

SMDC Planning Reference –	SMD/2022/0047		
Site Name –	Cellarhead Bess Battery Park		
Summary of proposals -	Electricity Storage Facility		
Consultation Note Subject –	Landscape and Visual Matters		
Planning Case Officer –	Jane Curley		
Landscape Comments Prepared By –	Stuart Ryder of Ryder Landscape Consultants		
Date of site visit —	18/5/22	Date of response	7/6/22
Recommendation –	Refusal – Net landscape and visual harm occurs / Landscape character is neither conserved or enhanced / Access modifications suggested / Mitigation measures will address some but not all landscape and visual change / some landscape positives such as wildflower meadow creation		

Dear Jane

Battery Storage Facility, Adjacent to Cellarhead Sub-Station, Cheddleton – Landscape and Visual Consultation

Thank you for appointing us to review the landscape and visual aspects of the submitted planning application and I pass a series of comments under the following headings;

1. Methodology
2. Site and surrounding's landscape character
3. Proposals for the site
4. Landscape effects
5. Visual effects from surrounding areas
6. Compound effects
7. Potential design considerations
8. Landscape Policy Compliance
9. Suggested Planning Conditions

1. Methodology

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) appointed Ryder Landscape Consultants to consider the submitted scheme and supporting documents in May 2022. Stuart Ryder an experienced Chartered Landscape Architect attended site on 18 May 2022, walked nearby public footpaths and highway corridors and took site photography.

The site visit was unaccompanied but I had the following plans and report to inform me about the proposals;

- Sirius Planning – Site Location Plan SRE1138/03/01 Rev 1 dated 2/2/22
- Sirius Planning – Indicative Site Layout SRE1138/03/ Rev 1 – revision is undated
- Sirius Planning – Aerial Overview SRE1138/03/05 Rev 1 dated 10/2/22
- FPCR – Landscape Mitigation 10541-L-01 A dated 21/1/22
- FPCR - Extracts and figures from Landscape and Visual Appraisal.

2. Site and surrounding's landscape character

The main site is effectively two regularly shaped green fields put to improved grass set to the east side of Cellarhead Sub-station facility. Access is proposed from the south via a third pasture field with road access for construction and operation presumed via the existing access road to Cellarhead. The status of

the access to Cellarhead is presumed as a private road but Footpath CH60 does run along it allowing public access on foot at least.

The main site already contains elements of electricity transmission infrastructure associated with Cellarhead and a barn and standing to the north east corner of the northern field. In fact sub station and electricity power lines are cited as landscape characteristics in the Staffordshire Moorlands commissioned Wardell Armstrong 2008 Landscape Character and Settlement Assessment where the site is located in a landscape type called Ancient Plateau Farmlands.

Typical boundary to the fields are native hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees, this is also the case for the intervening hedge that separates the two fields. The hedgerow trees to the north are large horse chestnuts which is a little unusual as a hedgerow species. The internal hedge and tree group between the two fields would be retained by the proposals.

The proposed Site access enters the south east corner of the main site after running in a straight fashion across the western end of a larger rectangular field. This rectangular field would then be reformed into two parts – a larger eastern part that would presumably be retained as improved pasture and a smaller eastern part that would become wildflower meadow along with its neighbouring western field.

There are a number of public footpaths near to an adjacent to Site. These include CH60 along the southern access road to Cellarhead, CH47 that runs to the west of the proposals on land between the existing sub-station and the main site and CH53 to the north of the northern field. The Wardell Armstrong 2008 Landscape Character and Settlement Assessment study shows no landscape constraints on the Site or its contextual area. The Site lies outside of the Churnet Valley Boundary that was assessed in the Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment, 2011.

In landscape character terms there is both connectivity with and influences of the pastoral landscape to the north, east and south but also influence of the Cellarhead sub-station to the west albeit that it is relatively well screened. I would not class the Site as a 'valued landscape' as per NPPF Para 174 a).

The wider landscape context is as a pastoral landscape that is ordinary in appearance and conforms to the broader landscape character description of the Ancient Plateau Farmland but is not free from obtrusive or incongruous development with the existing power infrastructure.

3. Proposals for the Site

The proposals consist of five lines of battery containers running broadly north to south and at different lengths to reflect site dimensions. The lines are broken to allow retention of the central field hedge and stand of trees. Each battery container is served by an inverter / transformer again adding further rows of equipment to the site layout. A small switchgear cabin is set to the north east corner and four containers to south east end of the main site.

The remaining open space would be put to gravel, presumably to minimise maintenance and still provide ready access to the kit on site.

Two fields to the south of the site that would be evident from CH60 and CH47 would have their topsoil inverted by deep ploughing and be sown to wildflower meadow. A native tree and scrub belt approximately 15m wide is proposed to the eastern boundary that faces Rownall Road. There are also a smaller number of similar native tree species set around the other boundaries of the site filling hedge gaps and providing additional hedgerow trees.

A 4m high acoustic barrier is set to the west side of the eastern tree belt to reduce the aural effects of the transformers. A barrier this high will also have visual effects until screened by the adjacent mitigation planting particularly when approaching on Footpath CH53 from the east.

A specific comment is made about the proposed straight access drive that takes advantage of a gap in the tree line off the Cellarhead access road and has swales set either side of it. Such a straight route would be seen as truncating the remaining field that it runs through and it would appear better curved towards the western hedge that it effectively parallels. This would still allow existing trees to be retained.

4. Landscape effects

The proposals will effectively turn this green field site into an industrial area. For the site itself this change can only be classified as a **Major, Adverse and Permanent** effect that is an inevitability of development. This is mitigated slightly by the retention of the intervening hedgerow and tree group but the overall character of the main site will appear as a large power infrastructure site. This landscape effect will be compounded by the adjacent presence of the Cellarhead sub-station.

The proposals are not considered in keeping with the wider pastoral landscape character of the Ancient Plateau Farmland even though there is the adjacent Cellarhead facility.

The ability to create a strong eastern planting buffer is acknowledged and ultimately the woodland planting belt will likely screen views to the battery containers in an estimated 6 to 8 years. The initial change to the adjacent landscape is considered to be;

- North – Moderate Adverse and likely remaining at Moderate Adverse
- East - Moderate Adverse, reducing to Minor Adverse
- South – Moderate Adverse, remaining at Moderate Adverse
- West – Minor Adverse and remaining at Minor Adverse.

Effects on the landscape character of the contextual area can be amalgamated as **Moderate / Minor, Adverse and Permanent**.

There is one set of works that would lead to a **Moderate, Beneficial and Permanent** effect in landscape character terms and that is the planting of the two southern fields as a hay meadow. This benefit is to the character of the fields themselves but character wise they will still have the adverse effect of the battery facility to their north. The hay meadow will never be able to screen out sight to the main site but tree planting within the southern field is stymied in part by the transmission lines that cross it. Its long term management as a hay meadow would need to be secured through a Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan.

5. Visual effects from surrounding rural areas

The main site is effectively visible from public footpaths set to the north (CH53), east (CH53), south (CH60) and west (CH47).

Typically sensitivity of rural path users to an industrial development is considered to be High but with the presence of the existing Cellarhead sub-station they are already familiar with similar equipment and their resulting sensitivity is lower. The one exception to this is users of Footpath CH53 to the east where due to path side planting there is a limited appreciation of Cellarhead at this time.

The greatest appreciation of the development will be from the south and west, the southern fall of land, the arrangement of lines and limited screening to the southern boundary will make more of the site's equipment visible when compared to the north and east.

As stated above the eastern woodland belt and planting to the west of the existing barn complex will take an estimated 6 to 8 years to start to be effective at screening out sight to the equipment in views from CH53 as people walk it in a westerly direction towards the Site. These same blocks of planting will also screen sight to the lower portion of existing pylons but their upper parts will still be visible above the tree line.

There appear to be no views to this location from public roads such as Thorneyedge Road to the west and Rownall Road to the east when driving in a typical vehicle. However a pedestrian would be able to gain a longer range sight to the acoustic wall from Rownall Road if they stop to look through a gap in the road side hedge. This would appear incongruous and too regular in height and material until the mitigation planting establishes.

It is uncertain whether the open ground of the main site is evident from residential locations to the east such as Home Farm and Dove Cottage, but if it is then it would be from the upper west facing rooms that look out to the existing pylons.

The visual effects from each direction have been assessed as;

- North – CH53 walking in both directions – Major / Moderate, Adverse at first reducing to Moderate, Adverse and Permanent.
- East – CH53 walking in a westerly direction – Moderate, Adverse reducing to Minor / Negligible, Adverse and Permanent.
- South – CH60 in both directions and CH47 walking north – Major/ Moderate, Adverse reducing to Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- West – CH47 in both directions – Moderate / Minor, Adverse reducing to Minor, Adverse and Permanent.

Visual effect has been assessed as **Major / Moderate, Adverse and Temporary** in the first instance until the mitigation planting has established when it will decrease to **Moderate / Minor, Adverse and Permanent**.

Neither the power equipment, nor the mitigation planting will screen longer range attractive views to the wider landscape from any of the public footpaths.

In summary given the number of footpaths near to the main site and their proximity to it there will never be total screening of the proposals. Rather there will be an ability to see and perceive the presence of an extensive facility set in the proximity of the existing Cellarhead sub-station.

6. Compound effects

There are two sets of compound effects to be considered. The first with the existing Cellarhead sub-station, the second with the potential similar development across fields to the north east of this proposal.

This proposal will appear and be judged as extending Cellarhead sub-station. This is due to it being experienced in proximity to Cellarhead and because it already has existing pylons within the main site fields. The balance at the moment is that pylons exist in a rural field but should development be allowed then the sense of rurality would be removed and it would be perceptually linked with Cellarhead even with existing and proposed vegetation physically separating the two sites.

Should the similar power storage facility being considered under SMD/2021/0695 be consented and built out this site would become the middle block of three and the easterly spread of power infrastructure would be greater and more readily perceived from Rownall Road until mitigation planting

is established. It would also create a larger power park to be experienced at close range from Footpath CH53 that would run past both battery facilities and then past Cellarhead itself on CH47.

7. Potential design amendments

The following summary of potential design amendments are given as a way of improving the landscape and visual aspect of the proposals.

- Curving the access road to the west towards the existing hedgerow to reduce its industrial appearance;
- Considering breaking up the top line and varying the colour of noise barrier to make it appear less uniform until the mitigation planting establishes; and
- Further screening to the southern boundary to add a more definitive vegetation line to reduce visibility from CH60.

8. Landscape Policy Compliance

The SMDC landscape planning policies that need to be considered are;

SS11 – Churnet Valley Strategy – should SS11 be considered applicable as Site is just outwith of Churnet Valley Area

A multi-layered policy that places significant weight on the conservation and ideally improvement to landscape character. The telling part of the policy wording is the third bullet point. The proposal does not protect or enhance landscape character of the valley. However the landscape character of this Site and immediate context is degraded by the presence of Cellarhead sub-station facility. With the power infrastructure already on Site the field partly appears as part of the Cellarhead complex.

It is considered that there is currently conflict with this policy if it is deemed applicable.

DC3 – Landscape and Settlement Setting

This is the main landscape focussed policy of the Local Plan that seeks to protect and where possible enhance local landscape. The five parts to its policy box are set below and considered in turn;

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.

There would be intrusion arising from the new facility but it is not considered prominent. This is due to the existing pylons influencing its landscape character so the facility does not appear as incongruous and is a relatively discrete location within the local landscape.

No substantive conflict with Part 1 of the policy has been found.

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.

The fields do not form the context to any residential properties or settlement so that part of the policy is not applicable. The proposals cannot be classed as leading to a net improvement in local landscape character so cannot be considered as complying.

The proposals are in conflict with Part 2 of the policy.

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.

The proposed meadow seeding, hedgerow planting and woodland belt creation on and off site would all comply with this part of the policy. Its long-term establishment and ecological contribution will need to be delivered through an appropriate landscape management and maintenance plan.

Compliance with Part 3.

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

The sustainable building techniques could be applied to the demountability of the scheme and ease of removal should the proposals become defunct or superfluous to the power grid. Swales along the access track and surface water pond are SuDS features. The materials and building form are clearly not sympathetic to the landscape when compared to traditional materials used in the area.

Part-compliance with Part 4 even though this part of the policy does not appear to be strongly applicable to the proposals.

5. Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.

This part of the policy is not applicable to these proposals as the site is sufficiently remote from the PDNP.

Not applicable.

NE2 – Tree, Woodland and Hedgerows

This three-part policy is aimed to 'protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, in particular, ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows from loss or deterioration.'

The first part that seeks the integration of trees, woodlands and hedgerows on site unless their removal clearly outweighs their loss is complied with retention of the intervening hedgerow and trees. Other trees around the periphery of the site are retained.

Part 1 - Compliance.

The second part seeks new tree planting associated with development that this scheme demonstrates on and offsite. The proposed species, size at planting and planting densities appear appropriate.

Part 2 - Compliance.

The third and final part of the policy addresses the retention of ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species rich hedgerows. The hedgerow trees are the oldest stock around the Site and the hedgerows appear as old hedge lines.

Part 3 – Compliance.

9. Suggested planning conditions

There is clear landscape and visual harm to be put in the planning balance but should you be minded to grant planning consent and notwithstanding the already submitted landscape proposals the following planning conditions are suggested;

- A. That a detailed hard and soft landscape mitigation scheme is submitted for consideration.
Reason – to ensure that the proposals maintain the boundary character and respect the neighbouring landscape.
- B. The soft landscape proposals should be implemented in the first growing season after construction has commenced and replacement of dead, diseased or dying stock should be undertaken in accordance with a Landscape Maintenance and Management Plan. *Reason – to ensure the quality of the landscape mitigation measures.*
- C. That no tree felling is undertaken on site without the express written agreement of SMDC's Arboricultural Officer and after consideration of tree sensitive construction processes – *Reason to protect the remaining mature tree stock that contributes to the local landscape.*
- D. That a Landscape Maintenance and Management Plan (LMMP) is prepared for implementation by the site owners for the full operational life of the facility and that an arrangement for continuation of the LMMP by future owners is entered into – *Reason – to reflect the importance of the soft landscape mitigation proposals for the local landscape character.*
- E. That a specific colour reference is included in the battery containers' external materials finishes condition to demonstrate that muted and reflection free colours are to be used. – *Reason – to limit the notability of the built form until the landscape mitigation proposals have established.*
- F. Low light level scheme – *Reason – to reduce the intrusive nature of lighting in the hours of darkness.*
- G. That details of the acoustic barrier including elevation treatment is submitted for agreement with SMDC– *Reason to protect local landscape character until mitigation planting has established.*
- H. That a schedule of works activities in the form of a site restoration plan is produced to explain the removal of equipment and full restoration of the main site back to a pasture field is submitted for agreement with SMDC prior to the Site becoming operational – *Reason to protect local landscape character and rural amenity on the cessation of use as a power storage park.*

I recognise that the suggested conditions could possibly be combined with others and may require re-wording to be enforceable but wished to explain the importance of them.

I trust you find these notes useful as you consider the determination of this application and I can forward photography from my site visit for your report. Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Stuart Ryder

7/6/22