

SMD Planning Reference	SMD/2022/0088		
Site Name	Advanced Proteins (AP), Cheddleton		
Summary of proposals	Major factory building and associated office suite		
Consultation Note Subject	Landscape and Visual Matters		
Planning Case Officer	Jane Curley		
Comments prepared by	Stuart Ryder of Ryder Landscape Consultants		
Date of site visit	18/5/22	Date of initial response	25/5/22
Date of this updated response	31/8/22		
Recommendation	Approve subject to landscape conditions		

Dear Jane

AP Protein Factory Extension Proposals, Cheddleton – Updated Landscape and Visual Consultation

Purpose of updated note

This note has been prepared after our recent discussion of the site section information, review of the existing tree stock on Site and Policy DC3 Part 1. It is prepared as a revision to the original note rather than a separate response. Updated parts to the response have been titled '**New content**' whilst typographical changes have been left unrecorded.

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 eight headings;

1. Methodology
2. Site and surrounding's landscape character
3. Proposals for the site
4. Landscape effects
5. Visual effects from surrounding rural areas
6. Potential design considerations
7. Landscape Policy Compliance
8. 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 some of which is presented in Figure 1 to support this note.

The site visit was largely unaccompanied other than the AP Plant Manager escorting me to the Site but I had the following plans and report to inform me about the proposals;

- EAME – Figure A2 Site Layout dated 17/4/21
- Elevations of the proposed facilities
- Planting Plan – 478_PP_01 dated 2/12/21
- Offsite Woodland Planting Plan – 478_PP_02 dated 27/1/22
- Extracts and figures from Sightline Landscape's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

New Content – This update has also been informed by considering the Site Sections on Drawing CT-204-PP-3-01 which show the relationship of the proposed buildings with the existing building stock.;

2. Site and surrounding's landscape character

The site is effectively a rectangular green field put to improved grass to the south side of the existing factory facility. It slopes gently from north to south and is bounded on its four sides by a mix of mature and semi-mature planting.

Of this surrounding planting the following observations were made;

- The north planting set on a raised earth bank is a mix of semi-mature tree stock that appears to have been planted as part of a screen for the existing factory, the north end of this planting block would be removed to allow construction of the office building and service yard.
- To the east is mature woodland that helps to screen further factory facilities, this woodland would not be physically affected by the proposals;
- To the south is an outgrown hedgerow, combined with a stone wall which has two significant breaks in it that allow sight out to the rural landscape to the south; and finally
- To the west lie mature oak that appear to have been part of a previous hedgeline or parkland planting combined with the larger Fox Wood.

Internally to the Site there is no tree or scrub planting which suggests its former use as a pasture field and subsequent management for silage / hay crops. There is no evidence of any historic farm systems such as ridge and furrow lines or obvious older earthworks. The ground surface of the field is somewhat rutted but this is most likely associated with ground investigation of the site.

The site's strongest landscape feature is the bank of trees to the north that perform the task of largely screening the remainder of the factory estate to the north. This does not mean that the existing factory is not discernible from the site with stainless steel ductwork visible at its eastern corner and the factory's stacks elevated above the tree line. **New content** – It is a triangular shaped area of trees which leads on from the tree line that would have to be removed to construct the office block and associated car park to the west end of the Site.

There are no public footpaths on or immediately adjacent to Site. The Wardell Armstrong 2008 Landscape Character and Settlement Assessment study shows no landscape constraints on the Site or in its contextual area. Its character is also assessed in the Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment, 2011.

There is a relatively new building set to the immediate west side that was constructed to be an office for previous owners of the factory. This use fell away and it is now let as residential properties. In landscape character terms there is both connectivity with and influences of the pastoral landscape to the south and the factory buildings to the north. I would not class the Site as a 'valued landscape' as per NPPF Para 174 a).

The wider landscape context is as a well wooded pastoral landscape that is attractive in appearance and conforms to the broader landscape character description of Landscape Character Type 4 – Settled plateau farmlands and is free from any obtrusive or incongruous development. **New content** – LCT4 is not subdivided into smaller Landscape Character Areas (LCA's) but rather described in its entirety as LCA 4a – Consall. The existing plant is recognised in this character description and described as an animal waste incinerator.

3. Proposals for the Site

The proposals consist of two main buildings – the offices and the factory building with the latter much larger by several factors. The buildings are set within a mix of hard standing to allow the factory building to function and a framework of new and existing soft landscape treatments. Within the landscape are set ancillary facilities to the main factory building including tanks, biofilter unit and an attenuation pond.

The building of the office block requires the felling of a triangular group of trees to the north end of the existing northern tree bank, the ancillary tanks require clearance of trees at the southern end of the same line.

The office block set in its position at the north end of the Site relates to the front of house of the factory and would help to restrict views to the factory building behind. The office block is set within a proposed pond margin meadow which although will have some bio-diversity benefit may not look as appropriate as more formal landscape treatment at the main entrance to the factory.

New content - Site sections on CT-204-PP-3-01 show the height of the larger building at 21.5m above surrounding ground level with it extending above the existing factory unit's ridge level. The stacks of the existing factory would appear above the new unit and will remain the tallest element of the overall factory. The initial consultation response took the proposed building as sitting under the level of the existing factory which will make it more prominent in the views back to the facility.

A mix of other meadow treatments are suggested as the predominant ground cover around the main site field. The main tree and scrub planting is concentrated to the more open southern side of the site field to create a green screen between the main factory unit and the open rural landscape to the south.

The planting proposals comprise a mix of native trees and hedging species and the suggested planting sizes and densities appear appropriate.

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 naturalistic treatment of most soft landscape areas within the Site but this will deliver greater bio-diversity benefits than wider positive landscape effects. However the site itself will still in landscape character terms appear as a large factory building set within a wider industrial complex. The proposals are considered in keeping with the adjacent factory unit but in contrast to the adjacent rural pasture fields which is why the proposals are seeking to create the southern tree screen.

The ability to create a strong southern planting buffer is acknowledged and ultimately the woodland planting belt will do this and the site will effectively be isolated from the rural landscape to the south. It is anticipated that it will take at least 15 years to achieve this separation. During this 'growing-time' the main factory building would be visible from the south as discussed in the next section on visual effects. The field to the south will effectively become an industrial fringe to the new factory unit but it would not appear as part of a continuous urban fringe as there is no sight to other parts of Cheddleton or Wetley Rocks. This change in the landscape character of the southern field is assessed as **Moderate, Adverse and Temporary** and would diminish with the growth of the southern tree belt to a point where it is **Negligible, Adverse and Permanent**.

Effects on the landscape character of the contextual area to the north, east and west are limited by the presence of the existing factory to the north and woodlands to the east and west. These effects are assessed as **Minor, Adverse and Permanent**.

The landscape effect, perhaps of greater concern, arises from the felling of either end of the banked tree screen to the site's northern boundary. By removing this planting it will open up increased sight to the existing factory beyond that which is currently screened. This point is discussed more under visual effects in Section 5 below. The continuous banked tree belt if left whole will continue to sub-divide the wider factory complex and assist in screening the existing plant and help to reduce the scale of the overall factory in the landscape. The removal of the triangular shaped tree belt potentially appears avoidable and this could be discussed with the Applicant.

There is one set of works that would lead to a **Moderate, Beneficial and Permanent** landscape effect and that is the planting of 0.6 Ha of offsite woodland (presuming it is an appropriate native woodland). Such woodlands are characteristic of the local landscape character, provide visual interest and will connect well with existing woods.

5. Visual effects from surrounding rural areas

Two public footpaths cross the pasture fields to the south of the Site and these were walked to consider the visual effects looking back to the proposed extension. There is also Folly Lane as a rural road, two residential properties and a farm set to the south. The A520 was also driven but no views back to the Site were identified from this A-road.

The two paths walked were Consall 5 and Consall 6. From these routes the existing factory could be discerned primarily because of the stacks that stand above it. The open ground of the Site could also be discerned in part which confirms there would be sight back to the proposed factory unit, it was difficult to define whether the office block would be visible.



Extract from Staffordshire County Council's Online PRow Map – extracted 25/5/22

The main unit would be visible in part until the establishment of the mitigation planting to the southern boundary. It would be a change to mid-distance views from these paths and cannot be classed as a beneficial change. However it is not necessarily an incongruous change given the existing factory back drop to the site.

The scale of the development given the distance between the footpaths and Folly Lane is such that it is not necessarily dominant even though the factory unit is a large building. **New content** - The new unit's ridgeline would extend above the existing factory's and will not have the remaining tree line as a backdrop to it. The visual effect has been assessed as **Moderate-Minor, Adverse and Temporary** until the southern mitigation planting has established when it will decrease to **Minor, Adverse and Permanent**. This long-term visual effect has increased from the original note's Negligible to Minor, Adverse as the factory unit is likely to stay visible in part even with the southern tree planting.

Screening works best when a series of vegetative layers 'build-up' within a scene to prevent sight back to a given location. A proposed area of off-site woodland planting (0.6 ha in size) is proposed as works within

the blue line boundary. As stated above this would be a landscape character benefit but does little, if any to build up vegetation in the view from Footpaths Consall 5 & 6.

Shorter duration 'kinetic' views to the proposed factory unit would be gained from Folly Lane by motorists in higher vehicles that can look over the roadside hedge or in normal height cars at field gates or other breaks in the hedgerow. This view has been assessed as **Minor, Adverse and Permanent** decreasing to **Minor/Negligible Effect** when the site's southern boundary tree line has established. This long-term visual effect has increased from the original note's No Effect to Minor/Negligible, Adverse as the factory unit is likely to stay visible in part even with the southern tree planting.

There are two houses set off the rural stretch of Folly Lane – Beechmount and Park Lodge Farm and a further farm – Spout House. All three properties do not offer up any publicly accessible views so technically can be ignored in the LVA process. However, it is Beechmount that is judged to have potential viewing opportunities back to the site (as judged from Footpath Consall 5). Park Lodge Farm may have viewing opportunities but this could not be judged. Spout Farm would not given the amount of intervening vegetation. Without taking these residential views directly it is impossible to assess any visual effect but it is safe to conclude that sight from these properties to the main building would also be screened out by the proposed southern tree line on site. It is also safe to conclude that their residential amenity will not be adversely affected at the distance between themselves and site.

Overall, the site is already visually well contained with few visual receptors to look back on it. This does not mean that it is invisible from footpaths and Folly Lane to the south but it would be relatively small part of the overall view. The view to the buildings on the Site will diminish to a point where they are no longer visible to the casual observer but may be evident to somebody who studies the scene more closely.

New content - The taller elements of the existing factory stacks are likely to remain in the view and will continue to mark the presence of the industrial plant within the local scene particularly when discharging a plume of steam or smoke to draw the eye further.

Ideally the mitigation measures proposed at the application site will have a positive effect on screening the existing factory as well. This is particularly the case as the proposal to remove the northern triangular end of the banked tree screen would visually link the new factory unit with the existing and compound the apparent scale of the overall facility.

6. 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 to largely improve the mitigation of adverse visual effects.

- Retain the banked northern tree line as far as possible with any breaks for pipelines or connecting paths kept to a minimum to prevent the apparent visual joining of old and new factory buildings in views from the south;
- **New content** – Re-configuration of the office block orientation and associated car parking to maximise tree retention within the triangular shaped block of trees shown for removal;
- Possible amendment of the shape of the off site woodland planting from a triangular copse to something more linear to increase screening value to the west of the proposed location;
- Inclusion of native tree planting in off-site hedgerows within the blue line area to build up vegetative layers to aid screening from the south and improve landscape quality;
- Amending the meadow grass planting near the office building to something that will give year round interest at this arrival point to the factory;
- Explaining colour choices for the cladding of the main building so that it is recessive in the landscape rather than bright and reflective **New Content** – as recommended for similar agricultural buildings as per Landscape Planning Guideline J on pdf page 78 of the Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment ;
- Change of *Populus x canadensis* 'Robusta' to a UK native poplar;
- Prevention of high mast lighting and glare to minimise night-time effects;
- Screening to the tank location to the south east corner of the Site; and
- New content – Addressing

7. Landscape Policy Compliance

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

SS11 – Churnet Valley Strategy

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;

‘measures to enhance, protect and interpret the landscape character and heritage assets of the Churnet Valley.’

The proposals at the moment will eventually conserve the landscape character of the area to the south of the development when the mitigation proposals have established and reached semi-maturity. The off-site woodland planting could be considered an enhancement. **New Content** – However in the first instance and until mitigation planting establishes the landscape character of the Churnet Valley is not enhanced or protected.

It is considered that there is currently part-compliance with this policy.

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.

New content – To confirm there will be an Adverse landscape effect to the character of the Site itself as its character changes from a green field location to an industrial facility. There would also be intrusion from the main new building until the mitigation planting starts to screen it. However, the intrusion is not considered prominent in landscape and visual terms as the proposed site is not in a prominent landscape location e.g. ridgeline or focus of roads and is associated within existing industrial feature. There is also a relatively modest amount of viewing opportunities to the proposals. Finally, the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence does not identify any landscape constraints at the Site or in the immediate contextual area.

No substantive conflict with Part 1 of the policy has been found (New Content) other than landscape character change of the Site itself.

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 proposals given their scale and openness to the south would initially reduce landscape character quality in the first instance until the mitigation works establish then it would be judged as respecting it. The creation of a new woodland screen would not be seen as alien in the landscape and may bring about additional screening benefits. The proffered and potentially greater offsite woodland planting works would lead to an enhancement but this like the southern mitigation planting would only occur on establishment. The setting of a settlement is not affected as even though it is close to Cheddleton and Wetley Rocks it is visually isolated from them. **New Content** - The change of the open field to industrial development neither respects, nor enhances the quality of the field as a contributing piece of the local landscape and prevents its current function as a buffer to the existing plant. As well as the loss of the site field there is also the adverse change to the landscape character of the adjacent field to the south. This contextual change will reduce but not totally be removed with the growth of the proposed boundary tree belt. It is an inevitable effect of green field development and should be considered as an adverse effect in the planning balance. As stated previously the setting of the settlement in landscape terms is not affected.

The proposals have sought to respect local landscape character so complies with Part 2 of the policy (New Content) other than landscape character change of the Site itself..

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 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 does not immediately appear to apply to the proposals other than SuDS management of surface water run-off. The off-site planting of 0.6 Ha of woodland can be classified as positive management of the landscape for aesthetic, ecological and natural flood management purposes.

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 not complied with given the removal of parts of the site’s northern banked tree line and particularly the triangular block of trees to build the office suite and car park. This tree line plays a useful landscape role in screening the existing factory from the south and the proposals could be amended to aid its greater retention. Other trees around the periphery of the site are retained.

Part 1 - Not fully complied with.

The second part seeks new tree planting associated with development that this scheme is able to demonstrate on and offsite.

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 mature oaks to the western most boundary could be classed as veterans or near veterans and they are retained by the proposals. **New content** – The protection of all retained trees on and around the Site need to be clearly stated as part of any planning conditions.

Part 3 – Compliance if the oak trees are classed as having veteran value. If they do not have veteran status this part of the policy is not applicable.

8. Suggested planning conditions

Should you be minded to grant planning consent for these proposals and notwithstanding the already submitted landscape and management plan proposals the following landscape orientated 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 the use of the properties 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 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 buildings’ 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 a protective covenant is applied to the off-site woodland planting to retain its presence in the landscape in perpetuity– Reason to ensure its retention in the long term and to protect local landscape character.

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 updated notes and accompanying photographs useful as you consider the determination of this application but should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Stuart Ryder
31/8/22