



Sirius Group

Cellarhead, Stoke on Trent

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

January 2022

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Rev	Issue Status	Prepared/Date	Approved/Date
-	DRAFT	JES / 14.01.2022	CEH / 14.01.2022
A	Issue	JES / 20.01.2022	CEH / 20.01.2022

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been carried out for the proposed battery storage development by FPCR Environment and Design Ltd (FPCR). The purpose of this LVA study is to provide an assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed development. The landscape and visual effects have been considered in relation to the proposals detailed in the planning application drawings (Sirius Planning drawing ref SRE1138/03/03 0, and FPCR drawing ref 10541-L-01).
- 1.2 FPCR is a multi-disciplinary environmental and design consultancy established over 60 years, with expertise in architecture, landscape, ecology, arboriculture, urban design, masterplanning and environmental impact assessment. The practice is a member of the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and is frequently called upon to provide expert evidence on landscape and visual issues at Public and Local Plan Inquiries.

Site Location

- 1.3 Figures 1 and 2 show the location and context of the site, which is situated approximately 8km north east of Stoke on Trent, between Werrington, Wetley Rocks and Bagnall. The site is located to the immediate east of Cellarhead Grid Supply Point / Sub-Station. It comprises two regular-shaped fields currently being used for grazing, the northernmost of which contains two high voltage overhead electricity pylons. A section of the field to the south of the main parcels is proposed to form the vehicular access, from an existing access track / PRow Footpath ref 'Cheddleton 60' off Rownall Road.

Proposed Development

- 1.4 The proposed development is for a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) across approximately 5.12Ha of land. The proposal will comprise 112 battery containers (56 pairs) with 112 inverters and 56 transformers, a sub-station, a hard-paved access road, internal gravel surfacing and inward facing infra-red CCTV, with security fencing around the perimeter and acoustic fencing around the northern, eastern and southern edges (4m high). The development will be set within a framework of existing and new green infrastructure, including retained hedgerows and trees, new native hedgerow and tree planting around the site boundary, a strip of woodland planting along the eastern boundary, and surface water drainage features.
- 1.5 In addition, the fields to the south of the site (blue line on figures) covering 3.84ha are proposed to form an off-site area for biodiversity enhancements. They are proposed to be planted with new native hedgerows and trees with topsoil treatment, seeding and management of the grassland to improve the ecological value.

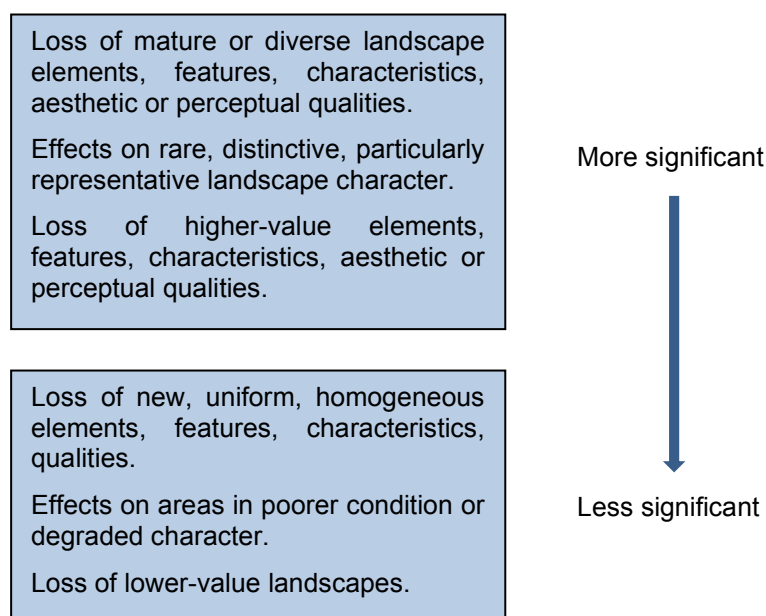
2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 This LVA has been prepared based upon the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition (GLVIA3), published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, in 2013. The assessment of Landscape Value also takes account of guidance in Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02-21 "Assessing landscape value outside national designations".
- 2.2 In summary, the GLVIA3 states:
- "Landscape and Visual impact assessment (LVIA), is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity."* (GLVIA3 paragraph 1.1.)
- 2.3 There are two components of LVIA:
- *"Assessment of landscape effects; assessing effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right;*
 - *Assessment of visual effects: assessing effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people."* (GLVIA3 paragraph 2.21.)
- 2.4 The GLVIA3 states:
- "LVIA can be carried out either as part of a broader EIA, or as a standalone 'appraisal' of the likely landscape and visual effects of a proposed development..."*
- *As a standalone 'appraisal' the process is informal and there is more flexibility, but the essence of the approach – specifying the nature of the proposed change or development; describing the existing landscape and the views and visual amenity of the area that may be affected; predicting the effects, although not their likely significance; and considering how those effects might be mitigated – still applies".* (GLVIA paragraph 3.2)
- 2.5 The components of this report include: baseline studies; description and details of the landscape proposals and mitigation measures to be adopted as part of the scheme; and identification and description of likely effects arising from the proposed development.
- 2.6 In terms of baseline studies, the assessment provides an understanding of the landscape that may be affected, its constituent elements, character, condition and value. For the visual baseline, this includes an understanding of the area in which the development may be visible, the people who may experience views, and the nature of views.

Assessment of Landscape Effects

- 2.7 GLVIA3 states that *"An assessment of landscape effects deals with the effects of change and development on landscape as a resource"* (GLVIA3 paragraph 5.1).
- 2.8 The baseline landscape is described by reference to existing published Landscape Character Assessments and by a description of the site and its context.
- 2.9 A range of landscape effects can arise through development. These can include:
- Change or loss of elements, features, aesthetic or perceptual aspects that contribute to the character and distinctiveness of the landscape;

- Addition of new elements that influence character and distinctiveness of the landscape;
 - Combined effects of these changes.
- 2.10 The characteristics of the existing landscape resource are considered in respect of the susceptibility of the landscape resource to the change arising from this development. The value of the existing landscape is also considered.
- 2.11 Each effect on landscape receptors is assessed in terms of size or scale, the geographical extent of the area influenced and its duration and reversibility. In terms of size or scale of change, the judgement takes account of the extent of the existing landscape elements that will be lost or changed, and the degree to which the aesthetic or perceptual aspects or key characteristics of the landscape will be altered by removal or addition of new elements. Geographical extent is considered by reference to the extent of the area over which there will be a change. Duration is considered for the landscape effects, with short term effects being defined as those lasting less than 5 years, medium term effects lasting between 5 and 10 years and long-term effects being defined as anything over 10 years in duration.
- 2.12 The level of effect is determined by considering the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and the magnitude of effect on the landscape. Final conclusions on the overall landscape effects are drawn from the assessment components described. This appraisal describes the nature of the landscape effects, and whether these are adverse or beneficial, at the following stages of development; construction, completion (year 1) and longer term (year 15).
- 2.13 GLVIA3 sets out some guidance on the underlying principles, which are used in this appraisal. This includes Figure 5.10, Scale of significance. Whilst this scheme is not EIA development, and judgements on significance are not therefore required, the Figure does provide useful guidance on reaching an overall judgement on the level of effects. This is repeated below (note this includes the correction of a typo, from the published document)



- 2.14 The criteria used in the appraisal are set out in Appendix A.

Assessment of Visual Effects

- 2.15 An assessment of visual effects deals with the effects of change and development on the views available to people and their visual amenity. This appraisal describes the nature of the visual effects and, whether these are adverse or beneficial, at the following stages of development; construction, completion (year 0 Winter) and longer term (year 15 Summer).
- 2.16 The first stage in the assessment is to identify approximate visibility/ visibility mapping. This is done by either a computerised Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)¹, or by manual methods using map study and field evaluation. A series of viewpoints are included within the assessment that are representative of views towards the site from surrounding visual receptors. Other views of the site are included where it supports the description and understanding of the site's landscape and visual characteristics.
- 2.17 The views also typically represent what can be seen from a variety of distances from the development and different viewing experiences.
- 2.18 It is important to remember that visual receptors are all people. For each affected viewpoint, the assessment considers both the susceptibility to change in views and the value attached to views.

"The visual receptors most susceptible to change are generally likely to include:

- *Residents at home;*
 - *People, whether residents or visitors, who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the landscape and on particular views;*
 - *Visitors to heritage assets, or to other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;*
 - *Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area;*
- Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes tend to fall into an intermediate category of moderate susceptibility to change. Where travel involves recognised scenic routes awareness of views is likely to be particularly high."* (GLVIA3 paragraph 6.33.)

"Visual receptors likely to be less sensitive to change include:

- *People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape;*
- *People at their place of work whose attention may be focused on their work or activity, not on their surroundings, and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life (although there may on occasion be cases where views are an important contributor to the setting and to the quality of working life)." (GLVIA3 paragraph 6.34.)*

- 2.19 Each of the visual effects is evaluated in terms of its size or scale, the geographical extent of the area influenced and its duration or reversibility.
- 2.20 In terms of size or scale, the magnitude of visual effects takes account of:

¹ Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV): A map usually digitally produced, showing areas of land within which a development is theoretically visible. [GLVIA3]

- “The scale of the change in the view with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition, including proportion of the view occupied by the proposed development;
- The degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape with the existing or remaining landscape elements and characteristics in terms of form, scale and mass, line height, colour and texture;
- The nature of the view of the proposed development, in terms of the relative amount of time over which it will be experienced and whether views will be full, partial or glimpses” (GLVIA3 paragraph 6.39).

2.21 The geographical extent of the visual effect in each viewpoint is likely to reflect:

- The angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor;
- The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development;
- The extent of the area over which the changes would be visible.

2.22 As with landscape effects, the duration of the effect could be short to long term or permanent and the same definitions apply.

2.23 GLVIA3 states that there are no hard and fast rules about what makes a significant effect, and there cannot be a standard approach since circumstances vary with the location and context and with the type of proposal, but the following points should be noted;

- *Effects on people who are particularly sensitive to changes in views and visual amenity are more likely to be significant*
- *Effects on people at recognised and important viewpoints or from recognised scenic routes are more likely to be significant*
- *Large-scale changes which introduce new, non-characteristic or discordant or intrusive elements into the view are more likely to be significant than small changes or changes involving features already present within the view. (GLVIA3 paragraph 6.44)*

2.24 The criteria used in this appraisal are set out in Appendix A.

Overall Landscape and Visual Effects

2.25 The final conclusions on effects, whether adverse or beneficial, are drawn from the separate judgements on the sensitivity of the receptors and the magnitude of the effects. This overall judgement is formed from a reasoned professional overview of the individual judgements against the assessment criteria.

2.26 GLVIA3 notes, at paragraphs 5.56 and 6.44, that there are no hard and fast rules with regard to the level of effects, therefore the following terms have been used for this appraisal:

- **Major**
- **Moderate**
- **Minor**
- **Negligible**

- 2.27 Where it is determined that the assessment falls between or encompasses two of the defined criteria terms, then the judgement may be described as, for example, Major/ Moderate or Moderate/ Minor. This indicates that the effect is assessed to lie between the respective definitions or to encompass aspects of both.

3.0 PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, July 2021)

- 3.1 The NPPF sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policy and in combination these policies give the Government's vision of sustainable development. The NPPF emphasises the need for well-designed places, promoting healthy and safe communities and conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 3.2 Regarding landscape and green infrastructure, the Natural Environment section of the NPPF provides a policy context for the countryside and green infrastructure. The key objectives include protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and, minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.
- 3.3 Paragraph 174 states at part a) that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance valued landscapes and goes on to clarify that this should be in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan. Part b) states that planning policies and decisions should recognise *"the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside"*.
- 3.4 Paragraph 175 advises that:

"Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries".
- 3.5 Paragraph 176 goes on to add:

"Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues". And

"The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas."
- 3.6 The site is located within the Staffordshire Moorlands green belt, although this is a planning policy consideration and not a designation for landscape value. The character of the site and its immediate context is assessed within this report to help inform decisions regarding *"the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside"*. The potential to enhance green infrastructure networks is also considered.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- 3.7 The PPG was first published on 6th March 2014 and is a regularly updated online planning resource which provides guidance on the NPPF and the planning system. The NPPF continues to be the primary document for decision making.

Local Planning Policy

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) 2014-2033

- 3.8 The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was adopted on 9th September 2020 and provides a framework for development within the district between 2014-2033. It supersedes the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2014) and the previous Local Plan. The following policies are of relevance to landscape and visual matters and the proposed development:

Policy SS10: Other Rural Areas Strategy

- 3.9 The policy includes:

“The other rural areas comprise the countryside and the green belt outside of the development boundaries of the towns and larger villages and the open countryside surrounding the smaller villages. These areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. The Council and its partners will achieve this through the following actions:

...3. Enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by:

- *Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape;*

...

- *Ensuring renewable energy schemes are of an appropriate scale, type and location...”*

Policy DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting

- 3.10 The policy 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 lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement or important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence;*
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 evidence;*
3. *Supporting developments which conserve or enhance the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape, such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, walls, watercourses or ponds;*
4. *Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape;*
5. *Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.”*

Policy NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

3.11 The policy includes:

“The Council will protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, in particular, ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows from loss or deterioration.

This will be achieved by:

- *Requiring that existing woodlands, healthy trees and hedgerows are retained and integrated within a proposed development unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh their loss;*
- *Requiring new developments to provide tree cover that secures a good level of sustainability through tree retention, planting and soft landscaping, including where possible the on site replacement of any trees that are removed with sufficient tree planting to replace or increase the canopy cover on-site as appropriate. Landscaping schemes will also be required to mitigate against negative landscape impact and complement the design of new development and make provision for future maintenance. Where it is not possible to secure this new or replacement tree planting within the site, the Council will work with applicants to ascertain if a suitable site(s) can be found off-site for replacement planting in the locality...”*

Other Relevant Strategies, Guidelines or DocumentsStaffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD (2018)

3.12 The Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD identifies the overarching principles for securing good design.

3.13 With regard to ‘Landscape and Settlements’ the document states:

“... in order to protect, and where possible enhance, the landscape character, development should assimilate into the landscape and avoid adverse impact on landscape quality.” (para 2.4).

3.14 And in terms of ‘Soft Landscaping and Wildlife’ the document states:

“...Where possible, opportunities for enhancement must be considered, for example the provision of roosting/nesting spaces for bats/birds, use of sustainable drainage systems or landscaping to create new habitat or managing an area for wildlife purposes.” (para 4.25).

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD (2014)

3.15 This document aims to provide a comprehensive framework for future development in the Churnet Valley. The masterplan covers a vast area of land, which extends from the east of Rownall Road and spreads east towards Ashbourne, towards Rushton Spencer in the north and encompasses Alton to the south. The site is located outside of the boundary for this masterplan.

4.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS

Landscape Character

National Character

- 4.1 National Character Area (NCA) profiles have been prepared by Natural England for the 159 NCAs defined across England. These NCA profiles include a description of the natural and cultural features that shape the landscape, how the landscape has changed over time, the current key drivers for ongoing change, and a broad analysis of each area's characteristics. Figure 3 illustrates the NCAs and other defined character areas within the context of the site.
- 4.2 At this very broad landscape scale, the site lies within Natural England's National Character Area (NCA) 64: 'Potteries and Churnet Valley'. This NCA encompasses the city of Stoke on Trent and extends north past Biddulph and east to the outskirts of Ashbourne therefore covers a very extensive landscape area. The Key Characteristics for the NCA which relate to the site and its surrounding context include:
- *"...Agriculture is predominantly permanent pasture for grazing and stock rearing with some dairying; flatter areas are used for silage production and some arable cropping in the south, mainly cereals..."*
 - *"There is a contrast between the settlement pattern of valley-bottom villages with scattered farmsteads and hamlets on the valley slopes in the east and the sprawling conurbation of the Potteries in the west."*
 - *"Major transport infrastructure includes several A roads (A34, A50 and A52) and the Stoke-on-Trent to London railway. The Caldon Canal and Trent and Mersey Canal link the conurbation with the Churnet Valley."*
- 4.3 Statements of Environmental Opportunity for the NCA which relate to the site and development proposals include:
- "SEO 1: 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; and enhancing the recreational and experiential qualities of the NCA."*
- For example by:*
- ...Creating new areas of native woodland, where it will not compromise other habitats, by natural regeneration or through planting, expanding and linking the existing woodland, ensuring populations of key species to optimise species composition and woodland structure."*
- "SEO 3: Manage and expand areas of characteristic unimproved grassland pastures in the Churnet Valley and heathland and moorland of the Staffordshire Moorlands, reducing habitat fragmentation and restoring traditional boundary features to benefit landscape character, sense of place, biodiversity and resource protection while enhancing the recreational and experiential qualities of the NCA."*
- For example by:*
- ...Encouraging the restoration of hedgerows in valleys and on lower-lying land with typical species, by gapping up and planting accompanying hedgerow trees..."*

Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

- 4.4 At the district level, the Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment subdivides the landscape into 10 areas of similar character, called Landscape Character Types (LCTS).
- 4.5 The site is located within the 'Ancient Plateau Farmlands' LCT, a single parcel of land which: *"lies on the western edge of the district north of Werrington and contains an extensive area of lowland heath."*
- 4.6 Key Characteristics for 'Ancient Plateau Farmlands include:
- *"Gentle undulating landform with some steep slopes,*
 - *Heathland including wet heath with rushes and rough grasses,*
 - *Drystone walls with remains of unmanaged hedgerows and isolated trees,*
 - *Fields often demarcated by fencing,*
 - *Dairy farming and horse grazing,*
 - *Small woodlands, broadleaf and conifer,*
 - *Isolated stone farm houses and buildings converted to residential dwellings,*
 - *Electricity power lines and substation."*
- 4.7 The description of the LCT which relates to the site and surrounding context includes the following:
- "Vegetation*
- Blocks of broadleaf and conifer plantations are mainly associated with buildings and to screen sub station, with belts of trees found along stream lines. Woodlands are dominated by birch reflecting the heathland character of the area. There are some hedgerows but they are generally in poor condition... Some birch and oak are present mainly along field boundaries.*
- Land use*
- Dairy farm and stock rearing are the main uses of the land...Power lines and electricity substation are dominant incongruous features within the landscape.*
- Enclosure*
- Hedges used as field boundaries are poorly maintained with gaps that have been replaced with post and barbed wire fence that is also in poor condition. Subdivision of fields for horse grazing has lead to damage to hedgerows and to trees. Where hedgerows have not been replaced field boundaries are often marked by isolated trees and remnant holly and thorn along wire fences...*
- Transport and Access*
- The area contains a network of minor roads whilst the A52 runs along the south of the area.*
- Incongruous landscape features*
- ... Replacement of hedges by a variety of fence materials. Evidence of over grazing. Power lines and electricity substation are dominant incongruous features within the landscape."*
- 4.8 Key Planning and Management Issues within the LCT which relate to the site and surrounding context include:

- *“Impact of the urban fringe and the spread and increase of incongruous features*
- *Development pressure...*
- *Deteriorating hedgerows*
- *Fencing including replacement of field boundaries*
- *Powerlines and electricity substation...*
- *Loss of some semi-natural vegetation and the poor condition of those that remain”*

- 4.9 The following ‘Capabilities and sensitivities of the landscape to accommodate change’ are relevant to the site and its landscape context:

“Planning for Landscape Change Supplementary Planning Guidance to Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan, identifies this landscape character area as a landscape in decline that requires restoration.

Urban fringe pressures have had a particularly adverse impact on the landscape quality of this area due to the proliferation of incongruous features and the deteriorating condition of existing landscape features.”

- 4.10 The following ‘Landscape Planning Guidelines’ are relevant to the site and proposed development:

- *“...Field boundaries should be retained, maintained and, in places, replaced to maintain the scale of the landscape. Stone walls or native hedgerows should be used as a means of enclosure dependent upon local character. Replacement of hedges and drystone walls by fencing should be discouraged...*
- *This landscape requires a new vegetational structure comprising of heathlands, hedgerows, trees and woodlands to be created...*
- *The new vegetational structure should link to existing remnant vegetation. It should create a mosaic of spaces, some open some wooded and of small to medium scale. Broadleaf and conifer species can be accommodated. Reference should be made to the historic field pattern which should influence the re-emergent landscape pattern.*
- *Planting should be used to screen the conurbation edge and other intrusive and incongruous urban features.*
- *Where new development is proposed, the edge of the development... should contain appropriate tree and shrub planting to reduce the visual impact of the development and to enable it to be more readily assimilated into the landscape...*
- *The loss of semi-natural vegetation should be checked and remaining habitats should be protected, managed and where possible extended to create sustainable communities.”*

- 4.11 The following ‘Land Management Guidelines’ are relevant to the proposed development:

“Ancient/semi-natural broad leaved woodland

... new woodlands should be recreated or regenerated

Hedgerows

It is highly important that ancient and diverse hedgerows, particularly the hedgerow trees along them, are maintained and managed. Where hedgerows are planted or restored it is important that