

SMDC Planning Reference –	SMD/2022/0574		
Site Name –	Armshead Farm Battery Storage Facility		
Summary of proposals -	96 No. battery storage units and transformer and associated ancillary facilities including landscape planting proposals		
Consultation Note Subject –	Landscape and Visual Matters		
Planning Case Officer –	John Copestake		
Landscape Comments Prepared By –	Stuart Ryder of Ryder Landscape Consultants		
Date of site visit —	Not yet made	Date of response	5/6/23
Summary of anticipated landscape and visual effect	There will be a Major, Adverse landscape effect at the Site but a Moderate, Beneficial wider landscape effect from the more extensive landscape planting across the broader farm holding. Visual effects are considered to be limited with FP Cheddleton 49 experiencing the most notable visual change.		

Dear John

Armshead Farm Battery Storage Facility – 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. Suggested Planning Conditions

1. Methodology

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) appointed Ryder Landscape Consultants to consider the submitted scheme and supporting documents in June 2023. Stuart Ryder an experienced Chartered Landscape Architect has reviewed the Illustrative Landscape Plan, aerial photography and Staffordshire CC's Online PROW Map information. I have not attended Site before preparing this note but know the broader area from reviewing landscape matters for two previous battery storage facilities set to the east of Cellarhead sub-station.

2. Site and surrounding's landscape character

The site is a single existing pasture field set at an elevation of approximately 247m AOD. It is bounded by what appear to be native hedgerows to the east, south and west and a more open, gappy hedge to the north where Foopath Cheddleton 49 runs. It is these hedgerows and the occasional trees that they contain that are anticipated to form the Site's most notable landscape feature. Visible from Armshead Road there are apparent runs of timber, equestrian style field fencing which in landscape terms is a sign of change from rural to horse focussed land management.

The Site and the surrounding similar medium sized pasture fields are not subject to any landscape designations or form the setting to any sensitive features such as Listed properties, or Scheduled Monuments. Pylons at Cellarhead sub-station can be seen on the skyline.

I would not class the Site or the surrounding area as a 'valued landscape' as per NPPF Para 174 a) but its hedgerow pattern is of value and its long-term preservation or ideally enhancement as hedgerow is critical to sustaining landscape character in the area.

3. Proposals for the Site

Construction access is proposed from the east from Armshead Road past Armshead Farm and forming a new access away from the existing farm track that FP Cheddleton 49 follows. This track appears set within the existing fields by approximately 15m running up to the main installation field.

The main installation field is set to the east of the overall application Site. The proposals indicate 96 No. containers in rows of 6 or 7 units arrayed either north to south or east to west. The transformer associated with the proposals is set to the north east corner of the main installation field. There are no cable routes marked between the facility and the National Grid system and it is presumed that these are underground or shown on other proposal drawings. If overhead, they will increase the sense of landscape change and visual intrusion and if underground the route should follow existing tracks and limit the amount of root damage to trees and hedgerows.

The fencing position and type is not marked on the landscape masterplan but it is presumed that a security fence of some type will be required and could add to the sense of landscape character change away from rural character to one that is more infrastructure focussed.

Landscape planting proposals are shown ranging across the surrounding farm area which is presumed to be in the same land ownership as the main site field. The landscape mitigation strategy appears to building up 'layers' of vegetation in the landscape to provide screening in short and mid-distance views. This is done by;

- Forming new hedgerows and sub-dividing the field to the west of the installation site into two halves to add another vegetation line;
- The sub-division takes place with an earth bank with planting on top and its sides;
- Native woodland planting belt to the west of the Site
- Additional tree planting in existing hedgerows to add height and greater screening value to them.
- Field corner planting with small copse style planting.

Clearance of existing trees, hedgerows and avoidance of watercourses and existing field ponds appear not to be required and that the battery containers are set with an offset from surrounding hedgerows and tree lines.

4. Landscape effects

The proposals will effectively turn the field site into a piece of electrical infrastructure and this for the Site is classified as a **Major, Adverse and Temporary** effect that is an inevitability of development. It is classed as **Temporary** as it is assumed that the development will be granted under licence for a period of 35 years or similar. This temporal period will be perceived as **Permanent** by human receptors who pass by the Site but in landscape terms can be classed as **Temporary** particularly given the ease of reversibility with regards to the fixtures and fittings of the battery site. The proposals are not considered in keeping with the wider pastoral landscape character of the Settled Plateau Farmland Slopes but there is the existing power infrastructure at Cellarhead and two other battery facilities proposed near to it. However, this may lead to a sense of proliferation and a compounded cumulative effect.

The ability to retain the existing hedgerow network to provide strong planting buffers is acknowledged and in reality the numerous hedgerows will be added to and when established will provide a landscape enhancement to the wider area.

The retention of hedgerows and trees on Site cannot be classed as a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) however new hedgerow and woodland planting can and this is proposed around the wider contextual landscape.

The earth bank proposed to sub-divide the field to the west of the main installation field could appear artificial if not suitably shaped and finished into the local ground levels. Establishing trees and scrub on new raised banks can be difficult as they are 'perched' above ground water supply, consideration of this in any future landscape maintenance and management plans should be explained in detail.

Some of the tree planting species for the hedgerows appear underwhelming with;

- Silver birch – not a typical hedgerow tree and short lived;
- Field maple – typically a hedge plant but not a hedgerow tree;
- Hazel – not a tree but a hedge species;
- Goat willow – grows too quickly and not a traditional hedge species.

It is suggested that trees more akin to existing larger hedgerow tree species in the area are proposed.

With the proposed screening the facility should be assimilated into the landscape in an anticipated 8 to 10 years.

The wider effects of new hedgerows, tree planting and field corner copses would lead to an increase in native vegetation cover that would remain on the removal of the battery storage site. The wider planting is anticipated to lead to a **Moderate, Beneficial and Permanent** effect to the wider contextual landscape.

5. Visual effects from surrounding areas

There are three groups of potential visual receptors that require consideration and potential screening to conserve their visual amenity and enjoyment of the area;

- Users of Armshead Road – mid-range views from the west;
- Users of Footpath Cheddleton 49 – close range views from the north;
- Residents of the group of farm buildings to the east of the Site – mid-range from the east.

Armshead Road is set at a higher elevation at 269m AOD compared to the Site's 247m AOD. This elevation aids the taking of a longer view to the north east. I cannot testify as to what extent and prominence the main installation field has in this view, but the majority of the landscape mitigation works appears to be aimed at building up screening layers between the road user and the Site. On establishment I think the planting will successfully screen the battery arrays from Armshead Road.

Users of FP Cheddleton 49 will have the closest public vantage point of the main installation field as it runs parallel to the north side of the field. The design response to beat up the existing hedge and set further woodland planting behind it should screen sight to the battery units and transformer (depending on its height) in an anticipated 6 to 8 years. One design positive is the fact that the access is not straight from the footpath into the installation field as such views are hard to hide but is further west and can be 'disguised' as a typical field entrance. The actual security gate access can be hidden from view behind the screen planting.

The group of farm buildings contain Field View Farm, The Waste, Platts Farm and Far Little Waste Farm. They appear as active working farms or transport businesses in aerial photography and may not have

any direct views to the main installation field. The landscape proposals do not appear to propose any measures to help assimilate the proposals in views from these properties.

Views from other rural roads to the north appear to be screened by roadside hedges and tree planting.

6 Cumulative effects

There may be a sequential cumulative effect for users of FP Cheddleton 49 as they will pass Cellarhead, the proposed battery storage park to the immediate east of Cellarhead when it is constructed and then this Armshead Farm facility.

I suspect that there will be no position on the ground where this facility is visible at the same time as the other two battery parks but its presence will extend the infrastructure character further away from Cellarhead sub-station than the recently consented proposals.

There is a balance between the rural landscape being able to accept such facilities and still retain an overall rural character or change to a character where pieces of countryside appear left between the more dominant land use of energy infrastructure. If you are minded to grant consent for these proposals I would suggest that further ones in the area may tip the overall landscape character from rural to infrastructure.

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.

- Confirmation of long-term management of valuable landscape features (also ecological assets) of hedgerows, trees and new planting as indicated on the landscape master plan across the wider farm;
- Additional tree planting in roadside hedges along Armshead Road as these are closer to one of the potential visual receptor groups;
- Updated species choice for hedgerow trees that lead to larger, longer lived native trees in the hedgerows;
- Field corner copse planting to the east of the transformer to assist in screening its presence from FP Cheddleton 49;
- Sections through earth bank and clarification of fencing types if not already submitted;
- Mitigation proposals for the cable connections to the National Grid and confirmation if these are underground (preferential) or overhead (increased landscape and visual effects that would need to be assessed in addition to the storage and transformer equipment);
- Confirmation of drainage treatment on Site e.g. SuDS balancing pond, presumably the grey shaded surfacing is unbound stone that should be built off a geo-textile to assist with its removal in the future;
- Confirmation of land restoration process on completion of the battery storage park use, who will have legal responsibility for it and the time frame for its completion;
- Acceptance that the facility on cessation of use is not classed as brownfield for the purpose of other development and reverts to a rural field.

In addition, the submission of a long-term Landscape Maintenance and Management Plan (LMMP) for the duration of the development's operation will be required so the initial establishment and ongoing upkeep of the various landscape features and ecological habitats can be confirmed and suitably Conditioned. Whether a separate document or part of the LMMP the processes required for the

restoration of the development site including the removal of tracks and hard-standings on cessation of use as a battery park needs to be provided.

8. Suggested planning conditions

There is clear landscape and visual harm to be put in the planning balance at the Site but this is offset to some extent by the long term landscape enhancement the more wider planting proposals would have. 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, including plant and material schedules are 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 for a minimum period of 10 years. *Reason – to ensure the quality of the landscape mitigation measures and appropriate maintenance until they become effective.*
- 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 mature tree and hedge stock that contributes to the local landscape.*
- D. That a Landscape Maintenance and Management Plan (LMMP) is prepared for implementation by the site owners / tenants 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 rural landscape in the hours of darkness.*
- F. That a schedule of works activities in the form of a site restoration plan is produced to explain the removal of the battery storage facilities, transformer, ancillary equipment and tracks as part of full restoration of the Site back to pasture fields 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 you may be considering and will require careful 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.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Stuart Ryder

5/6/23