

SMDC Planning Reference –	SMD/2021/0695		
Site Name –	Rownall Road 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 / Mitigation measures will address some but not all landscape and visual change / some landscape positives such as woodland belt planting		

Dear Jane

Battery Storage Facility, off Rownall Road, 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;

- Stephenson Halliday – Localised Site Context Figure 5 Rev A dated Oct 2021
- Avon Utilities and Generation –Site Layout 00 Cellarhead 104/ Rev J – 27/9/21
- Stephenson Halliday – Localised Site Context Figure 6 dated Oct 2021
- Stephenson Halliday - Extracts and figures from Landscape and Visual Appraisal.
- Photomontage representations.

2. Site and surrounding's landscape character

The site is comprised of three pasture fields put to improved grass set to the west side of Rownall Road. Access is proposed from the south via a third pasture field with road access for construction. There are two larger regular shaped fields to the north and smaller, elongated triangular field to the south.

Access to the site would be taken directly from Rownall Road with a track proposed near to the north boundary of the fields running parallel to the northern hedgerow and tree line.

The Staffordshire Moorlands commissioned Wardell Armstrong 2008 Landscape Character and Settlement Assessment confirms the site is located in a landscape type called Ancient Plateau Farmlands.

Typical boundaries to the fields are native hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees reinforced in places by timber post and agricultural mesh fences. There is also a part tree avenue planting along Footpath 53 that runs to the south side of the site. The tree avenue is comprised of both poplars and horse chestnuts.

There are a number of public footpaths near to and adjacent to Site. These include CH53 along the southern side of the Site and part of its western boundary where it dog legs past an existing barn. Footpaths 42 and 43 head to the east down into the Churnet Valley

The Wardell Armstrong 2008 Landscape Character and Settlement Assessment study shows no landscape constraints on the Site or its contextual area. The Site lies just outside of the Churnet Valley Boundary that was assessed in the Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment, 2011 whose boundary appears to run along Rownall Road at this location.

In landscape character terms there is both connectivity with and influences of the open pastoral landscape to the north, east and south but also marginal influence of the Cellarhead sub-station to the west with the sub-station largely separated by its eastern boundary planting. The existing pylons set to the west of the site also indicate the use of the wider area for power transmission. The overall landscape character is however rural pastoral fields. There are no structures on Site but a barn complex is set just beyond the south west corner emphasising its rural appearance. Again to the south west of the Site is a small agricultural reservoir.

I would not class the Site as a 'valued landscape' as per NPPF Para 174 a).

The wider landscape context is again a pastoral landscape that is reasonably attractive in appearance and conforms to the broader landscape character description of the Ancient Plateau Farmland. With the general lie of the land falling east towards the Churnet Valley this Site appears to be set at the top of the valley.

A clutch of residential properties set off Rownall Road to the east of the Site include Dove Cottage, The Stables, Rownall Hall Farm and Rownall Hall. These properties are largely set behind impressive old red sandstone walls that mark this part of the district.

3. Proposals for the Site

Although there are three fields included in the redline planning application it is only one that will receive the installation of power storage equipment, the other two play a part in the mitigation of the proposals.

The installation field is the furthest west from Rownall Road. The proposals consist of three double lines of battery cabinets running broadly north to south with associated switchgear set 3m apart with concrete firewalls between each set. The main three rows are surrounded by a rectangular access route. To the west of the main three double rows are two short double rows set at 90° to the main rows. To the north west corner of the main site is the proposed sub-station area.

Surrounding all the storage and sub-station equipment is a 4m high acoustic fence that will effectively turn the storage unit into a compound and prevent sight into the area. Presumably, the acoustic fence acts as the primary security barrier for the site as well.

The surfacing of the main installation field is not defined on the drawings but is presumably unbound gravel to minimise landscape maintenance and reduce fire risk from long, dry grass.

The proposals for the other two fields largely comprise native woodland and hedgerow planting but the easterly larger field has the access route running through it along its northern side. The southern, elongated triangle field would cease to be a grazing field with woodland planting indicated across its whole extents. The larger, rectangular eastern field would appear to remain as pasture albeit with reinforced hedgerows and a further buffer planting to its western side.

The 4m high acoustic barrier would effectively and immediately screen out sight to storage equipment it encloses from local paths and Rownall Road but in itself is an intrusive feature which requires screening or amelioration. This appears to be the main objective of the landscape proposals i.e. screen out the acoustic fence with shrub and tree planting set all the way around it.

The proposed planting is all native stock with a mix of tree and scrub species proposed to form the new woodland, hedgerows, hedgerow trees and buffer planting. There would be a net gain in woodland, hedgerow and scrub planting on the successful establishment of the planting proposals.

4. Landscape effects

The proposals will effectively turn the western green field site into an industrial compound. For this field itself this change can only be classified as a **Major, Adverse and Permanent** effect that is an inevitability of development. The proposals are not considered in keeping with the wider pastoral landscape character of the Ancient Plateau Farmland even though there is the Cellarhead facility nearby.

The ability to create a strong planting buffers is acknowledged and ultimately the woodland planting belt will likely screen views to the acoustic barrier wall in an estimated 6 to 8 years. The proposed planting belt to the south is considered narrow compared to others, particularly as it is positioned adjacent to CH53 which is a primary, public viewing spot of the proposals.

The initial change to the adjacent landscape is considered to be;

- North – Major / Moderate Adverse reducing to Moderate Adverse
- East - Moderate Adverse, reducing to Minor Adverse
- South – Major / Moderate Adverse, reducing to Moderate / Minor Adverse
- West – Major / Moderate Adverse and reducing to Minor Adverse.

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

The woodland planting in the southern elongated triangular field is acknowledged as a landscape benefit and its long term management as a diverse broadleaf woodland 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 CH53 set to the south and west of the site and from Rownall Road where existing hedge gaps exist or along the new access track. Of these it is walkers on CH53 that have the longer duration and closer view whilst vehicle users on Rownall Road have shorter kinetic views.

Footpaths CH42 and CH43 fall away to the east and the proposals would not becoming evident to walkers until they reach Rownall Road.

I cannot testify to visibility from the eastern residential properties but suspect it would be limited to upper west facing rooms given the quantity of planting in gardens and walled boundaries. People do not have a right to a view and residential amenity appears to be the driver to the proposal to set the development within a 4m high acoustic fence.

Typically, sensitivity of rural path users to an industrial development is considered to be High and this would be the case for users of CH57 as they walk west towards Cellarhead as they have not experienced any power kit yet within their view. Path user sensitivity is reduced if walking east bound as they would have passed by Cellarhead.

The enclosing acoustic fence would appear artificial in terms of material, scale, regularity and constant height compared to other built form in the contextual area. It would remain visible for a minimum of 6 to 8 years until the screen planting established and likely longer than that in parts with any failed stock or weaker growth. Visibility in winter months is also anticipated for longer until the density of growth is such that leaf cover is no longer necessary to form an effective screen.

One effect of such planting is to change the appreciation of an open landscape to the west and will effectively screen off visual links to the north for users of Footpath CH53. Likewise enclosing the compound with tree planting in the two other fields will visually separate the site and views across it to the east and the wider Churnet Valley. They will only be re-established when visual receptors reach Rownall Road.

The visual effects from each direction have been assessed as;

- North – CH19 walking in both directions – Moderate, Adverse at first reducing to Minor / Negligible, Adverse and Permanent.
- East – Rownall Road driving in both directions but more so when heading south – Moderate, Adverse reducing to Minor / Negligible, Adverse and Permanent.
- South – CH53 in both directions – Major/ Moderate, Adverse reducing to Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- West – CH53 walking eastbound – Moderate, 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 **Minor, Adverse and Permanent**.

In summary the initial effects of forming the acoustic wall will be highly notable until the mitigation planting establishes and even with this planting there will still be adverse effects with long views truncated by it.

6. Compound effects

There are two sets of compound effects to consider. The first with the existing Cellarhead sub-station, the second with the potential similar development across fields to the south west of these proposals.

This proposal will appear as separate from the main part of the Cellarhead sub-station but there is sufficient power infrastructure in the intervening field that the overall visual effect would be appear to be associated with it, particularly if equipment such as the sub-station, lighting or telemetry masts appear above the acoustic fence and associated planting. This is due to it being experienced in proximity to Cellarhead as people move through this landscape.

Should the similar power storage facility being considered under SMD/2022/0047 be consented and built out this site would become the eastern 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.

The other power park scheme also has an acoustic barrier facing east which could present a series of artificial straight lines set on a local ridge making them appear more prominent and being perceived with the pylons that stand higher than them.

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. Their adoption should be sought if you are minded to consent the proposals.

- Considering the use of nurse species of quicker growing stock in the woodland planting that can be later removed to establish planting screens quicker.
- Considering breaking up the top line and varying the colour of noise barrier to make it appear less uniform until the mitigation planting establishes;
- Considering why a regular, artificial shape is required for the acoustic barrier;
- Increasing the planting width of the southern barrier planting set adjacent to CH53 where it runs adjacent to the installation field,
- Retaining the tree avenue form along CH53 which will likely be lost with solid planting to its north; and
- Not a landscape comment but 90° corners such as those shown around the battery sets may be difficult to negotiate particularly by larger vehicles such as fire tenders or cranes required for maintenance or replacement of kit.

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. The Site is within the setting of the Churnet Valley and its presence would not improve the adjacent landscape character of the valley until mitigation planting establishes.

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 and it is considered prominent for a minimum period of 6 to 8 years and a reduced level until the mitigation planting screens the artificial form of the acoustic barrier.

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 existing fields do form the context to residential properties to the east but not their immediate setting so that part of the policy is only partly applicable. The proposals cannot be classed as leading to a net improvement in local landscape character so cannot be considered as complying.

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 field margin 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. The materials and building form, particularly of a typical acoustic fence, are clearly not sympathetic to the landscape when compared to traditional materials used in the area.

Conflict 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 by the retention of boundary hedgerow and trees other than any small break in the hedgerow off Rownall Road to form the site access.

Part 1 - Compliance.

The second part seeks new tree planting associated with development that this scheme demonstrates in all three fields that comprise the wider Site. 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, particularly the horse chestnuts to the western field boundary appear as the oldest stock around the Site and these are retained albeit their context will change from hedgerow standards to being backed by shrubs and other trees.

Confirmation of root protection areas and avoidance of excavations that could affect the tree roots is recommended if not already submitted.

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 , or excavation within root protection areas, 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. Low light level scheme – *Reason – to reduce the intrusive nature of lighting in the hours of darkness.*
- F. 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.*
- G. 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 that have been suggested and may require re-wording to be enforceable but wished to explain the reasoning behind them.

I trust you find these comments 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