

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 – No.2		
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	10/8/26
Number / Purpose of note	To consider further submitted Materials Management Planning information submitted in June 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 continue to need to be applied to address risks and construction impacts of the proposals.		

Dear Ms. Pope

AGRICULTURAL LAND IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATED WITH ROWNALL ROAD BESS SCHEME – LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL COIMMENTS

Thank you for asking me to review the additional information submitted by the Applicant in relation to the proposed agricultural land improvement / soil deposition scheme at land off Rownall Road.

I have reviewed the additional material, including the updated Terrain Landscape Statement Revision A. I understand that the additional information has been submitted in response to earlier officer comments and to clarify landscape, visual and heritage matters associated with the proposed deposition of soils arising from the wider BESS development.

Review of additional Applicant material

The updated Landscape Statement provides helpful further clarification of the landscape, visual and heritage context for the proposal. It remains important to note that the document is expressly described as a Landscape Statement and not as a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment or Landscape and Visual Appraisal prepared in accordance with GLVIA3. However, given the nature of the proposal, the submitted information is sufficient to assist in reaching a proportionate landscape and visual judgement, subject to the detailed implementation matters of the new ground form being properly controlled.

The Applicant's additional material confirms that the proposed soil deposition areas are located within grassed pasture fields to the east of Rownall Road. The areas sit on either side of a narrow watercourse within a shallow valley cut into the broader east-facing slope, with existing levels ranging from

approximately 232m AOD in the west to approximately 198m AOD in the east. This assists as it confirms the Applicant's recognition of the relationship between the proposed deposition areas, the local valley-side topography and the existing watercourse/clough feature.

The Statement records that the deposition would be positioned to avoid the existing drainage channel, graded to blend in with existing levels, and would have a maximum height of approximately 3.5m above existing ground levels. It also confirms that the deposition areas are to be seeded to create neutral grassland and proposes three small trees to supplement existing tree cover near the deposition area. These clarifications are welcomed and are broadly consistent with the agricultural land improvement purpose of the proposal.

The landscape character information confirms that the site lies wholly within the Ancient Slope and Valley Farmlands Landscape Character Type (LCT). The key characteristics of this landscape include strongly undulating or sloping landform cut by small-scale steep-sided stream valleys, small-scale irregular fields bounded by trees and hedgerows, extensive views from higher ground, intimate wooded valleys, isolated properties and narrow winding lanes. These characteristics remain directly relevant to the assessment of the scheme because the proposal involves landform alteration within a sloping valley-side landscape where the watercourse/clough feature, pasture, trees, hedgerows and field pattern all contribute to the attractive local character.

Final landform and levels

The updated Landscape Statement states that the proposed level changes have been designed to grade into the shape of the existing landform and would not introduce discordant level changes. It concludes that the wider sloping landform would remain clearly legible and that effects on landform would be no greater than minor and permanent. I accept that this is a reasonable conclusion in principle, provided the final landform is delivered as described.

However, the final landform remains the principal landscape issue for me. In my previous consultation response, I identified the need to ensure that the new topography reads as a natural agricultural slope rather than as an engineered platform, bund or artificial fill feature. I also noted that 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. These concerns remain relevant and at the heart of the updated Conditions set below.

I therefore consider that a condition securing final levels, contour plans, cross-sections and landform tie-in remains necessary. This is not intended to question the principle of the Applicant's design approach. Rather, it is required to secure the detailed landform outcome on which the Applicant's own assessment relies. If you consider the submitted Soil Deposition Plan and Typical Sections already provides sufficient detail to identify the approved finished levels, gradients, sections and edge tie-ins, the condition could be framed as a compliance condition. If you do not consider it contains sufficient information then further details such as levels, contours, sections and edge tie-in information should be requested before soil deposition or land re-profiling commences.

I have gone back to the plan and reviewed it again after noting the Agent's comment that sufficient information had been included in it. I have placed numbered orange dots to record my observations about the information shown. They correspond with the list of comments below:

1. The annotation about no fill in the drainage channel should note 'No fill within at least 3.5m of the top of the bank'

2. The contour line here appears to form a small plateau, and the contours do not flow, is there any reason why?
3. Additional section lines are recommended to the west to show form of embankment and assist its delivery management on Site.
4. Tree protection measures could be indicated on the earthworks plan to reinforce their need.
5. Helpful if contour heights are put on lines, or every 5m line – see also Point 23.
6. Contours appear somewhat straight and angular when more sinuous ground form should be achieved.
7. Is the dashed red line the red line boundary, it is not included in the Key.
8. Including a distance from Rownall Cottage to the red line boundary or proposed tie-in would be helpful to confirm distances and to aid management on Site.
9. Tree protection at the end of the stand of trees possibly required – defer to AMS information.
10. Suggestion to move Section line through high point of eastern deposition area to show worst case situation.
11. Additional section suggested through high point.
12. Tree protection is in line with AMS requirements.
13. The reference to ‘typically shown’ is unhelpful as it is not definitive information. I understand why the term ‘typical’ is used but it leaves areas for interpretation.
14. The upper 3.5m high change in level shade does not appear on the indicated earthworks, if it is not to be deposited at this level it could be removed to keep the level of fill to the drawn maximum height.
15. The contours and narrowness of the depth bands at the eastern ends of the two deposit areas appear steep, could this be looked at again to ensure the ground form appears to ‘flow’ out of the existing levels.
16. Use of the word ‘Typical’ in the section titles makes them less robust in terms of enforceability as they are therefore not definitive proposals.
17. Tree protection measures on the section would again be helpful in reinforcing their presence and requirements for the duration of the work.
18. It could be the nature of the section drawing but the upper deposition line is drawn with angular lines rather than smooth and flowing surface line.
19. Please indicate the clear no-deposition area set at least 3.5m back from the top of the channel to either side of the brook.
20. 1:3 is generally taken as the maximum steepness of unstabilised earth slopes but can appear too steep in certain situations. Here, however 1:3 side slopes down to the local watercourse would emphasise the small valley form on the valley side.
21. Fill material – how is this to be laid needs to be defined and possibly a cross reference to the scheme’s Materials Management Plan or similar given. Ensuring topsoil uppers of sufficient depth and quality to allow seedbeds to be formed will be key to the success of grass sward creation.
22. Useful to have PRoW put on the plan.
23. Spot heights where the maximum fill level is proposed to show a proposed finish level and then current level in brackets would assist in defining the proposed fill depths in lines along where the maximum depth is indicated. This would give more definitive information.

The current drawing is useful in terms of locating where the deposition areas are proposed and general depths but does not contain sufficient information that can be monitored to assist in the schemes delivery and enforceability should issues arise.

Soil handling, restoration and aftercare

The Applicant's assessment repeatedly relies on the restored land becoming assimilated into the surrounding pasture once grass seeding establishes. The Statement refers to the deposition areas being seeded to create other neutral grassland and indicates that seeding is likely to establish within a growing season, with visual effects reducing to negligible for a number of receptors following restoration.

This is welcomed, but successful restoration is not automatic. The proposal still involves the movement and placement of a substantial volume of material. My earlier response recorded the scheme as involving 3,309m³ of topsoil and 12,350m³ of clean and natural soil, giving a total of 15,659m³ of material moved within the same agricultural holding. Poor soil handling could result in any of the following or a combination of them:

- compaction,
- smearing,
- rutting,
- settlement,
- slumping,
- erosion,
- weed growth, or
- failed grass establishment.

These effects could persist beyond the short construction period and could result in avoidable residual landscape and visual harm, or further expense to the Applicant as they seek to remedy the soils and seeding at the deposition areas.

I therefore consider that a focused soil handling, placement, decompaction, restoration and aftercare condition remains justified. The condition should secure the source, quantity and type of soil to be deposited; the sequence of stripping, movement, storage, placement and spreading; restrictions on working in unsuitable weather or ground conditions; measures to prevent the points listed above; decompaction and cultivation of the receiving areas; seedbed preparation; appropriate seed mix; timing and method of seeding; and remedial works where soil problems or failed grass sward establishment occurs.

Where BNG, habitat management or landscape management documents already provide equivalent and enforceable detail, those documents can be cross-referenced to avoid duplication. However, I would not recommend removing the condition unless you as an experienced minerals case officer is satisfied that soil handling, placement and remedial aftercare are all secured elsewhere with sufficient precision.

Watercourse and clough protection

The Applicant's confirmation that the deposition would avoid the existing drainage channel is welcomed. The watercourse/clough feature is, however, the central drainage element to this part of the valley side. I therefore consider that a watercourse/clough buffer condition remains necessary. The purpose of the condition is to ensure that the 3.5m stand-off is protected during the works and that;

- soil deposition,
- tracking,
- stockpiling,
- storage of materials,

- machinery movement,
- fuel storage and re-fueling,
- drainage alteration or
- ground raising

does not take place within the buffer unless otherwise agreed. The condition should also ensure that the watercourse is not culverted, infilled, narrowed, regraded or otherwise altered without prior written approval.

Public rights of way and visual receptors

The Applicant's additional Landscape Statement acknowledges that users of PRoW Cheddleton 43 and PRoW Cheddleton 18 would obtain clear close-distance views of the proposed operations. The Applicant assesses those effects as up to minor/medium during operation, reducing to negligible following restoration.

I broadly agree that the effects would be temporary and capable of reducing substantially following restoration. However, I remain of the view that the temporary visual and recreational effects for the closest path users could reasonably be described as moderate adverse during the working period, given the proximity of the earthworks and the direct experience of machinery, bare soil, temporary access arrangements and landform change all combined with a loss of tranquility. This difference in judgement does not lead me to object to the proposal, but it supports the need for proportionate controls over the PRoW setting and the reinstatement of affected land.

I recognise that any formal temporary closure, diversion or management of the PRoW will be dealt with through Staffordshire County Council as the Local Highway Authority statutory process. However, that process should be distinguished from the landscape planning controls required to secure reinstatement of the affected route and surrounding land. The legal management of the route may not, by itself, secure removal of temporary access materials, repair of rutting or compaction, reinstatement of adjoining pasture, regrading of disturbed ground, repair of field boundaries, or restoration of the visual and recreational quality of the route following completion.

A PRoW-related landscape condition therefore remains justified but can be refined so that it does not duplicate the separate legal public rights of way process.

Listed buildings and setting

The Applicant's updated Landscape Statement now includes consideration of the listed buildings to the west of Rownall Road, including Rownall Farmhouse and its associated listed barn, and Ivy House Farmhouse and its associated listed barn/stables. The Applicant concludes that there would be no direct physical effects on the listed buildings, but accepts that there would be some short-term adverse effects on their settings during deposition operations, reducing to negligible once grass seeding establishes.

This additional information is welcomed and appears to address the earlier omission in broad landscape and visual terms. From a landscape and visual perspective, it does not materially change my overall advice. However, it reinforces the importance of the same controls already identified in relation to final landform, soil handling, restoration and aftercare. The reduction of setting effects to negligible depends upon the deposited material being sympathetically graded, the clough/watercourse landform remaining legible, and the restored grassland establishing successfully.

I do not raise any additional landscape or visual objection arising from the listed building setting information now provided. I recommend that the case officer considers the Applicant's heritage assessment alongside any conservation advice received in their determination process.

Response to the Applicant's comments on conditions

The Applicant's comments on the suggested landscape conditions are noted. I accept that some matters may already be addressed in part through submitted drawings, arboricultural information, traffic/construction management material, the PRow procedures and BNG or habitat management requirements. It would therefore be reasonable for the case officer to avoid duplication and to cross-reference approved documents where those documents provide sufficiently precise and enforceable control.

However, I do not consider that the additional information removes the need for core landscape conditions. The proposal involves the deposition and grading of a substantial volume of material within a sloping and scenic valley-side agricultural landscape. The Applicant's own Landscape Statement relies on the works being graded into the existing landform and successfully restored to grassland and becoming visually assimilated after seeding establishes. Those outcomes are central to the conclusion that landscape and visual effects would reduce to negligible following restoration. They should therefore be secured by condition.

The most important landscape controls are final levels and landform tie-in, soil handling and decompaction, watercourse/clough protection, retained tree and hedgerow protection (possibly defined in Arboricultural Impact Assessment or similar looking along the route and not just at the deposition areas), temporary access and PRow reinstatement, restoration seeding and aftercare, completion verification, and restriction on further soil importation or additional land raising. These controls are not intended to duplicate other technical responses, but to ensure that the final landscape outcome is acceptable and that short-term construction-phase effects do not result in avoidable residual harm.

Revised condition approach

I modified the original condition schedule to reduce and refine it into a shorter set of core landscape conditions. It is attached as a separate document again. The conditions may be further shortened by you as case officer where certain matters are already secured by approved technical documents, provided that those documents are sufficiently precise, enforceable and directly relevant to the landscape risks identified.

The revised core landscape conditions should secure:

- approved landscape plans, final levels and landform tie-in;
- soil handling, placement and decompaction;
- watercourse/clough buffer protection;
- retained trees, hedgerows, temporary access and PRow reinstatement;
- landscape restoration, establishment and five-year aftercare; and
- completion verification and restriction on further soil importation or land raising.

I would not recommend removing these controls as they go directly to the landscape and visual acceptability of the scheme. The Applicant's Landscape Statement concludes that effects would reduce following restoration, but that conclusion depends entirely upon the successful delivery of the restored landform and grassland.

Conclusion

The Applicant's additional material is helpful and provides further clarity on the receiving landform, the intended grading approach, landscape character, visual effects from public rights of way and longer-distance receptors, and the setting of nearby listed buildings. It supports the broad conclusion reached in my first consultation response: that the proposal can be acceptable in landscape and visual terms.

However, the additional material does not remove the need for enforceable landscape controls. The scheme remains a sizeable soil deposition and landform alteration operation in a sloping and scenic rural valley-side landscape. The acceptability of the proposal depends upon the final landform appearing natural and agrarian, the watercourse/clough feature being protected, soils being handled and restored appropriately, temporary access and PRow effects being properly reinstated, and the restored grassland establishing successfully.

Subject to suitably worded and proportionate landscape conditions, I maintain that there is no landscape or visual objection to the proposal.