

Proposed installation of a ground mounted photovoltaic solar development at Land at Rownall Farm, Rownall Road, Cellarhead

Addendum to Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in Response to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Comments

Prepared by Amalgam Landscape Limited
On behalf of Rownall Farm Solar Limited

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	Name	Position	Date
Graphics prepared by:	P.Shephard	Senior Consultant	November 2024
Report prepared by:	A.J Watts	Director	December 2024
Reviewed by:	A.E Watts	Director	December 2024
For and on behalf of Amalgam Landscape Ltd			

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1. Introduction

Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 Following submission of the planning application for the proposed installation of a ground mounted photo voltaic solar development at Land at Rownall Farm, Rownall Road, Cellarhead, comments and requests for additional information were received from Staffordshire Moorland District Council (SMDC - the determining authority).
- 1.2 Amalgam Landscape Limited, a Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute, has produced this Addendum to the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) on behalf of Rownall Farm Solar Limited, in response to these comments.

2. Summary of Staffordshire Moorland District Council Comments

- 2.1 The comments raised by SMDC included:
- More detail on and evidence of the consultation with SMDC to agree the potential viewpoints to inform the LVIA;
 - The cumulative information has changed since the LVIA was written;
 - Potential impacts from Rownall View Cottage (residential property) and Rownall Road;
 - Potential impact from the public right of way that crosses the site;
 - Potential impacts from the A520 (Cheadle Road), north out of Wetley Rocks and the A522 which rises south-south-east out of Wetley Rocks and potential impacts from Wetley Rocks settlement; and
 - Potential impacts from Thornyridge Road.
- 2.2 The response to these comments is outlined below.

3. Response to Staffordshire Moorland District Council Comments

- 3.1 To inform the response to SMDC comments:
- The development layout has been updated which involved changes to the Indicative Landscape Masterplan (Updated Figure 22, Revision E, November 2024) and the Landscape and Ecological Masterplan (Updated Figure 1, Revision E, November 2024); and
 - The cumulative information has been updated which involved changes to the Cumulative Schemes (Updated Figure 2, Revision A, November 2024).
- 3.2 Each of the comments from SMDC are discussed in more detail below.
- More detail on and evidence of the consultation with SMDC to agree the potential viewpoints to inform the LVIA
- 3.3 As stated in paragraph 2.14 of the LVIA (July 2022):

“Following the collection of base data, the scope of the LVIA, including potential viewpoints to inform the LVIA, were issued to the Planning Officer at SMDC on 8th October 2021 and on 28th October 2021 for discussion.”

3.4 As stated in paragraph 2.16 of the LVIA (July 2022):

“No response was received, so it was assumed that the scope of the LVIA, including the potential viewpoints was acceptable and appropriate.”

3.5 Copies of all e-mail communication with the Council is included within **Appendix A** of this LVIA Addendum.

The cumulative information has changed since the LVIA was written

3.6 The cumulative information to inform the LVIA (July 2022) was collected and updated at the end of May 2022.

3.7 This has changed in the last two and a half years and the updated cumulative information is illustrated in **Updated Figure 2 – Cumulative Schemes** (Revision A, November 2024).

3.8 A summary of the changes is outlined in **Table 1** below:

Table 1 Cumulative Information

Name and status of cumulative scheme (July 2022)	Name and status of cumulative scheme (November 2024)
Land east of Cellarhead Sub-station Battery Storage – pending planning	Land east of Cellarhead Sub-station Battery Storage – consented
Land adjacent Cellarhead Sub-station Battery Storage – pending planning	Land adjacent Cellarhead Sub-station Battery Storage – consented
Newfields Battery Storage – pending planning	Newfields Battery Storage – withdrawn from planning permission so not considered further
	Land south of Cellarhead Substation and West of Rownall Road Battery Storage – pending planning
	Greenfields Battery Storage – pending planning

3.9 The operational Cellarhead substation has been included within the cumulative assessment. The operational Cellarhead substation benefits from permitted development rights and no actual developments are currently proposed under these rights.

3.10 In summary:

- Two of the pending planning battery storage schemes are now consented;
- One of the pending planning battery storage schemes has been withdrawn – so is not considered further as part of the cumulative assessment; and
- Two battery storage schemes have been submitted for planning permission – they are pending a planning decision.

3.11 Although the status of two of the battery storage schemes have changed from pending planning to consented and there has been additional battery storage schemes submitted for a planning decision (albeit with one withdrawn) – the overall summary of cumulative impacts and effects, as outlined in the LVIA (July 2022), will not largely change.

- 3.12 Paragraphs 7.4-7.8 from the LVIA (July 2022) summarising the additional impacts on landscape character (including landscape relevant designations) are outlined below:

“The proposed development and the [consented and] pending planning battery storage schemes are situated within the Green Belt and the Ancient Plateau Farmlands landscape character type.

Already influenced by the existing [operational] sub-station and the lines of pylons, there will be an increase in development which will directly influence the Green Belt and the Ancient Plateau Farmlands landscape character type.

Subtle variations in landform and separation and enclosure of the proposed development will however ensure that renewable energy development, although with the potential to be perceived, will not dominate or define the landscape character.

The enclosure by subtle variations in landform and mature vegetation in combination with the proposed development will ensure that renewable energy schemes will be absorbed into this largely agricultural and well-vegetated landscape, with minimal additional cumulative effects on landscape character. The characteristic regular and strong field pattern will screen the wider cumulative influence of renewable energy schemes on landscape character.

In summary, the addition of the proposed development, although selectively perceived in combination with pending planning battery storage schemes, will not influence the wider Green Belt or create a wider landscape dominated by renewable energy schemes which will influence the setting or the integrity of landscape relevant designations or change the landscape character into one influenced by renewable energy development. The addition of the proposed development, even in combination with the pending planning battery storage developments, will not dominate the wider landscape.”

- 3.13 Paragraphs 7.9-7.12 from the LVIA (July 2022) summarising the additional impacts on visual amenity receptors and their views are outlined below:

“The enclosure provided by the surrounding sloping and well-vegetated farmland will ensure that the proposed development and the [consented and] pending planning battery storage schemes will not dominate the view.

There will be limited opportunities, generally only in close proximity, for combined or sequential views of the proposed development and the [consented and] pending planning battery storage schemes. The separation by sloping landform and enclosure by surrounding vegetation will ensure that the combined perception of renewable energy schemes will not dominate any views or journeys.

There will however be potential for the proposed development to be perceived in combination with the [consented and] pending planning battery storage schemes to the south. It will only be from selected open and elevated locations that the proposed development and the [consented and] pending planning battery storage schemes will have the potential to be perceived. However, nestled within the mature and well-established regular landscape framework, already influenced by pylons and infrastructure, the addition of the proposed development will not create views dominated by renewable energy development.

Even from the few locations where the proposed development has the potential to be perceived in combination with the [consented and] pending planning battery storage

schemes, although perceived within a busy expansive landscape, already influenced by pylons and infrastructure, renewable energy schemes will not dominate the view.”

Potential impacts from Rownall View Cottage and Rownall Road

- 3.14 To minimise the influence of the proposed development from Rownall View Cottage, situated to the north-east corner of the site as well as Rownall Road (both ways) and Wetley Rocks, further afield to the east – the proposed development has been ‘pulled back’ from the residential property and the minor road.
- 3.15 From the boundary of Rownall View Cottage garden/Rownall Road:
- The offset to the fence will be approximately 40m; and
 - The offset to the panels will be approximately 55m.
- 3.16 In addition, the woodland belt running along Rownall Road has substantially increased in width to provide enhanced screening and separation, even during the winter months, between Rownall View Cottage and Rownall Road. The proposed woodland belt will be approximately 25m wide and 175m long, as illustrated on the indicative landscape masterplan (**Updated Figure 22**, Revision E, November 2024) and LEMP (**Updated Figure 1**, Revision E, November 2024).
- 3.17 It is also important to note that Rownall View Cottage is set lower than the adjacent minor road and the sloping fields associated with the site, with the main views from the property orientated eastwards and southwards over the expansive valley and sloping landscape. Potential views broadly westwards, including towards the site, are largely only from the less sensitive first floor windows as well as from the entrance/drive leading to the property/property fringes along Rownall Road. The property boundary with Rownall Road is lined by mature garden vegetation, including substantial evergreen hedgerows.
- 3.18 The combination of substantial changes to the layout and the extensive proposed woodland planting would ensure that although there will be the potential for adverse impacts during construction and at Year 1, albeit reduced through setting back the proposed development, such influence will be drastically restricted, even during the winter months, through the growth of the woodland planting over time.
- 3.19 In summary, following the completion of construction activities (Year 1), from the high sensitivity residential property (although it is acknowledged that potential views will be largely from the less sensitive first floor), the magnitude of impact will be **medium-low**, the level of effect will be **minor adverse**. The proposed fencing and solar panels will be perceived within the adjacent gently rising sloping fields, beyond the low stone wall and post and wire fence lining Rownall Road, albeit positioned approximately 40m and 55m away from the property boundary respectively, so it will not dominate the view.
- 3.20 Following the growth of the substantial woodland belt, comprising native trees and shrubs, approximately 25m wide and 175m long – this will completely screen any potential views towards the proposed development over time. The thickness of the woodland planting will provide year round robust screening, even during the winter months. With time, the magnitude of impact will be **no change**, the level of effect will be **neutral**.
- 3.21 The views however from this property will change from overlooking a sloping gently rising field, to thick woodland.

Potential impacts from the public right of way that crosses the site

- 3.22 The proposed development will be perceived for travellers along the public right of way that crosses the site from east to west (between Rownall Road and Thornyedge Road). Crossing the sloping fields, open views will be possible from the public right of way towards the proposed development, only partially restricted by adjacent existing hedgerows, scattered trees and stone walls.
- 3.23 To minimise the proposed development from ‘overpowering’ or ‘dominating’ users of the public rights of way, the proposed solar panels have been moved back even further from the line of the public right of way to reduce their influence.
- 3.24 As illustrated in the sections, through the public right of way corridor that crosses the proposed development from east to west:
- The minimum offset from the existing hedgerow field boundary to the fence within which the public right of way is situated, will be a 12m buffer; and
 - The minimum offset from the existing hedgerow field boundary to the solar panels within which the public right of way is situated, will be a 20m buffer.
- 3.25 The creation and maintenance of a wide rough grassland ‘buffer’ will help to prevent the development from dominating the users of the public right of way but there will still be a change in view for the approximately 675m length of public right of way that crosses the proposed development – albeit reduced slightly through changes in and setting back of the development design.
- 3.26 The proposed development will however still be perceived as a prominent, noticeable feature in the view from the approximately 675m length of public right of way that crosses the proposed development and the magnitude of impact will remain as **medium-high**, the level of effect will be **moderate adverse**.

Potential impacts from the A520 (Cheadle Road), north out of Wetley Rocks and the A522 which rises south-south-east out of Wetley Rocks and from Wetley Rocks

- 3.27 As stated in the previous LVIA Addendum (April 2024) from a few open locations within and on the fringes of Wetley Rocks, as well as from the nearby major roads, expansive views will be possible across the undulating landscape towards the proposed development.
- 3.28 To minimise the distant influence of the proposed development on the high sensitivity settlement and for low sensitivity travellers along the major roads, the development layout has been changed and further panels removed from the highest part of the site to the north. This avoided the potential for ‘skylining’ or ‘dog-toothing’ of the proposed development on the horizon, particularly when distantly perceived from Wetley Rocks and from glimpsed, fleeting and oblique views from the nearby major roads.
- 3.29 The growth of the extensive woodland landscape mitigation measures, particularly along Rownall Road on the north-eastern boundary of the site will also minimise the influence of the proposed development when perceived from the east.
- 3.30 These additional changes including reduction of the layout design and growth of the extensive woodland landscape mitigation measures will help to minimise the potential influence over time.

- 3.31 In addition, the potential views of the proposed development from selected open and elevated locations within and on the fringes of Wetley Rocks and from the nearby major roads, will be distant and only form a small part of an expansive landscape and view.
- 3.32 At worst, from a few open locations within or on the fringes of the high sensitivity settlement and the low sensitivity major roads, the magnitude of impact will be low, the level of effect will be negligible adverse. In reality, however, the proposed development will be difficult to 'pick out' and will often go unnoticed in the landscape or view.
- 3.33 Given the minimal influence of the proposed development from Wetley Rocks and the nearby major roads, any further reduction of the extent of the proposed development from the high points within the site (including moving the proposed development to below the 240m contour line) will not significantly reduce the influence of the proposed development further.

Potential impacts from Thornyedge Road

- 3.34 Thornyedge Road, to the west and north-west, is lined by mature and well-managed hedgerows on both sides.
- 3.35 As stated in the previous LVIA Addendum (April 2024), the sloping nature of the site however will ensure that views will be possible towards the proposed development from the few gaps along the road or above this vegetated enclosure, particularly during the winter months.
- 3.36 To minimise the influence of the proposed development from the few gaps in enclosure along Thornyedge Road, particularly as the minor road rises to the north-west, additional landscape mitigation measures have been proposed along the northern and north-western boundary of the site.
- 3.37 The landscape mitigation measures include proposed hedgerow planting as well as infill planting to the existing intermittently vegetated boundaries. This will help to screen and enclose the proposed development over time, from the north-west, although glimpsed views of the development may still be possible, particularly during the winter months.
- 3.38 The further additional removal of panels from the highest part of the site has also ensured that the panels in the northern most field would not be visible from Thornyedge Road. There will be no 'skylining' or 'dog-toothing' of the proposed development on the horizon.