

SMDC Planning Reference –	SMD/2026/0050		
Site Name –	Rownall Road BESS		
Summary of proposals -	Agricultural land improvement scheme to land to the south of Rownall Road, Cellarhead		
Consultation Note Subject –	Landscape and Visual Matters		
Planning Case Officer –	Jane Curley – Principal Planning Officer		
Landscape comments prepared by	Stuart Ryder of Ryder Landscape Consultants		
Date(s) of site visit —	9/6/26	Date of this response	16/6/26
Number / Purpose of note	To consider the submitted Materials Management Planning information submitted in May 2026 and conclude on the anticipated landscape and visual effects		
Summary of consultation response	• That the proposals for material management and bund formation are considered acceptable. • That landscape and material management conditions need to be applied to address risks and construction impacts of the proposals.		

Dear Mrs Curley

SMD/2026/0050 – AGRICULTURAL LAND IMPROVEMENT NEAR ROWNALL ROAD – LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONSULTATION NOTE

Thank you for appointing us to review the landscape and visual implications of the above proposals submitted on behalf of the Applicant – John Pointon & Sons for use of excavated earth material associated with the Rownall Road BESS scheme that is currently under construction.

Site Visit

I attended Site on 9th June 2026 and viewed the proposed deposition areas from Rownall Road, the Public Footpath ?? that crosses the Site and from the A520 Cheadle Road set on the other side of the valley.

I took extracts of the submitted Planning Statement v2 by Wharfe Planning and associated landscape note by Terrain Landscape Architects to inform of the proposed location and height of the proposed mounding. I have also reviewed the submitted information in the Traffic Management Plan, spoil reduction information and relevant earthworks drawings. In addition, I have viewed the Site and surroundings on Google Earth and consulted the Staffordshire County Council online Public Right of Way (PRoW) map.

This research and submitted information has provided me with a good overview of the proposals.

Description of the Proposals

The proposal comprises the deposition and grading of clean agricultural soils within pastureland to the east of Rownall Road, associated with the wider management of material arising from the approved BESS development. The stated purpose of the works is to improve agricultural land quality, drainage and manageability, while avoiding unnecessary export of clean natural material from the wider holding. The totals of materials proposed for relocation as an agricultural land improvement scheme involving **3,309m³ of topsoil and 12,350m³ of clean and natural soil, 15,659m³ total**, moved within the same agricultural holding.

The Traffic Management Plan, which shows deposition areas, temporary roadway, PRow crossings/diversion and access arrangements. Critically the proposals show a straight over the road crossing of Rownall Road rather than a length of running along the road corridor.

The Off-Site Spoil Reduction Addendum, which records the reduction from **38,775m³ to 15,659m³**; and the Landscape Statement, which concludes likely effects would be up to **minor landscape effects** and **minor/medium short-term visual effects**, reducing following restoration.

The Application Site

The application site lies within a rural agricultural landscape characterised by sloping pasture, small watercourses, hedgerows, occasional mature trees and a network of public rights of way. The land also forms part of the wider Green Belt and Churnet Valley landscape context. The site is not visually isolated, and the submitted material identifies potential visibility from nearby public rights of way, including Cheddleton 43 and Cheddleton 18, from parts of Rownall Road, and from elevated receptors to the east around the A520/Wetley Rocks area to the other side of the valley. The visual influence is therefore localised rather than absent, and the proposal will introduce a perceptible change to landform and surface condition during the operational and restoration phases.

The proposed receptor Site has a disturbed ground profile for reasons unknown and until 2017 at least held a more wooded character down the clough. The 2017 Google Earth image also shows some land drainage improvement works to the proposed northern deposition field. There are four mature open field trees in this northern field that are attractive stock and a band of scrubby trees (on some maps labelled Little Sprinks) between the upper deposition areas and the lower, smaller one. It is this smaller deposition area that currently looks like the most disturbed area of the Site.

Within the context of the Site there is Rownall Cottage set to the side of Rownall Road and to the west of the deposition areas that is currently boarded up but this does not stop it being reinhabited in the future. On a grander scale is Woodend Hall, a large handsome property with views east across the valley towards Wetley Rocks.

Fig 1 – Extract of 2017 Google Earth aerial imagery



Landscape Effects

There is some concern regarding the scale and nature of the engineering operation, particularly because the works involve intentional alteration of an existing valley-side/clough landform and the deposition of what is still a substantial volume of material. Even though the revised scheme has materially reduced the volume of soil proposed for deposition, the works would still be capable of being experienced as a noticeable intervention in the rural landscape. During implementation, bare soil, machinery, temporary access tracks, stockpiles, traffic management and temporary PRow arrangements will be visible to nearby walkers and some road users. These effects would be most apparent at close range, particularly where the Public Right of Way network passes through or near the working area.

The principal landscape concern relates to the need to ensure that the final landform reads as a natural agricultural slope rather than as an engineered platform, bund or artificial fill feature. The local landscape is strongly influenced by sloping ground, small watercourses and field patterns, and it is important that any re-profiling respects these characteristics. The works should avoid over-smoothing the landform, creating abrupt transitions, affecting the legibility of the clough, or compromising the visual relationship

between the watercourse, pasture and field boundaries. The proposed 3 metre stand-off from the watercourse is therefore important, as is the detailed control of final levels, gradients, soil handling and reinstatement.

Visual Effects

In visual terms, the most sensitive receptors are the users of nearby public rights of way, who have a higher sensitivity to changes in rural landscape character than passing road users. The temporary diversion and crossing arrangements shown on the Traffic Management Plan will also affect recreational experience for a limited period for users on PRow Cheddleton 43. These effects should not be dismissed, particularly because PRow users are likely to experience the works at close range. However, the effects are expected to be temporary in nature and reversible in visual terms, provided that the works are carefully managed, promptly restored and successfully re-seeded.

The submitted Landscape Statement concludes that a full LVA/LVIA would be likely to identify no greater than minor landscape effects and up to minor/medium short-term visual effects for the most affected receptors, reducing to negligible following restoration. This conclusion appears broadly reasonable, particularly having regard to the revised reduction in deposition volume. I would however place the visual effect a little higher for path users and set it at Moderate, Adverse and Temporary. The absence of new buildings, permanent hardstanding, lighting or vertical infrastructure is also material. The proposal would remain agricultural in character and once restored, should be read as part of the surrounding pastoral landscape rather than as a separate or urbanising form of development.

The proposal would not, in my view, result in unacceptable harm to the openness of the Green Belt in landscape and visual terms. Spatially, the land would remain open and undeveloped, with no built form introduced. Visually, there would be temporary construction-phase activity and some permanent alteration to landform, but the final use would remain agricultural, and the restored surface would be grassed. Subject to the landform being graded sympathetically and restored successfully, the proposal would preserve the prevailing rural character and would not give rise to a material loss of visual openness.

Material Reduction

The reduction in off-site spoil exports is a relevant positive consideration. The revised approach substantially reduces the quantity of material requiring removal from the wider BESS site and allows clean natural soils to be reused locally within the same broader agricultural holding. This reduces the need for longer-distance transport and avoids unnecessary disposal of suitable material. However, this benefit does not remove the need for careful landscape control at the receiving site. The acceptability of the proposal depends on the final landform, restoration and aftercare being secured with sufficient precision.

Further Site Observations

There were four observations from Site that you may wish to bring to the Applicant's attention or that of Ameresco as beneficiaries of the 'parent' planning application are:

Hedgerow removal - A section of hedgerow has been coppiced down to the ground at the BESS' site entrance, and this was not part of the approved BESS landscape or clearance works. It appears to have been done to form better sightlines at the construction site access. Ameresco will need to remedy this with the provision of a replacement section of hedge using advanced nursery stock to create an instant effect. My advice is that it is done in the next available planting season (Nov 26 to Mar 27) but set back on an agreed sightline so that it can start to establish now and replace the unconsented hedge removal now. It will need to be watered and cared for during the current BESS construction works rather than leaving establishment aftercare to the end of the construction activity. If it has been approved by later applications to SMDC or through clearance drawings I have not seen, then please disregard the above comments about it being unapproved.

Cumulative Effects – With the BESS site formation in 'full-swing' there will be a cumulative effect between the BESS works and these deposition works. There is the visible presence of the construction cabins, the movement of plant and audible reversing alarms of vehicles adding to the sense of disturbance. I have not noted any substantive discussion of cumulative landscape or visual effects in the submitted documents. Instead, they recognise the operational relationship between the approved BESS development and the proposed soil deposition works, particularly in relation to the reuse of clean natural material and the management of construction traffic. However, it does not include a separate cumulative landscape and visual assessment. This is a limitation of the submission, although the likely combined effects appear to be primarily short-term and construction-related, with the restored deposition areas expected to return to pasture and the longer-term visual influence of the soil deposition scheme reducing substantially after establishment.

Associated views with Wood End Hall - It appears the visual relationship with Woodend Hall (LVA reference as Wood End as per OS Map annotation) as viewed from Footpath 43 over the proposed smaller deposition area has not been included. The hall is clearly visible from Footpath 43 and a further representative photograph down the bank from where VP3 was taken would have demonstrated this. The effects on the residents of Wood End are however covered in the LVA. This is not a substantive point that requires addressing at this stage, but it would have made the LVA stronger to acknowledge the Site and attractive nature of views to the Hall.

Clough water flow treatment – there was a notable flow down the base of the currently disturbed clough during the Site visit. I have previously expressed concern about water runoff from the soil deposition works during the works and afterwards when established. Until the grass sward is established there will be a high chance of sedimentary run-off. The reference to a 3m standoff from the clough's watercourse is positive and as it is not a main river a full 8m standoff is not required. However, the base of the clough already appears to be disturbed land and may actually require a degree

of working to smooth out flow run-off. The protection of the private land drains is also recommended for the benefit of the wider fields but is not mandatory.

Planning Conditions

I consider that the proposal is acceptable in landscape and visual terms, subject to appropriate planning conditions. These should secure: final existing and proposed levels; detailed grading and tie-in with surrounding landform; soil handling and decompaction methodology; protection of the watercourse buffer; protection of retained trees and hedgerows; temporary PRow management and reinstatement; removal of temporary access materials; restoration seeding; and a defined aftercare period to ensure successful establishment of pasture and any associated planting. Conditions should also require remediation of any failed grass establishment, rutting, compaction, erosion or settlement within the restored areas.

Without prejudice to your decision, I have set some suggested draft conditions in a separate annex that you could incorporate into any granting of planning consent. You may however wish to change them to complement other Conditions and to ensure they meet the six tests for Conditions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the proposal raises some legitimate landscape and visual concerns because it involves a sizeable engineering operation within a sensitive rural setting and close to public rights of way. There would be short-term adverse visual effects during the works, and the final acceptability of the scheme depends upon the quality of landform restoration. Nevertheless, the reduced scale of the scheme, its agricultural purpose, the absence of permanent built development, the retention of landscape structure primarily its fieldscape, the proposed restoration to pasture and the localised nature of visual effects all weigh in favour of acceptance. Subject to suitably worded conditions, I do not raise a landscape or visual objection.