognised in the SBI designation; the presence of these natural features provides visual interest, alongside the varied topography and glimpses of more elevated, rural landscapes. Although the Grade II* listed Fynneylane Farm is located only around 100m to the south, the setting of this heritage asset is considered to be spatially and visually detached from the site and has little or no influence.

The perceptual presence of the adjacent industrial estate must be acknowledged; susceptibility is medium. Given the proximity and scale of this feature, the overall sensitivity of the site is considered here to be medium.

The proposed changes to the landscape have been outlined in Section 1.2.1. These changes have the potential to impact upon the landscape fabric mainly through the irreversible change to the majority of the development area through the loss of grassland, a small number of trees and small areas of scrub and young woodland. New elements will include the industrial units,

hard elements such as roads and service yards, as well as lighting, noise and movement of traffic. However, it should be noted that the watercourse will not be disturbed and there will be only very limited effects on the woodland areas.

At a site level, the magnitude of change is considered to be high during construction and operation, given that the proposals will bring about a fundamental change in the landscape characteristics of the site. The resulting effect would therefore be moderate-substantial adverse, which is a significant effect.

The site character is considered here to be within around 500m of the proposal boundary, but less in some cases, due to enclosed topography and spatial relationships arising from the steep wooded slopes. Effects reduce with distance, such that these may be negligible within relatively short distances, such as 150m from the southern boundary. The overall effect on LCT 1c is considered to be moderate adverse at most. The pronounced topography of the area is considered to limit the extent of landscape effects, due to restricted perceptual and visual influences.

No direct effects are expected for LCT Sub-Type 5b, which lies immediately to the south of the site. However, indirect effects will arise where the development influences visual or perceptual qualities that inform sensitivity. In this case, these include the extensive views that encompass wooded valleys. The development will be visible in some views, although the proportion of these within the LCT sub-type as a whole is very limited. Views from other parts of the LCT will include the urban influences of Leek. Sensitivity is medium-high and the magnitude of change is low at most. The effect is moderate at most, but no effect for much of the LCT.

Mitigation is outlined in Section 8. This includes measures to minimise and offset the loss of habit areas, including new tree and hedgerow planting, translocation and improved management of species-rich grassland, and new balancing ponds with ecological value. Whilst none of these elements will mitigate against permanent loss of habitat and the presence of urban structures in a rural environment, they may result in a marginal reduction in effects, although not one that is considered less than significant.

5.3 Landscape designations

5.3.1 The Peak District National Park

The boundary to the Peak District National Park lies approximately 3.7km NE at the nearest point. The designation aims to conserve and enhance area's natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area; and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the park's special qualities by the public.

As evidenced by the ZTV, views will be limited to Morridge and only the very eastern boundary of the Park; it will not viewed in context with other areas of the Park; no direct effects are expected. The development may theoretically be visible as a very minor and barely distinguishable element, potentially only when the sun reflects off a roof. The effect is locally negligible at most.

5.3.2 Local Landscape Designations

There are no local policy landscape designations with the Staffordshire Moorlands District.

6 Visual baseline and assessment of effects

This section provides a description of the baseline conditions for the key visual receptors identified, along with an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development. Where visual receptors are expected to have "effects judged unlikely to occur or so insignificant that it is not essential to consider them further" (GLVIA3), these are 'scoped out' of the assessment with reasons given.

To avoid cross-referencing between baseline reporting and assessment of effects on different pages, the two are described together for each landscape or receptor.

Visual receptors are people that may experience views of the landscape. These may include residents and visitors to settlements, roads, footpaths, trails, visitor facilities or particular viewpoints. ZTV, desktop and site studies have been used to identify the key visual receptors likely to be affected by the proposal, to include the following:

- Residential, individual properties and settlements
- Public Rights of Way and other recreational receptors
- Roads

Despite bare earth and screened ZTVs demonstrating theoretical visibility to 4km of the proposal, observations made during a site visit coupled with the relatively small scale of the proposed development site suggest it is highly unlikely any notable visual effects would occur outside the immediate vicinity of the site. Only receptors within around 1.5km and where direct views are likely are assessed below.

6.1 Public Rights of Way and recreational receptors

6.1.1 Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

All Public Rights of Way are assessed with reference to numbers shown on the online Staffordshire County Council mapping site. All distances are to the nearest site boundary.

Within 1km

Leek Town 31 footpath (0.0km to 0.56km W of site). This public footpath runs from Cheadle Road, around the northern side of the Leekbrook Industrial Estate to join with footpath 32 to the south of the Esterchem site. A short section of the route is passable from the eastern end of Brooklands Way, through rough grassland and over stiles to footpath 32. No evidence of use could be discerned for the section that runs alongside the north side of the Industrial Estate and along the watercourse; this route was completely overgrown with no sign of desire lines or access.

The footpath will be diverted as part of the development proposals. The new route will run further to the east, through a ‘green corridor’ to join the extended access road. Sensitivity, given the strongly industrial context and lack of evidence use, is considered to be low; the route may nevertheless offer some amenity value to local workers. The magnitude of change is high, due to the diversion and increased presence of industrial elements in the view. The effect is therefore moderate adverse.

Despite this adverse effect, the development may allow an improvement to linkages from the Industrial Estate to the wider PRoW network. Regular maintenance to ensure routes are not blocked by vegetation would offer small-scale amenity value for local employees; the northern diversion may offer an opportunity to view the ecological balancing pond. These mitigation measure may reduce adverse effects, such that they may become neutral.

Leek Town 32 footpath (0.04 SW to 0.37km S of site). The route rises up a steep slope through dense vegetation from a point south of the Esterchem site where it links with Leek 30 and Leek 31 footpaths. The route then continues across pasture fields to Fynneylane Farm. It is signed and passable, offering local amenity value to employees and residents although usage is likely to be limited. There are relatively open views from the vicinity of Fynneylane

Farm where the wider landscape towards Leek can be appreciated. Sensitivity is medium-high at most.

For a short section (c.100m) where the path joins Path 31 (see above), the development will result in an appreciable extension of the industrial character in the view. However, sensitivity to this section is low, due to the influence of the existing industrial buildings. For the remainder of the route, including the open section close to Fynneylane Farm, no change is likely, as evidenced by Figure 4a (Viewpoint 1), although as a worst-case scenario this may be negligible.

For the route as a whole, the magnitude of change is low at most and the effect overall is moderate adverse at most, but frequently no change for much of the route.

Cheddleton 37 footpath (0.04 to 0.39 W). This route runs along the southern boundary of the site from Basford Lane in the west to a point south of the Esterchem factory, where it continues as Leek Town 32 (assessed above). The route runs through steep scrubby woodland. Given the context of the view, which is dominated by the existing Leekbrook Industrial Estate, sensitivity is low. The development would be visible as an extension of the existing site to the eastern end of the route, but screened for much of the remainder. The magnitude of change is medium and the effect is slight-moderate adverse.

Leek Town 30 footpath (0.50 N to 0.93km NW). The public footpath runs along farm tracks from Sheephouse Farm on Cheadle Road to Ashenhurst Hill. It has an open character, with wide views for much of the length towards the Peak District, as well as the residential fringes of Leek. Sensitivity is considered to be medium. Theoretical views may be possible for very short sections of the most elevated section. However, site analysis suggested that these views would be screened by vegetation; any views would be glimpsed and at right angles to the direction of travel. The effect is considered to be negligible.

Cheddleton 36b and 36c bridleway (0.10 S to 0.48km W). The route runs along farm tracks from Fynnelane Farm (where it joins C35) to a point near Ashenhurst (BC 13a). The route is signed and would appear to be well-used, offering recreational access for residents in Cheddleton Heath. The section close to the site has an attractive character within the setting of the Grade II* listed Finneylane Farmhouse. Sensitivity is medium-high or high.

For much of the route, views are screened by topography or dense vegetation. However, a short glimpse is available immediately to the east of Finneylane where the development may appear incongruous through a gap in the boundary woodland; here the existing industrial features are not currently prominent. More open views area available from a short section to the east of the site, as evidenced in Figure 4b, Viewpoint 2, particularly for receptors travelling from east to west. The industrial estate is already visible in this view, as a discordant feature set within wooded, steep valleys. Sensitivity is arguably slightly lower within such views. The development would result in the industrial character advancing closer towards the receptor and occupying a greater proportion of the view. The magnitude of change for both locations is medium-high. The effect is therefore moderate-substantial adverse; it may be argued that the presence of the development in the existing baseline prevents a substantial adverse effect. Despite this, it should be noted that views are only available from a small proportion of this route and the overall effect for route as a whole is considered to be moderate adverse.

Bradnop and Cawdry 8 footpath (0.77km to 0.82km NW). The route runs across elevated farmland from Ashenhurst to the more enclosed valleys around Ashenhurst Mill. The footpath allows open views to the Peak District and the setting of Leek, close to residential areas. Sensitivity is medium-high. There may be theoretical glimpses available immediately to the north of Ashenhurst, but these are likely to be screened by localised vegetation and any views will not be in the direction of travel. The effect is considered to be negligible.

Bradnop and Cawdry 13a bridleway (1.09km E). This route is an eastwards continuation of Cheddleton 36c bridleway. Theoretical visibility may be available for a very short section close to Ashenhurst, but site visits suggested that this may be subject to further vegetation screening. The effect is considered to be negligible.

Bradnop and Cawdry 11 and Bradnop and Cawdry 12 footpaths (1.09km E). These two footpaths may have distant views of the development from a single point where they join, immediately west of Revedge Farm (reference Viewpoint 3, Figure 4c). Any views would be glimpsed and within an expansive panorama that also includes the existing industrial estate. The effect is locally moderate adverse or slight-moderate adverse, but the overall effect is slight adverse.

Leek Town bridleway 25 (1.41 km N to 1.16km NW) provides an accessible amenity route for residents in Birchall and Leek, offering open views across the town. Views to the site my theoretically be available but are likely to be very limited and screened by an adjacent hedgerow. The effect is negligible.

Leek Town footpath 29 (1.41 km N to 1.16km NW) links Leek with Ashenhurst Mill. The route is well-used and provides quick access to open countryside with expansive views. The high point of the site, where the route joins Bridleway 25 near Ballington Grange Farm, may have theoretical views of the site where the existing industrial buildings are not visible. Sensitivity is considered to be high at most. Viewpoint 5 (Figure 4e) illustrates a wireline showing approximate building heights based on the available site plan. This would appear to show that the development is likely to be screened through woodland to the north of the site, as well as topography. However, given the margin of error within the available data, this effect may be regarded as negligible, or medium at most; the magnitude of change would not be more than low.

Longsdon 19 (2.57km W) has long-distance but open, elevated views at right angles to a route that links Mollatts Wood Road to Wood Road via Hollinhay Wood. The route provides accessible recreational value for local residents as a popular through-route from Ladderedge to Deep Hayes Country Parks. It also forms part of the Staffordshire Way and European Walking Route 2 (see Section 6.3). Open views are available towards the Morridge and the Peak District, although these are influenced by modern residential development and some agricultural clutter (reference Viewpoint 5, Figure 4e). The existing site is not currently visible in the view; the sloping field to the southern side of the site can be seen and the development will therefore introduce a new, incongruous element into the landscape. However, views would from a glimpsed, from a relatively long-distance and are at right angles to the direction of travel. Sensitivity is high. The magnitude of change is low and the effect is moderate adverse at most.

Views from locations at greater distances than the routes described above are restricted to elevated, open routes on the west-facing slopes of Morridge. These may include the following:

- Bradnop and Cawdry 25 footpath (1.73km NE), near Wildgoose Farm: views would be in the context of modern agricultural outbuildings
- Bradnopr and Cawdry 6 footpath (1.9 to 2.6km NE): some open views but frequently screened by field boundary hedges;
- Bradnop and Cawdry 27 footpath (2.3km NE): open views although in the context of nearby Bradnop and functional agricultural buildings
- Bradnop and Cawdry 29, from Beeley Barn to Morridge/Blakelow Road (3.3 to 3.9km NE): expansive, panoramic views from an open landscape
- Bradnop and Cawdry, from Beeley Barn to Morridge/Blakelow Road (3.33 to 3.63km ENE): expansive, panoramic views from man open landscape
- Bradnop and Cawdry 5, a short section from High Cross to Morridge/Blakelow Road (3.51 to 3.63km ENE)

In all the above cases, extensive vistas are available across the steep wooded valley of the Churnet and tributaries out across The Potteries and the distant Cheshire Plain. There may be theoretical visibility of the development, which is some cases may introduce a very minor new element of industrial built form within the view. However, given the wide-ranging nature of view and the fact that these are oriented in the direction of landscapes with greater human

influences than those to the east, the effect in all cases may be moderate adverse at most, but generally negligible.

6.1.2 Recreational trails

Staffordshire Way (1.94km SW at closest point)

The Staffordshire Way is a 148km signposted walking trail that extends from Mow Cop to Kinver Edge. It was progressively opened between 1977 and 1992. At the nearest point, it runs along the Caldon Canal at Cheddleton, with sections to the north along the valley of the River Churnet. Views are only expected from a very short (c.80m) section along of public footpath Longsdon 19, which is assessed above (Section 6.1.1) as a short-term moderate adverse effect. The development will introduce a new but glimpsed industrial element into a view where the existing Leekbrook site is screened. However, the view is at right angles to the direction of travel and the path is influence by modern residential development. The effect overall on the route is negligible at most.

Views from the short section that runs to the west of Ladderedge Country Park are screened by vegetation.

The section assessed also forms part of the *European Walking Route 2* (E2), which links a number of established walking trails to form a continuous route from Dover to the Scottish Borders.

Almost no views are expected from any other walking trails, including the locally publicised *Staffordshire Moorland Walks* network, which are also indicated on OS mapping. All these routes are screened by topography, with the exception of a very short section near Lowe Hill, SE of Leek, close to Viewpoint 4 (Figure 4d); in this case the effect is considered to be negligible.

6.2 Road receptors

The road network in the study area is generally characterised by heavily-trafficked single-lane A roads radiating from Leek, alongside narrow, often hedge-lined unclassified roads.

Views from road receptors are expected to be almost non-existent, due to the limited number of adopted highways in the immediate site area and screening by topography. Glimpsed views may theoretically be possible from a short (c.300m) section of the *A523* near Poolhall (2.10km NE), as the road climbs east towards Ashbourne. Traffic speeds are relatively high although there is a footway, primarily for local residents, along the western side. Views are expected to be screened by roadside vegetation and other hedgerow trees; the effect is negligible at most.

Blakelow Road (4.0km NE) runs along the prominent gritstone ridge of Morridge, which forms the western boundary of the Peak District National Park. The road offers panoramic, dramatic views across a wide range, across the Cheshire Plain to North Wales and Shropshire. The route is used by receptors to appreciate the wider views, although most vehicle speeds are high. The effect is considered to be negligible at most.

6.3 Residential receptors and settlements

The following assessment provides an indication of potential visibility from residential properties only. It is not intended as a Residential Amenity Assessment. Assessment. Observations were made from publically accessible locations and aerial mapping. Given that these were not from private properties or garden areas, it is not possible to ascertain the exact nature or use of a room, nor the value attributed to a particular view.

Property addresses are based on those indicated on Ordnance Survey large-scale mapping and listed in online postcode databases; accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Distance are approximate and given from the edge of the property to the site boundary.

It is not considered that the development will result in overbearing impacts that would render the outlook unpleasant or overwhelming such that these will be unattractive places to live.

Fynneylane Farm (0.12km S) lies close to the southern site boundary, above the steep wooded slopes of Twinney Wood. The property is Grade II* listed; an assessment of effects on heritage assets has been prepared within a separate report by FAS Heritage.

The house is oriented east-west, with principal views across the garden to the west. Views to the north are limited and screened by mature trees and a dense, evergreen hedge. Reference should be made to Viewpoint 1 (Figure 4a), which is located around 80m west of the property. Based on wireline data and indicative heights of the development, this demonstrates that that the development is very likely to be hidden below the dense woodland. As such, no effects would be expected, or negligible at worst. However, given that this assessment cannot be made from any first floor, north-facing windows, the effect may theoretically be negligible or possibly moderate adverse, given the high sensitivity and low overall magnitude of change as a proportion of all views within the property. This would be considered a worst-case scenario.

A number of residential conversions are associated with Ashenhurst Hall Farm. These include *Nos. 1, 2 and 3 The Courtyard; The Coach House;* and *The Gables*. Views are screened by dense, mature trees along the western boundary and a slight rise in topography, particularly for the Courtyard properties which are relatively low-lying. No effects are expected.

Ashenhurst Hall Farm (0.64km E) has an open aspect from the west elevation, looking across a garden designed to take advantage of views that are in the direction of the proposal. Views are likely to be subject to screening by woodland to the west of the site, along the north-facing slope of the valley. The development may potentially be visible, particularly in the winter months, although it is likely to be glimpsed. The magnitude of change may be low at most, but and the effect would be moderate adverse.

Roost Hill Farm (0.91km E) has views from the western elevation across fields towards the proposal site. The existing development can be glimpsed, although it is partially screened by both trees in close proximity and woodland around the site itself. Sensitivity is high, as the wider view is considered to be valued, despite the presence of minor detractors. The development may result in a very slight increase in the extent of the development, although as a proportion of the views this may be low at most. The effect is moderate adverse at most.

Fernleigh (0.97km E) is screened by mature trees immediately to the west.

Lowe Hill House (1.47km NNE) has views from the principal elevation across designed gardens in the direction of the site. Views are expected to be screened by mature trees within the curtilage and further vegetation around the site. Given that sensitivity is high, as a worst-case scenario the magnitude of change is low and the effect may be moderate adverse. Reference should be made to Viewpoint 4 (Figure 4d).

Revedge Farm (1.44km W) has no view due to screening by outbuildings.

Cliff Farm (1.21km NE) is screened by mature trees and a slight rise in topography

Distant views may theoretically be available for properties along the *A523 between Leek and Bradnop*, including Hills Dene, Brae Side, The Poplars and Fernycroft (1.80km NE). However, the development would be a very minor feature within wide views, subject to localised screening by trees along the road and in the context of passing traffic. Effects are moderate at most but more likely negligible.

A small number of south-west facing properties in *Bradnop* (such as Mount Fields and The Old Coach House; c.2km NE) and Little Bent and Twillow Heath (2.5km NE) but again effects would be moderate at most but more likely negligble.

A number of properties have long-distance east-facing views along *Mollatts View Road* (2.63km W), where the development may introduce a new but minor industrial element in views that currently do not include the existing Leekbrook site. These would be subject to localised screening by garden boundary vegetation and mature trees and only around 2 properties may arguably have relatively open views. A further small number (possibly 2) properties to the east side of Mollatts Close may have a similar aspect. In all cases, the effect is considered to be moderate adverse as a worst-case scenario, or more likely negligible.

7 Cumulative effects

Cumulative effects can occur when more than one development is present in an area. The cumulative effect of a set of developments is the combined effect of all the developments taken together.

'Development' in this sense is generally considered to represent a similar type of structure or change in the landscape as that which is proposed, such as wind turbines or solar farms. In some instances, a wider scope may be required. Consultation with SDC (refer to Section 2.2.1) indicated that cumulative effects should relate to the existing industrial estate, as well as larger-scale, functional features such as farm barns.

Cumulative effects on visual amenity consist of combined visibility and sequential effects.

- Combined visibility occurs where the observer is able to see two or more developments from one viewpoint. Combined visibility may either be in combination (where several developments are within the observer's arc of vision at the same time) or in succession (where the observer has to turn to see the various developments).
- Sequential effects occur when the observer has to move to another viewpoint to see different developments. For example, this could be when travelling along roads or paths. The occurrence of sequential effects may range from frequently sequential (the features appear regularly and with short time lapses between, depending on speed of travel and distance between the viewpoints) to occasionally sequential (long time lapses between appearances, because the observer is moving very slowly and / or there are large distances between the viewpoints).

Views of this development in combination are expected from locations described in the main assessment, where the existing industrial estate is already visible in the view. The proposal may lead to an increase in industrial development as a proportion of the view, or an 'advance' of industrial features towards the receptor. Sequential views are generally expected to be limited, as the existing and proposed sites are adjacent and therefore both are likely to be in view at any one time.

Cumulative effects arising from the interaction between the proposal and other features of an industrial character—such as large portal barns—are considered here to be limited. These features are noticeably limited in the wider landscape; the nearest are associated with Yew Tree Farm (0.25km S) which are not visible from the site but are apparent in wider views, albeit as a recognisably agricultural set of features. Groups of large barns also exist at Cliff Farm (1.30km NE) and farmsteads above Bradnop (2.5km NE). Within wider views, particularly from the east, the extensive John Simpson waste processing site (3.70km SE) is visible, near Cheddleton. Views of the business park at Cheddleton and the large industrial estates to the southwest and northwest of Leek are largely screened by topography within the immediate site area.

Cumulative visual effects

Cumulative visual effects are summarised as follows. In general, where the visual effects arising *only* from the new development (as previously assessed) are slight-moderate or less, cumulative effects are not expected to be greater than moderate and therefore not assessed. However, a general narrative is provided where appropriate.

Public rights of way

Leek Footpath 31: moderate adverse cumulative effect (significant) due to combined views. The short section that is passable will be diverted through the site and effectively surrounded by the development, but sensitivity is considered to be low.

Leek Footpath 32: moderate adverse cumulative effect, due to sequential and combined views, but sensitivity is low and views only available for a short period.

Cheddleton 37 footpath: moderate adverse cumulative effect, due to short-period combined views at lower end of slope, where sensitivity is lowest.

Cheddleton 36(a) bridleway: moderate-substantial adverse cumulative effect (significant), due to combined views in close proximity (reference Viewpoint 2, Figure 4b); the development will 'advance' towards the viewer.

Bradnop and Cawdry Footpaths 11 and 12 (Revedge Farm): slight-moderate cumulative adverse effect, as the new development will be less visually extensive than the existing (reference Viewpoint 3, Figure 4c); barns at Yew Trees Farm are also in the view.

Public footpaths around and above Bradnop may receive distant views, but the extent to which this development is visible and the likelihood of both existing and proposed being visible both reduce with distance from site. The cumulative effect is considered to be moderate adverse at most, but more likely negligible. There may also be some cumulative effects through combined views with large-scale barns or more distant 'shed' features, but these are considered here to be a very minor contributory factor.

Residential receptors

Roost Hill Farm: slight-moderate cumulative adverse, as the new development will be less visually extensive than the existing.

Ashenhurst Hall House, Lowe Hill House and those properties previously assessed within elevated areas around *Bradnop* (Section 6.3 may receive views in combination, but these would be subject to localised screening by vegetation and topography. In such cases, the worst case scenario may be a moderate adverse cumulative effect, but given the direction of view and distance from the site, particularly around Bradnop, the cumulative effect overall is more likely to be less. There may also be some cumulative effects through combined views with large-scale barns or more distant 'shed' features, but these are considered here to be a very minor contributory factor.

Landscape receptors

The new development will result in a locally (within 500m) significant (moderate-substantial adverse) effect on the Local Landscape Character Type 1c (refer to Section 5.2). As noted previously, the sensitivity of the site is influenced by the presence of the existing development. However, the proposal will result in an appreciable extension of the industrial character of the valley to the east. Effects may also arise from the interrelationship with other industrial estates close to Leek and Cheddleton. The cumulative magnitude of change is locally high and the cumulative landscape effect is therefore considered to be moderate-substantial adverse (which is significant) for LCT Type 1c within around 500m of the site. However, the overall cumulative effect on LCT 1c is considered to be moderate adverse.

Despite this locally significant cumulative effect, it can be argued that it is preferable to concentrate this type of development within locations that are already in close proximity to similar industrial sites, avoiding straggling or spreading of incongruous features within rural areas that may also result in more frequent or greater visual cumulative effects.

8 Mitigation

Given that the development comprises the permanent loss of grassland and the introduction of new, dominant elements in the landscape, mitigation is not expected to screen views or offset all habitat changes.

However, a design that considers the specific qualities and wider context of the site will reduce both landscape and visual effects. Measures proposed include the following:

- Protection of existing trees during construction and minimising the loss of any specimens through layout development
- 1.3 hectares of the site will be used for the protection and enhancement of the existing SBI.
- New tree planting along the northern boundary, to more than offset any losses during construction

- Improved structure planting along the access route to soften buildings and create a more pleasing visual environment
- New hedgerow planting and a 'green corridor' along the footpath diversion route, which will provide both biodiversity and ecological value
- Provision of balancing ponds as part of the drainage design that will offer new habitats and ecological value
- Avoidance of new tree planting and shading in order to protect and enhance species-rich wet grassland areas
- Translocation of species-rich grassland to ensure within the site

In addition to the above, the detailed design stage should incorporate elements that improve the amenity value for employees. The value of the woodland to workers in existing industrial units is evident through the use of informal seating areas and bird feeding stations. Opportunities to experience the wider landscape and improve access to local footpath routes should be included as part of the iterative design process.

Consideration should also be given to the colour of units. Whilst subjective, the terracotta shade used on the Esterchem buildings is considered here to create a striking but not overly dominant visual feature that potentially references the local brick textile mills. This should nevertheless be used with care as the effect may become overpowering if used at too great a scale.

The above are considered to be in accordance with National and Local Planning Policy, including the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy; Supplementary Planning Guidance and Documents; and supporting documents such as the Staffordshire Moorland and Churnet Valley District Landscape Character Assessments.

9 Appendix: Glossary

Impact

The action being taken - e.g. the felling of trees or the construction of the development

Effect

The result of an action being taken or the change within an existing view or landscape resulting from the impact e.g. the construction of a development forming a new and dominant element within a view.

Direct Effect

An effect that is directly attributable to the proposed development.

Indirect Effect

Effects that result indirectly from the proposed project as a consequence of the direct effects, often occurring away from the site, or as a result of a sequence of interrelationships or a complex pathway. They may be separated by distance or time from the source of the effects.

Notable Effects

Effects which are considered material or very important within the planning decision making process.

Landscape

'*Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*' (Council of Europe, 2000)

This definition was adopted by European Landscape Convention and is within GLVIA3 guidance.

Landscape Character

A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.

Landscape Effects

Effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right

Landscape Quality (Condition)

A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.

Landscape Receptors

Defined aspects of the landscape resource that have the potential to be affected by a proposal.

Landscape Value

The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.

Magnitude or nature (of effect)

A term that combines judgments about the size and scale of the effect, the extent of the area over which is occurs, whether it is reversible or irreversible and whether it is short or long term in duration.

Residual effects

Effects that remain after mitigation has been implemented.

Sensitivity or nature (of receptor)

A term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor.

Susceptibility

The ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences.

Visual Amenity

The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working recreating, visiting or travelling through an area.

Visual Effects

How the surroundings of individuals and groups of people may be specifically affected by changes in the content and character of views as a result of the change, loss or addition of elements

Visual Receptors

Individuals and/or defined groups of people who have the potential to be affected by a proposal.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

A digitally produced map, showing areas of land within which a development is theoretically visible.

Offices at

Coleshill
Doncaster
Edinburgh
Exeter
Haywards Heath
Limerick
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newport
Saltaire
Skipton
Tadcaster
Thirsk
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