

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0087
Valid 23/02/2024

**THE WOODYARD OFF
DRAYCOTT CROSS ROAD
BROOK HOUSES
CHEADLE**

**ERECT STEEL PORTAL
FRAME UNIT FOR DRY WOOD
STORE AND ASSOCIATED
MACHINERY. INSTALLATION
OF 4 NO. BIOMASS BOILERS
(2 NO 210KW AND 2NO
295KW) ARRANGED IN PAIRS,
LINKED TO 2 NO STEEL
DRYING SKIPS**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

1. Whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt
2. The principle of the development
3. The impact on the character and appearance of the area
4. Impact on residential amenity including air quality
5. The impact on ground stability as a result of historical coal mining in the area.
6. Impact on highway safety.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in the open countryside just outside of the western edge of Cheadle and is also in the Green Belt. It comprises an established timber yard for the manufacture of timber garden furniture and fencing etc and also log processing for fuel supplies. There are existing linked buildings used for this purpose and yard areas. It is a long rectangular site in a woodland clearing which is reached via a long access road ("The Woodyard") connected to a main road, Draycott Cross Road, to the east. There is a large industrial estate to the north. The land to the south and west comprises open land and woodland. There are dwellings about 40m to the south-west of the site and about 80m to the south of the site. The access road also passes a bungalow which lies about 40m to the east of the site. There is a Public Right of Way crossing the site from the industrial estate to the north and heading south. The site is also in a High Risk historical coal mining zone.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for a metal clad portal frame warehouse to store dry wood and machinery and also for four biomass boilers which would be linked to two drying skips (for drying the wood to be used in boilers). The storage building would be placed at the west end of the site in an existing yard area and would have a footprint of 18.0 x 9.0 metres and a height of almost 6.5 metres.

The four boilers would be grouped together outside the western end of the existing building and would be centrally placed within the existing site. They would have a max height of 6.3 metres up to the top of the flues/chimneys and a footprint of 3.0 x 2.2m. They would be placed on a concrete base. The skips would be placed to the south side of the existing building and would have a metal container form/design with a length of 6.0 metres and a height and width of about 2.0 metres.

One Category C (classed as “poor”) tree will be removed as a result of the development.

In April 2024, an amended site plan (Rev A) was received to show the more formal route of the Public Right of Way crossing the site.

A Design and Access Statement has been submitted and stated that “the boilers will be fuelled using secondary kiln dried timber from the skips that is not suitable for supplying to customers, together with virgin wood sourced externally from various accredited suppliers in accordance with the “Woodsure” certified scheme.”

The original application is accompanied by a Tree Report, Coal Mining Risk Assessment Report and Green Belt Policy Statement. Subsequent to this, in April 2024, a revised Coal Risk Report was submitted and a completed SMDC Biomass Boiler Information Form, specifications of proposed plant and machinery and Noise Levels information. Also included was a Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Emissions Certificate, signed and dated December 2018, relating to the existing boiler operating on site, the Glenfarrow GF175, which states that the tested boiler meets the air quality requirements of the Non-Domestic RHI regulations.

In June 2024, an Air Quality Impact Assessment (AQIA) of the proposed boilers was submitted followed by further information to support the report, in July 2024. Also submitted was a Statement In Response to Environmental Health which states the following:

In response to comments raised by the EH Officer following the submission of the Air Quality Impact Assessment prepared by Dr Amanda Owen, the applicant would like to confirm the following points :

It is agreed that the boilers will not all be running at the same time but the batch fed boilers will be controlled on site by qualified operatives fully trained in the lighting and operating procedures. Furthermore they will only be fuelled using BSL & Woodsure accredited timber with a very low moisture content. This ensures the gasification state is reached very quickly at which point no smoke is emitted. Once the boilers are running at their optimum temperature, the on-board control unit automatically takes over the burning process monitoring and adjusting the oxygen levels to achieve a clean, efficient smokeless burn.

During the summer season when the ambient air temperature is higher and moisture content is lower, a large percentage of the biomass fuel can be air dried instead of force dried. This results in a significant reduction in the boilers operational time allowing for all annual servicing, maintenance and repairs to be carried out ready for maximum operation during the winter season when there is peak demand.

The current owners have a long proven track record in the biomass boiler industry and successfully operate this style of business at several other sites, and are understandably registered with BSL [Biomass Suppliers List] and Woodsure which are the governing bodies to ensure only the correct grade of fuel is used to fire the boilers and that they are operated correctly.

As such, they are spot checked on a regular basis by the governing bodies and must submit a full audit every 2 months. In addition, the boilers must be fully serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's specification every 12 months and reported to OFGEM.

In November 2024, a revised Detailed Air Quality Assessment by Environmental Visage was submitted.

In December 2024, further Noise data was submitted.

In March 2025, the site operators Boiler Procedures Statement (UK Renewable Energy Ltd Boiler Procedures) giving details of how the boilers will be operated to prevent pollution, was submitted, along with a Complaints Procedure stating what action would be undertaken by the operator in the event of any complaints from nearby residents.

An updated version of the Procedures was received on 8.5.25 and incorporates the Complaints Procedure. It states the following:

Biomass boiler and Kiln OPERATOR Manual

At no point MUST the boilers be running unmanned or outside of working hours

Loading the boiler for start up

- *clean and sweep the cold ash out of the boiler and deposit it in to the specialised enclosed ash container.*
- *save the larger charcoal for the start procedure.*
- *sweep the heat exchange tubes if necessary.*
- *only use BSL approved fuel.*
- *moisture test fuel and check the fuel is under 25% moisture.*
- *load the firebox so that the length of the fuel runs with the length of the boiler.*

Lighting the boiler

- *ensure the boiler fan and kiln are turned off but the boiler pump is running.*
- *build a small fire with kindling wood near the front of the fire box.*
- *once the fire is established add the charcoal.*
- *close the firebox door and turn the boiler fans on.*
- *after 10-15 minutes visually check for excessive smoke.*

Running the kiln and boiler

- *it is mandatory that the biomass boiler MUST NOT BE LEFT RUNNING IF SITE IS NOT MANED OR OUTSIDE OF WORKING HOURS.*
- *once the boiler reaches it's set point, turn the kiln on ensuring the kiln doors are closed.*

Re-loading fuel in to the boiler

- *at any point you need to open the door to the firebox,*
- *turn off the door switch.*
- *leave the boiler for around 10 minUtes.*
- *then stand behind the door and pull towards you.*
- *load the fuel on top of the cHarcoal in direction of the length of the boiler.*
- *close the door by pushing the lever down.*
- *turn the door switch back to the on posltion.*

Checking the boiler and being aware of excess smoke

- *it is mandatory that the biomass boiler is visually inspected at start up for excess smoke AND THEN HOURLY THEREAFTER DURING OPERATION. the SMOKE SHALL ALSO BE CHECKED FOR ODOUR. EXCESS SMOKE IS DEFINED ON START UP AS BEING A VISUAL PLUME [NOT JUST FAINT HAZE OR VAPOUR] FOR A PERIOD OF MORE THAN 10 TO 15 MINUTES AFTER THE INITIAL 10 MINUTE LIGHTING PROCEDURE.*
- *if excess smoke is found to be coming out of the chimney*
- *turn the boiler off at the door switch.*
- *ask for one of the engineers to check the boiler before turning the switch back to the on position.*
- *or report the problem to wayne dyke on: 07724763544.*
- *At time of lighting and during operation of the boilers, consideration must be given to wind direction and strength. In the event of winds from the North within an arc between NW and ENE consideration may need to be given to not lighting the boilers or to shut down the boilers until conditions allow the operation without resulting in potential adverse impacts at residential receptors as a result of smoke and odour. In the event of smoke and/ or odour being identified at the site boundary associated with the operation of the boilers with any residential receptor, the boilers must be shutdown until conditions allow for them to operate again without causing emissions to be detected at or in the event of smoke, visibly crossing the site boundary.*
- *In the event of smoke and/ or odour being identified at the site boundary associated with the operation of the boilers with any residential receptor, the boilers must be shutdown until conditions allow for them to operate*

again without causing emissions to be detected at or in the event of smoke, visibly crossing the site boundary.

Shut down procedure

- *TURN THE BIOMASS BOILER OFF at THE MAIN CONTROL BOX.*
- *WAIT 20 MINS.*
- *TURN THE KILN OFF AT THE KILN CONTROL BOX.*
- *after 10-15 minutes visually check for any smoke. This should be minimal.*

*Our standard working hours are 07:30 – 18:00 monday to friday
and 08:00 – 13:00 Saturday*

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted Sept 2020)

SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
SD1 Sustainable Use of Resources
SD2 Renewable Energy
SD4 Pollution
E3 Existing employment areas and premises
DC1 Design Considerations
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedges

National Planning Policy Framework (Feb 2025)

Section 6 (Economy), 12 (Design), 13 (Green Belts) and 15 (Natural Environment).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

A biomass boiler and 12.2m steel shipping container kiln was installed in 2014 for the purpose of providing kiln dried logs. This was formalised by a Lawful Development Certificate application ref SMD/2023/0077.

In 2004, planning consent was given for a new steel portal frame factory unit for steel fabrication and engineering ref 04/00215/FUL, measuring 518m² in floor area and 8.5m high, but was not implemented.

In 2023, a prior notification application for a forestry building ref DET/2023/0036 was submitted for a steel portal frame unit which was approved but limited through condition to the processing of timber grown on site.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11.4.24

Neighbour consultation period ends: 11.4.24

Press Advert: 5.3.24

Public Comments

Letters of objection were received from four local residents, between March and May 2024. The points raised are as follows:

- A previous operation of a biomass boiler on site caused air pollution affecting nearby residents and wildlife as well as harming the wider environment.
- Negative impact on property values.

A letter from the applicant in response to the objection letters was received on 8th April 2024 and states the following:

In response to the letters of objection received from adjacent residential neighbours, the applicant would like to confirm the following points :

The site was acquired just over 12 months ago and so they cannot be held responsible for any unscrupulous behaviours or bad practices carried out by previous tenants.

The current owners have a long proven track record in the biomass boiler industry and are registered with BSL [Biomass Suppliers List] and Woodsure which are the governing bodies to ensure only the correct grade of fuel is used to fire the boilers and that they are operated correctly. It is believed that the previous occupants did not have the necessary registrations with those bodies and did not have the specialist knowledge or experience to operate the current biomass boiler. This was evident when the site was acquired by the large quantity of unsuitable and incorrect scrap/waste timber products left on site, such as chipboard containing glue etc, which the applicant paid to have professionally removed. Furthermore, the existing boiler was found to be damaged caused by the burning of incorrect material and improper use, and has resulted in it being fully reconditioned and returned back to full working order.

It is well documented that there have been numerous fires on the adjacent Hillside Industrial Estate over the past several years, many attended by the Fire Brigade and one which lasted for over two weeks. Following such an event, the Environmental Health Dept erected devices on a pole within The Woodyard to monitor smoke and pollution from the Industrial Estate which are still in place.

The existing biomass boiler was first installed and accredited in July 2014 and used continuously by the owners [G & SJ Johnson] from that time up until April 2018. For the period from then until January 2022 the boiler and site was operated by their tenant which is when the problems that were experienced by the neighbours may have occurred. It is also believed that there were open bonfires held within the

Woodyard on occasion in addition to the fires in the adjacent industrial estate which would have resulted in poor air quality.

As the applicants are registered with the necessary statutory bodies, they are spot checked on a regular basis and must submit a full audit every 2 months. In addition, the boilers must be fully serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's specification every 12 months and reported to OFGEM. The operation of the boilers as stated by the manufacturer guidelines will ensure that there will be no smoke emitted through the burning of BSL listed and approved dry biomass fuel.

In September 2024, a resident of the nearby village of Boundary submitted an objection letter raising concerns over smoke pollution, noise from vehicles arriving to and leaving from the site, affect rights of access to a field within the objectors property, the possible felling of trees for the boiler timber which were planted by the Council to restore the nearby quarry and which are a benefit to wildlife, impact on the Public Right of Way and fire risk.

A further letter of objection from one of the objectors was received in February 2025 stating that the Air Quality reports point out that the levels of pollutants will increase and raises concerns over emissions impacting on his property.

One letter of support has been received from a local resident.

Town / Parish Comments

None received.

Local Highways Authority

No objection subject to a condition requiring a 10m stretch of the access road adjacent to the main road to be hard-surfaced to prevent material spread onto the road, in the interests of highway safety.

Environmental Health

The initial consultation response (on 5th April 2024) recommended refusal based on insufficient information. The Section commented as follows:

Air Quality: The reason for refusal at this stage is due to insufficient information being provided to determine impacts to local air quality.

Attached to this memo is a form which should be completed and returned to the Planning Department for assessment.

There is insufficient information contained within this application for Environmental Health to make recommendations at this stage.

Where Environmental Health are consulted with regards to the installation of boilers, the following information is required:

-Make and model of the boiler

-Manufacturers specification details

-Fuel type

-Net rather thermal input in MW

-Burn rate for Solid fuel in kg/hr and liquid or gaseous matter in kw

The applicant should also complete the screening assessment when returning the form found here: <https://laqm.defra.gov.uk/air-quality/air-quality-assessment/biomass-emissions-screening/>

Noise: Clarification required on sound power/ noise impacts levels of boilers.

EH also added in May 2024 the following: *The combined use of the boilers has the potential to impact on nearby residential receptors. Therefore, an assessment of the impact of both existing and proposed boilers and to determine that the stacks heights for the proposed boilers are adequate for the dispersion of pollutants will need to be undertaken.*

The combined use of the five biomass boilers will also need to be considered by the Environment Agency to determine if the proposal will also fall under the Medium Combustion Plant Directive and require an application for an Environmental Permit.

On 30th July 2024, EH commented as follows with regard to air quality issues only in response to the Air Quality Assessment received in June 2024:

At this time, Environmental Health cannot recommend approval of the above planning application due to concerns relating to impact on nearby residential receptors due to emissions of pollutants associated with the operation of the proposed biomass boilers.

An assessment was submitted with the application (dated June 2024) and a subsequent information provided (July 2024) in relation to concerns raised by this Department. Unfortunately, they do not provide sufficient clarification/ justification to alleviate the concerns:

- 1. RHI Certificate and emission rates. No information is available for the actual proposed model of biomass boilers being installed and the uncertainty associated with this has not been addressed within the assessments. It is acknowledged that this information is not available from the manufacturer and where emissions are greater, this could result in an underprediction of impacts in the assessments.*
- 2. Industrial Emissions Screening Tool: Actual stack height has been utilised rather than effective stack height which is likely to under predict the impacts and needs justifying.*
- 3. The discrepancy between background data sets has the potential to infer further uncertainty in the assessments. Further clarity is required between the different data sets being referred to and justification provided for using one set over another. Table 2 of the June 2024 assessment identified background data for NO₂ as 8.812, compared to 7.13 utilised in the SCAL assessment. One aspect of screening short-term impacts compares the Process Contribution against the Air Quality Standard minus twice the background data as a percentage. Although it is noted in the latest response (July 2024)*

that this does not affect the assessment, it is not demonstrated to support the conclusion. It is further noted in the July 2024 response (Table 2) that this level is exceeded for NO2 depending on the method of combining emissions and is close to the screening limit utilising a different method to combine emissions.

- 4. The method of combining stacks is not accepted and further clarification and justification is required for this. Although the stacks are in close proximity, they are not adjoined or discharging through a common flue, so the reason for combining the stack data is unclear. This results in reduced emissions compared to when the stacks are treated independently and the pollutants summed. A single stack location appears to have been utilised for all the assessments and may not represent actual emission points for the model of boiler again adding further uncertainty within the assessment. It appears that the July 2024 modelling appears based on an existing boiler, a single 210kw boiler and a single 295kw boiler operating rather than all five operating simultaneously.*
- 5. While good operation may aid in reducing emissions of smoke, there remains the potential for odour emissions associated with combustion of solid fuel in the biomass boilers which could have an impact on amenity and requires further consideration.*
- 6. The operating hours of the boilers have been assessed based on 2496 hours for the existing boiler and 5328 hours for the proposed boilers and consideration to restrictions being placed on any planning permission may need to be considered.*

The assessments undertaken to date are considered screening assessments. Due to the proximity to residential receptors and uncertainty, it may be necessary that detailed dispersion modelling will be required to be undertaken or the proposals re-visited with an updated screening assessment.

The following notes are made:

- > Where modelling is based on proposed operating hours, these may need to be conditioned as part of any planning permission granted.*
- > A restriction may be required to be placed on make/ model of boilers unless otherwise subsequently assessed.*
- > Due to concerns regarding the proximity of the boilers to residential receptors, a temporary permission may be appropriate to demonstrate the operation without resulting in odour impacts.*

Further comments dated 18.10.25 in response to a number of exchanges of information between EH Pollution Officer and the applicant's Air Quality Consultants:

The assessment methodology used needs to be demonstrated that it is validated for use for the size installation that is proposed. The model was originally designed for use with large scale combustion plant (20-50MW) and validated using emissions data from power stations. It has subsequently been updated to capture smaller plant, >1MW, but we have no evidence it is validated for use for the

smaller ones. This is the aspect I have been looking into and have now managed to liaise with someone who is digging deeper for me. Unfortunately it is not tool that appears to be familiar amongst local authority officers so not had much luck elsewhere on this.

If response is positive and can be used, then it could be a case of recommending conditions to restrict the number of appliances that can be lit and be in use at any one time (limited to two, one 210 and one 295) as well as a limit on operating hours (max 5328 hours per year) as this is what has been assessed, although not sure yet how this can be practically secured by a condition that can be enforced unless the appliances have a function to record this each year. There will also need to be boundary conditions for smoke and odour to protect the amenity of the residential receptors due to the proximity of the appliances.

If it has not been validated for use the applicant will need to provide evidence of this, or if conditions are not considered able to be tested/ enforced, likely dispersion modelling will be required. The latter will hopefully address number of appliances/ operating hours as well.

Formal EH consultation response following assessment of the Air Quality Assessment Report (Nov 2024), dated 15.1.25:

Potential Areas of Environmental Concern -

- 1. Construction Impacts (condition)*
- 2. Unexpected contamination (condition)*
- 3. Noise (condition)*
- 4. Air Quality (condition)*

The above application has been considered by Environmental Health. The proposals have the potential to impact on the amenity (and health) of nearby residents through both noise and air emissions (notably particulates) from the operation of the biomass boilers. As a result of concerns in relation to these aspects, should the planning authority be of mind to grant the application, the conditions below will be required to protect the amenity of receptors.

Specifically regarding Air Quality:

A detailed air quality assessment has been submitted in support of the above proposal, (Environmental Visage, report issue No. 1, dated November 2024).

The assessment is based on three scenarios:

- Scenario 1 is five biomass boilers (4 proposed and 1 existing) operating 24 hours/ 365 days a year, with no combining of stack effects.*
- Scenarios 2 and 3 are assessment based on stack effects being combined. As no supporting guidance is provided for combining the stacks, no weighting is given to these scenarios. Very simply put, the combination of the stacks potentially improves the dispersion of the emissions (and clearly does if this is modelled).*

Observations of the assessment.

- *In Section 3.1 the following statements are made for scenario 1 to consider it worst-case.*
 - *All five boilers operating together, which the applicant deems is unlikely,*
 - *All five boilers operating 365 days, 24 hours, which the applicant deems is unlikely and anticipate that the new boilers will only operate for 60% of the year and the existing boiler is only anticipated to be operated for 28% of the year.*
- *Unfortunately, no sensitivity testing of the model is provided in relation to any of the inputs used, in particular a reduced number of uncombined plant operating, reduced operating hours, to demonstrate the significance the above assumptions would have on the assessed impacts*. (*in all models some parameters have large “sensitive” effects on outputs and some smaller less sensitive, consequently unvalidated assumption around “sensitive” parameters have to be viewed with due caution)*
- *Section 2.2 identifies the emission data, which is based on the RHI certificate. The actual boiler monitored for the assessment was a Glenfarrow GF175, whereas it is proposed to install two GF210 and two GF295 Glenfarrow boilers. While these can all be combined for the purpose of the RHI scheme, it does insert a degree of uncertainty in actual emissions and modelling results (e.g the assumption that the amount of PM emitted /speed flow etc is the same in these bigger models that they are using when compared to the smaller one whose parameters have been used in the model).*
- *Isopleths shown in figures 5 to 8 indicate emissions falling within the boundary of residential receptors, although the conclusions of the assessment are that impacts are insignificant or deemed to be not significant. Conditions are thus recommended to ensure that any potential emissions of smoke and odour do not impact on the amenity at residential receptors due to the operation of the boilers.*
- *With regard to PM 2.5, it is noted at this stage that it is no longer really considered appropriate to reference $20\mu\text{gm}^3$ within a planning context, particularly given [The Environmental Improvement Plan 2023](#) interim target of $12\mu\text{gm}^3$ to be achieved by 2028 (not mentioned in the assessment). It is also noted that compliance with the 2040 targets are discussed in Section 3.5. Here a combination of worst case and not so worse case scenarios have been adopted, notably with regard to the assumption that background will reduce to $4.54\mu\text{gm}^3$ by 2040, thus achieving compliance if 3 boilers are used (not with all 5). If it is the case that background levels do not reduce sufficiently, then compliance by 2040 will not be achieved with only 3 boilers running, (though it is conceded other aspects of the assessment are worst case still). In addition this also demonstrates inadvertently that the process would be required to operate with only 3 boilers running to achieve the 2028 interim target ($12\mu\text{gm}^3$) (as it would not benefit from the reduction in the background) at the point of maximum impact, located within the site*

boundary. It would be beneficial if the actual location of the highest recorded values was included or isotherms / maps were at a better resolution.

- *Section 4 of the assessment addresses air quality impacts at specific receptors. This assessment is based on Scenario 1 inputs. Receptors 1 to 8 represent residential premises, with Receptor 1 representing the closest residential garden/ field. A statement on PM2.5 impacts is provided on page 21, below Table 13. The assumption in this assessment being all PM10 emissions are emitted as PM2.5. In this instance only Receptor 1 is likely to exceed the 2040 PM2.5 target value, assuming no exposure reductions to the background value is achieved. A background PM2.5 level of 7.488µgm³ is provided in Section 3.4*

With the above noted, although in the most part “worst case scenarios” have been adopted, there is a sufficient degree of uncertainty, with regard to the model inputs – notably that the model does not account for actual emission rates, that necessitates further validation of this model to ensure compliance with 2040 particulate matter objectives.

If the LPA are of mind to grant the application at this stage, the following conditions are therefore recommended:

- i. There shall be no change to the proposed model of biomass plant without prior written permission of the LPA.*
- ii. Fuel to be burnt in the biomass boilers hereby permitted shall be of a specification as detailed in Section ‘5. Fuel Details’ of the Biomass Boiler Information Request Form, submitted as part of the application (SMD/2024/0087).*
- iii. There shall be no visible emissions from the operation beyond the site boundary as marked in red on Site Layout Plan As Proposed, dated Dec 2023, Job No. 594, Dwg. No. SP2-A.*
- iv. There shall be no odorous emissions from the operation detectable at the site boundary as marked in red on Site Layout Plan As Proposed, dated Dec 2023, Job No. 594, Dwg. No. SP2-A, with any residential receptor, or within the curtilage of any residential premises as determined by the LPA.*
- v. The biomass boilers hereby permitted shall not operate beyond the 01 January 2040, unless a validation statement has been submitted to the local planning authority (LPA) for approval demonstrating that the 2040 PM2.5 target level of 10µgm³ shall be met at all receptor locations assessed within the air quality assessment prepared by Environmental Visage, report issue No. 1, dated November 2024. The method of validation shall be first agreed in writing with the LPA but can be determined either by direct measurement and calculation or through reference to manufacturer’s or installer’s information data specific to the plant make and model installed. In the event that air quality impacts are found not to meet the required human health and environment emissions standards the development hereby approved shall be modified to enable air quality impact requirements to be met in accordance with a scheme approved by the LPA.*

The revised recommended EH Conditions (dated 4.4.25) following the applicant's submitted Boiler Operators Procedure Manual and Complaints Procedure (March 2025) made in response to the EH comments and conditions above, are as follows:

If the LPA are of mind to grant the application at this stage, the following conditions are therefore recommended:

- i. The biomass boilers hereby permitted, shall be operated in accordance with the following:
 - a. UK Renewable Energy boiler procedures (dated 05/03/2025)*
 - b. UK Renewable Energy LTD. Complaints procedure (submitted 04/04/2025).**
- ii. There shall be no change to the proposed model of biomass plant without prior written permission of the LPA.*
- iii. There shall be no visible emissions from the operation beyond the site boundary as marked in red on Site Layout Plan As Proposed, dated Dec 2023, Job No. 594, Dwg. No. SP2-A as determined by the LPA.*
- iv. In the opinion of an Officer of the LPA, there shall be no odorous emissions from the operation detectable at the site boundary as marked in red on Site Layout Plan As Proposed, dated Dec 2023, Job No. 594, Dwg. No. SP2-A, with any residential receptor, or within the curtilage of any residential premises as determined by the LPA.*
- v. The biomass boilers hereby permitted shall not operate beyond the 01 January 2040, unless a validation statement has been submitted to the local planning authority (LPA) for approval demonstrating that the 2040 PM2.5 target level of $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ shall be met at all receptor locations assessed within the air quality assessment prepared by Environmental Visage, report issue No. 1, dated November 2024. The method of validation shall be first agreed in writing with the LPA but can be determined either by direct measurement and calculation or through reference to manufacturer's or installer's information data specific to the plant make and model installed. In the event that air quality impacts are found not to meet the required human health and environment emissions standards the development hereby approved shall be modified to enable air quality impact requirements to be met in accordance with a scheme approved by the LPA.*

Environment Agency

Comments dated 9th July 2024:

As submitted there is not enough information to advise whether or not this would be a permissible activity as a medium combustion plant. There are some exemptions from the need for a permit and these should be checked (specified in the link below).

If it is not exempt the operator will need to confirm the aggregated thermal input. It is stated in the application that the biomass boilers are 420 or 495kw but it is not clear if this means input or output. If the aggregated input exceeds 1 megawatt and the activity is not specified as an exempt activity it will need a permit.

The aggregated thermal input also determines the emission limit value which would be an important aspect of a permit. It should also be confirmed whether the site is located in an Air Quality Zone by the Local Authority as this will be one aspect which decides whether the applicant requires a standard rules or bespoke permit.

Comments dated 16.7.24: On the basis that the proposed boiler units are below 1MWth a Permit would not be required. I would have no further comments to offer at this time.

The EA also provided its standard General Pollution Prevention Advice Note.

Coal Authority

The initial consultation response is as follows:

I have reviewed the proposals and confirm that the application site falls within the defined Development High Risk Area.

The Coal Authority records indicate that within the application site and surrounding area there are coal mining features and hazards, which need to be considered in relation to the determination of this planning application, specifically probable shallow coal mine workings.

Voids and broken/disturbed ground associated with such workings can pose a risk of ground instability and may give rise to the emission of mine gases.

*The Coal Authority **objects** to this planning application, as a Coal Mining Risk Assessment Report has not been submitted as part of the application.*

It is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraphs 189-190 that the applicant demonstrates to the satisfaction of the LPA that the application site is safe, stable and suitable for development.

On receipt of further information the Coal Authority recommended refusal.

On receipt of a further amended Coal Mining Risk Assessment Report, the Coal Authority removed its objection on the basis of a condition further intrusive site investigations. The Coal Authority commented as follows:

The Coal Authority previously objected to this planning application, as a Coal Mining Risk Assessment Report had not been submitted as part of the application. Whilst the applicant then submitted some further information in the form of a Coal Mining Report, we still did not consider this to constitute the required Coal Mining Risk Assessment.

The Coal Authority is therefore now pleased to note the Coal Mining Risk Assessment (April 2024, prepared by Spilman Associates Ltd), which has been informed by an appropriate range of sources of information.

Having reviewed the available evidence the report does consider that there is a medium risk to the proposed development from potential shallow coal mine workings. Accordingly, recommendations have been made that in order to mitigate the risk and to characterise the depth / condition of any coal seams / workings, intrusive ground investigations are required.

The intrusive site investigations should be designed and undertaken by competent persons and should be appropriate to assess the ground conditions on the site in order to establish the coal-mining legacy present and the risks it may pose to the development and inform any remedial works and/or mitigation measures that may be necessary.

The applicant should note that Permission is required from the Coal Authority Permit and Licensing Team before undertaking any activity, such as ground investigation and ground works, which may disturb coal property. Please note that any comments that the Coal Authority may have made in a Planning context are without prejudice to the outcomes of a Permit application.

Mine Gas

It should be noted that wherever coal resources or coal mine features exist at shallow depth or at the surface, there is the potential for mine gases to exist. These risks should always be considered by the LPA. The Planning & Development team at the Coal Authority, in its role of statutory consultee in the planning process, only comments on gas issues if our data indicates that gas emissions have been recorded on the site. However, the absence of such a comment should not be interpreted to imply that there are no gas risks present. Whether or not specific emissions have been noted by the Coal Authority, local planning authorities should seek their own technical advice on.

SUDS

It should be noted that where SUDs are proposed as part of the development scheme consideration will need to be given to the implications of this in relation to the stability and public safety risks posed by coal mining legacy. The developer should seek their own advice from a technically competent person to ensure that a proper assessment has been made of the potential interaction between hydrology, the proposed drainage system and ground stability, including the implications this may have for any mine workings which may be present beneath the site.

SCC Public Rights of Way Team

The Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way for Staffordshire shows a public right of way crossing the application site. From the information submitted, it does not appear it will be directly impacted by the proposed development.

Peak & Northern Footpaths Society

We note that the PROW Cheadle 18 is close to or within the proposed site.

Use of the PROW, and the safety of users must not be affected by the development, nor during the work taking place.

The Ramblers

P.R.O.W Cheadle 18 although not an obvious route through the wood yard is still a path for public use. This must be kept in mind when alteration takes place.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is in the Green Belt. The strategy for the countryside, Policy SS10 requires strict control over inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Para's 154 and 155 of the government planning guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) list the exceptional forms of development which are not deemed to be inappropriate. New buildings on manufacturing sites are not listed and neither is biomass development. The proposal is therefore deemed to amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and which is also, by definition, in the NPPF, harmful to its openness. The NPPF also states that such development should not be approved unless there are very special circumstances which are considered to outweigh the level of harm to the Green Belt.

I consider there are very special circumstances with this proposal. The NPPF does state at the end of Section 13 (Protecting Green Belt land) that renewable energy schemes can be regarded as "very special circumstances". The site is an existing timber processing yard that has been used for this purpose for a significant amount of time and a certificate of lawfulness was granted for this last year. As a result of the development, the site would be used help provide the biomass to generate significant amounts of energy.

The proposed building and the skips would be used to assist with the operation by storing timber imported into the site and also machinery used for the processing of the timber for later use and in the case of the skips for drying the timber. It is worth noting that in 2004, a larger and higher building than the one now proposed and for the purposes of storage purposes for timber manufacturing was approved on the grounds of very special circumstances, but not implemented. I consider that the new proposal would lead to less harm to the openness of the Green Belt than the 2004 approved scheme even together with the four boiler structures and the two skips (the 2004 permission has expired and cannot be implemented).

The economic and employment benefits of assisting an existing business would also together with the renewable energy benefits also cumulatively amount to very special circumstances. It was the economic benefits that allowed the 2004 application for the larger building to be approved under very special circumstances. The Green Belt policies in respect of new employment related development have not significantly changed since 2004 and therefore the proposal remains acceptable in this respect.

With regard to the general principle of development, there is support in the policies in the Local Plan for new development on existing employment sites and also for renewable energy schemes. Overall, I consider the principle of the development to

be acceptable providing that no harmful impacts (other than to the openness of the Green Belt) arise and these need to be considered and are commented on in this report, below.

With regard to the residential amenities of the area and local air quality, there are two residential properties within 100m of the site, to the south. There is currently a wood drying boiler operating at the site with a certificate confirming compliance with air quality regulators. The applicant wants to add four more similar sized “Glenfarrow” boilers, grouped together. Concerns have been raised by some local residents over the impact on air quality and the presence of smoke over their properties. Some of the letters raise issues with smoke and air quality over the years and there were problems recognised by the Council, but this occurred with the previous operator of the site. The current operators were only present for 12 months before the application was submitted (Feb 2024). With regard to this new proposal, the Environment Agency ultimately, on the basis of further information and data over the proposed boilers to be used, did not raise an objection and did not require a licence on the basis that the boilers would not be in excess of 1MW of power.

Environmental Health has raised concerns regarding the potential for smoke encroaching onto nearby residential properties not on the basis of the specific proposed boilers to be used but whether or not these would be operated correctly. Over the past 12 months there has been exchanges of information about the boilers, two air quality assessments have been provided, in June 2024 and November 2024 and a meeting including Environmental Health officers and the applicant’s Air Quality Consultants. Ultimately, following the submission from the applicant of an Operators Procedures Statement/Manual and a Complaints Procedure, Environmental Health did not raise an objection on the basis of a number of conditions to be imposed, as follows:

- i. The biomass boilers hereby permitted, shall be operated in accordance with the following:
 - a. UK Renewable Energy boiler procedures (dated 05/03/2025)
 - b. UK Renewable Energy LTD. Complaints procedure (submitted 04/04/2025).
- ii. There shall be no change to the proposed model of biomass plant without prior written permission of the LPA.
- iii. There shall be no visible emissions from the operation beyond the site boundary as marked in red on Site Layout Plan As Proposed, dated Dec 2023, Job No. 594, Dwg. No. SP2-A as determined by the LPA.
- iv. In the opinion of an Officer of the LPA, there shall be no odorous emissions from the operation detectable at the site boundary as marked in red on Site Layout Plan As Proposed, dated Dec 2023, Job No. 594, Dwg. No. SP2-A, with any residential receptor, or within the curtilage of any residential premises as determined by the LPA.
- v. The biomass boilers hereby permitted shall not operate beyond the 01 January 2040, unless a validation statement has been submitted to the local planning authority (LPA) for approval demonstrating that the 2040 PM_{2.5} target level of 10µgm³ shall be met at all receptor locations assessed within the air quality assessment prepared by Environmental Visage, report issue

No. 1, dated November 2024. The method of validation shall be first agreed in writing with the LPA but can be determined either by direct measurement and calculation or through reference to manufacturer's or installer's information data specific to the plant make and model installed. In the event that air quality impacts are found not to meet the required human health and environment emissions standards the development hereby approved shall be modified to enable air quality impact requirements to be met in accordance with a scheme approved by the LPA.

Officer do not consider that Conditions i(b), iii and iv (relating to their being no visible or odorous emissions at the boundaries of residential receptors) can be applied due to doubts over their enforceability.

As a result, Env Health requested further measures and additions to be added to the Operators Procedure Manual, as an alternative and all of these have been added to an amended Operators Procedure Manual on 8th May 2025.

The measures include restrictions on hours of operation, moisture testing, hourly checks of any visible and odorous smoke and for the boilers to be switched off in this event.

On the basis of the safeguard of compliance with the amended Operators Manual/Statement, added as a condition along with conditions ii and v above, the case officer does not consider the proposal would lead to any significant detriment to air quality or significant harm to the residential amenities of the area caused by smoke.

With regard to noise, further specific data and specifications of the boilers was requested and received and on this basis and on the basis of all other operations at the site including other wood processing operations and vehicular deliveries, has not raised an objection on the basis of a planning condition which requires, inter alia, a restriction on the hours of operation, avoiding works at sensitive times i.e. on weekday evenings, Saturday afternoons and Sundays/Bank Holidays when local residents are more likely to be present.

With regard to the visual amenities of the area, the proposed building would be on an existing yard area and despite its height would be completely screened from views out of the site by thick groups of trees which surround the site. It would be visible from a public footpath which crosses the site, but other industrial/commercial buildings would also be visible. The proposed storage building has a typical portal-frame metal sheeted design which is not out of keeping with the area and the path also crosses a large industrial estate to the north with similar buildings. The metal sheets could be coloured green to ensure the building blends in with the landscape. A larger building was approved under a 2004 application but not implemented. The four boiler units would also not be visible outside of the site due to the tree screening, which would not be materially affected as only one tree is proposed to be removed and this is a poor quality category "C" tree. Overall, the proposal would not significantly harm the character and appearance of the area.

With regard to ground stability, the land underneath the site is affected by shallow historical coal mining activities. The Coal Authority initially objected to the application but on receipt of an amended Coal Mining Risk Assessment report, the Coal Authority has assessed that there is “medium risk” to the development but that these risks can be resolved following further more intrusive ground investigations and if necessary, mitigation or stabilisation measures to ensure no significant further ground disturbance or damage to the proposed buildings or structures. The further investigations can be achieved by way of a planning condition requiring such investigations and further groundworks if needed, before the commencement of the development. With the safeguard of the condition, the proposal would comply with Policy SD1 of the Local Plan.

With regard to highway safety, the access onto the main road benefits from good visibility to the north but is a bit restricted by the geometry of the road to the south although vegetation clearance has improved visibility in this direction. There have been no recorded vehicle collisions on this stretch of road in the past five years. The local highways authority does not object to the application providing a condition is added to improve the surface of the access road where it meets the main road. Overall, the proposal would not be detrimental to highway safety.

With regard to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the application was submitted and validated before the legal requirement for this, which commenced in April 2024.

The public footpath crossing the site would not be affected by the proposed buildings or structures. One of the letters outlines possible prevention of access to a field within one of the objectors properties but this is a legal matter and not a material planning consideration. The letter also outlines an increased fire risk and that Council planted trees at the property are used for the wood processing. However, the wood processing operations at the site, including the use of nearby trees, has been a long established operation at the site for several years.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposed development is deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is by definition harmful to its openness and should not be approved unless there are very special circumstances considered to outweigh the harm to the openness. It is considered the economic benefits of the proposal together with the support for renewable energy creation would amount to very special circumstances and that there are no other significant harms identified with the proposal which would be weighed against the benefits i.e. there are no harms to the visual or residential amenities of the area, ground stability or highway safety, with the safeguard of conditions, particularly those which would control emissions, smoke and noise. The proposed development would also be less harmful to the openness of the Green Belt than a development approved at the site in 2004 which was not implemented and where similar Green Belt policies applied and this scheme was also deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt but allowed due to the economic “very special circumstances”.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston
Recommendation Date: 8.5.25

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council