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**STATKRAFT**

**SWANSEA NORTH GREENER GRID PARK**

**LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL**

**DECEMBER 2022**

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**DECEMBER 2022**

**PREPARED BY:**

John Nuttall Technical Director

**REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY:**

Lucy Green Technical Director

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**CONTENTS:**

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1	Overview	
1.2	Description of the Development	
1.3	Scope of LVA	
<b>2</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1	Introduction	
2.2	Study Area	
2.3	Desk-Based Study	
2.4	Field Study	
2.5	Consultation	
<b>3</b>	<b>LANDSCAPE PLANNING CONTEXT</b> .....	<b>8</b>
3.1	Introduction	
3.2	Swansea LDP 2010-2025. (Adopted 2019)	
3.3	Policy CV 2: Development in The Countryside	
3.4	Policy ER 2: Strategic Green Infrastructure Network	
3.5	Policy ER 5: Landscape Protection	
3.6	Policy ER 11: Trees, Hedgerows and Development	
3.7	Policy EU 1: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Proposals	
3.8	Landscape Planning Designations	
3.9	Special Landscape Area	
<b>4</b>	<b>LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL</b> .....	<b>12</b>
4.1	Introduction	
4.2	National Landscape Character	
4.3	Regional Landscape Character	
4.4	Local Landscape Character	
4.5	Landscape Sensitivity	
4.6	Potential Landscape Effects	
4.7	Summary of Landscape Effects	
<b>5</b>	<b>VISUAL APPRAISAL</b> .....	<b>20</b>
5.1	Introduction	
5.2	Zone of Theoretical Visibility	
5.3	Viewpoint Appraisal	
5.4	Predicted Visual Effects	
5.5	Summary of Visual Effects	

<b>6</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE EFFECTS</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT MEASURES</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	<b>26</b>

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1** Supporting plans

**Appendix 2** View Points 1-11

**Appendix 3** Computer Generated images of the development

**Tables**

**Table 1** Landscape planning designation

**Table 2** Potential Landscape effects

**Table 3** Predicted visual effects

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Overview**

1.1.1 This report presents the findings of a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) undertaken as part of the planning application for a Greener Grid Park ('the Development') located on agricultural land to the east of the existing Swansea North substation and gas compressor station ('the Site'). The Site is currently bounded by agricultural land to the north, east, west and south. The 299 MW Abergelli Gas Fired Power Station has received DCO consent and is located to the north east of the Development with an associated access road to the south. It is intended that a similar access be used for the Development as for Abergelli Power Station and so the effects of this consented route have not been assessed.

The LVA describes the landscape and visual effects of the Development alone and in combination with other cumulative development, in this case the Abergelli Power Station.

The LVA has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect in accordance with good practice guidance and is informed by local landscape character assessments, landscape capacity guidance and other relevant guidance as specified.

1.1.2 The site is located on agricultural land to the east of the existing Swansea North substation and gas compressor station ('the Site'). It's grid reference number is SN65355 01143 and What3words location: storms.clip.ranges and Nearest Address: Felindre Pumping Station Substation, Ffordd Parc Felindre, Llangyfelach. The nearest post code is SA5 7DU. The local planning authority is Swansea council.

1.1.3 The Site is currently bounded by agricultural land to the north, east, west and south. The 299 MW Abergelli Gas Fired Power Station is located to the north east of the Development with an associated access road to the south. It is intended that a similar access be used for the Development as for Abergelli Power Station and so the effects of this consented route have not been assessed. (See site location plan ST19905-003A Appendix 1)

1.1.4 The LVA the landscape and visual effects of the Development alone and in combination with other cumulative development, in this case the Abergelli Power Station. NB there is already a consented application for this site 2021/0163/FUL.

### **1.2 The Development Description**

*“Construction of a Greener Grid Park Facility comprising synchronous compensators, transformers, generators and ancillary plant, underground electricity ducting and/or cabling to connect to the existing substation, and associated hard and soft landscaping.”*

1.2.1 The Proposed Development is a Greener Grid Park facility. Which will comprise the following: (see Appendix 1 ST19905 – 010 site infrastructure)

- 3 no. of Energy Management Buildings (Steel clad framed style structures 7m high) [EMB] each housing 2 no. synchronous compensators to stabilise, provide fault current, and inertia to the National Grid.
- 2 Welfare Facility/Office Containers & 2 Store Containers.
- HV Equipment & structures including large & small transformers, circuit breakers, cable sealing ends, busbars, ducting & cables (over & underground) bus ducts, concrete plinths & bunds etc., all contained within a porous gravel yard.
- 1 Comms House, 3 Coolers banks
- 2 Emergency Diesel Generators for the rare occurrence of a loss of external Grid supply. The site will generate no power for export.
- Electric/weld-mesh steel palisade Security Fencing which will enclose the high voltage compounds.
- Security Columns with CCTV Cameras and Lighting.
- Extension of the existing access road from the National Grid Substation (intended to be shared with Abergelli Power Station).
- Underground Cable Connection to existing Substation.
- Landscaping hard & soft.
- All associated and ancillary site works necessary to facilitate the development including: all necessary drainage systems, foundations works for the above compounds, various underground cables and ducts, equipment plinths, internal services roads,

Further details can be found in the plans submitted as part of this application.

Most components of the Proposed Development will be housed in moss green steel container-style units, while the main building will be constructed with moss green pre-galvanised power coated steel.

The Proposed Development would comprise a Greener Grid Park, part of NGEN's Stability Pathfinder Projects<sup>[1]</sup> which currently focus on synchronous compensators. The synchronous compensators will reduce frequency and voltage fluctuations, thus improving grid stability and reducing the risk of power failures.

1.2.2 This application gives further capacity to the consented application which provides services supporting the flexible operation of the National Grid and decarbonisation of electricity supply e.g. by balancing electricity supply and demand. The Development will import and export electricity but will not generate any additional electricity. The proposed batteries will store surplus electricity to be fed into the grid when required, while the energy management modules will reduce fluctuations, thus improving stability and reducing the risk of power failures.

1.2.3 The footprint of the overall red line application for the compound containing the just the infrastructure and associated planting is around 27,000m<sup>2</sup> (the red line for the top compound area of the consented application 20021/0163/FUL is 19,000 m<sup>2</sup>) so an

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<sup>[1]</sup> NOA Stability Pathfinder Phase 3 [Online] Available at:

<https://www.nationalgrideso.com/document/208341/download>

increase of around 8,000m<sup>2</sup>. The whole site is 6.24 Ha which includes the access road leading to the site. This report considers the infrastructural element of the proposal.

- 1.2.4 The change in the overall footprint of the site enclosure compared with the consented application 2021/0163/FUL, is the access 'funnel', leading from the gateway of the site towards the internal infrastructure. Its width increases in width from 15m at the gateway 'funnelling out' to over 50m width. It then encloses the rest of the site infrastructure (see Plan ST19906-003A, appendix 1.). The external perimeter compound fencing is 2.4 meters in height. The total footprint of the fenced compound is approximately 1.3 ha. The wider Site area of the planning application boundary is 6.24 hectares (ha). Access to the site will be gained from the Abergelli Power Station access road which provides a link to the B4489 to the west beyond the Swansea North substation.
- 1.2.5 The construction period of the Development will last approximately 18 months and the operational period of the Development will be permanent.
- 1.2.6 The Development has the potential to affect the following landscape and visual resources during construction and operation:
- Physical features and elements of the landscape within the Site (alteration and / or removal);
  - Landscape character of the Site and the surrounding area;
  - Landscapes designated for their special qualities or scenic beauty; and
  - The visual amenity of people in the surrounding area.
- 1.2.7 This LVA considers the effects the application will have on the landscape character of the site and the visual impact it will make.
- 1.2.8 The LVA is accompanied by;

### ***Appendix 1***

- Plan of the site – ST19905-03A
- Infrastructure plan – ST19905-010
- Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) – ST19905-001
- Landscape and Biodiversity Mitigation Plan Number ST19905-017
- Plan of known assets – ST19905-018

### ***Appendix 2***

- Figure 01: View North West Long distance view
- Figure 02: View South West Long distance view
- Figure 03: View South Long distance view
- Figure 04: View South East Mid distance view
- Figure 05: View South East Mid distance view
- Figure 06: View East Mid distance view

- Figure 07: View North Close distance view
- Figure 08: View North Close distance view
- Figure 09: East Close distance view
- Figure 10: Close distance view
- Figure 11: North East Long distance view

### ***Appendix 3***

- Proposed and Consented CGI image of the Site Layout – 3D Plans

## **1.3 Scope of the LVA**

### **1.3.1 The application LVA comprises:**

- A description of the existing baseline conditions, including identification of key landscape characteristics, relevant planning designations /constraints and potential visual receptors which may be affected by the Development;
- An assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects; and
- Recommendations for mitigation measures to offset, or reduce, any adverse effects identified (see the Landscape Plan ST19905-017 in Appendix 1).



## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

2.1.1 The methodology for the LVA is based on current best practice guidance, namely:

- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition;
- The Landscape Institute (2013), GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13;
- Landscape Institute (2019) Technical Guidance Note 06/19 Visual representation of Development Proposals;
- LANDMAP; and
- Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP) 2010-2025. Adopted on the 28th February 2019

### **2.2 Study Area**

2.2.1 The study area for the LVA was set as a 2 km offset from the site boundary and encompasses the northern outskirts of Swansea and surrounding villages and countryside. It is considered that for a development of this type and scale there would be no substantial landscape or visual effects beyond this distance.

### **2.3 Desk-Based Study**

2.3.1 Information for the LVA was gathered from the following sources:

- Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP) 2010-2025. Adopted 28th February 2019;
- LANDMAP;
- Web GIS data bases;
- Ordnance Survey 1:25000 scale site-centred digital raster map; and
- Georeferenced Aerial photography;
- Contour mapping (1 m); and
- Google Maps (<http://maps.google.co.uk/>).

### **2.4 Field Study**

2.4.1 A field survey was undertaken to assess:

- The landscape characteristics;
- Views of the site from the surrounding areas;
- The location and sensitivity of visual receptors; and
- The landscape and visual effects arising from the Development.

2.4.2 The survey was undertaken from roads, public rights of way and publicly accessible viewpoints within 2 km of the Site.

### **2.5 Consultation**

2.5.1 The eleven viewpoints considered were assessed. These include many where the development is screened either partially or in some cases wholly. The site visit was undertaken on 2:12:22. The view points are shown in Appendix 2.

### **3 LANDSCAPE PLANNING CONTEXT**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

3.1.1 In landscape and visual terms, the local planning policies of relevance to the Development are detailed in the following sub sections:

#### **3.2 Swansea LDP 2010-2025. (Adopted 2019)**

3.2.1 The Swansea Local Development Plan (LOP) 2010-2025 was adopted on the 28th February 2019. Under the provisions of the Planning (Wales) Act, the LDP forms the statutory development plan for Swansea Council. The following individual policies are identified as relevant to Landscape and Visual aspects of the Development.

#### **3.3 Policy CV 2: Development in The Countryside**

3.3.1 This policy seeks to ensure development outside defined settlement boundaries is required *'to ensure that the integrity of the countryside is conserved and enhanced. There is a presumption against development in the countryside, except where it is for:*

- i. The purposes of agriculture, forestry or other rural enterprise;*
- ii. The expansion of an existing rural business;*
- iii. Affordable housing to meet local need at acceptable and sustainable locations within or as infilling or adjoining settlements, or as minor extensions to small groups of dwellings in the countryside;*
- iv. A rural exception site for employment in or adjoining a settlement*
- v. A development to allow a small business to operate from home;*
- vi. One Planet Development;*
- vii. Necessary infrastructure provision and enhancement of infrastructure networks:*  
*or*
- viii. Recreational equine activities.*

*Countryside development must be of a sustainable form with prudent management of natural resources and respect for the cultural heritage of the area. Wherever possible, existing buildings should be reused or adapted and if this is not feasible new buildings should be located within or close to existing groups of buildings. Proposals to increase the number of residential chalets within the chalet developments of Hareslade, Holts Field, Miles Lane and Sandy Lane will not be permitted.'*

#### **3.4 Policy ER 2: Strategic Green Infrastructure Network**

3.4.1 This seeks development' to take opportunities to maintain and enhance the extent, quality and connectivity of the County's multi-functional Green Infrastructure network, and where appropriate:

- i. Create new interconnected areas of Green Infrastructure between the proposed site and the existing strategic network;*
- ii. RI/ gaps in the existing network to improve connectivity; and*
- iii. In instances where loss of Green Infrastructure is unavoidable, provide mitigation and compensation for the lost assets*

### 3.5 Policy ER 5: Landscape Protection

3.5.1 This Policy seeks to ensure that the character and quality of the County's landscapes is protected from inappropriate development. Landscape management, enhancement and the creation of key landscape features is encouraged.

*'Development will not be permitted that would have a significant adverse effect on the character and quality of the landscape and setting of the County. Priority will be given to protecting enhancing and managing the character and quality of the following Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) as shown on the Proposals Map and listed below:*

- i. Mawr Uplands*
- ii. Lower Loughor Valley and Estuary and Southern part of the Burry Inlet; and*
- iii. North East Gower and Cockett Valley;*
- iv. Garroch and Lower Afan Lian Valley*

*Within SLAs, development will only be permitted where there is no significant adverse impact, including cumulative impact, on landscape. The development should aim to protect and enhance the features for which the SLA has been designated. Where appropriate, a landscape impact assessment will be required in order to consider the impact of the development on the designated area. In exceptional circumstances, where development is necessary and could result in a significant landscape impact, a landscaping scheme will also be required and appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures should be provided.'*

### 3.6 Policy ER 11: Trees, Hedgerows and Development.

3.6.1 This policy seeks to protect existing trees, ancient woodland and hedgerows from *'Development that would adversely affect trees, woodlands and hedgerows of public amenity or natural/cultural heritage value, or that provide important ecosystem services, will not normally be permitted.*

*Ancient Woodland, Ancient Woodland Sites, Ancient and Veteran Trees merit specific protection and development will not normally be permitted that would result in:*

- i. Fragmentation or loss of Ancient Woodland;*
- ii. The loss of an Ancient or Veteran Tree;*
- iii. Ground damage, loss of understorey or ground disturbance to an area of Ancient Woodland or Ancient or Veteran Tree's root protection area;*
- iv. A reduction in the area of other semi natural habitats adjoining Ancient Woodland;*
- v. Significant alteration to the land use adjoining the Ancient Woodland;*
- vi. An increase in the likely exposure of Ancient Woodland, Ancient or Veteran Tree to air, water or light pollution from the surrounding area;*
- vii. Alteration of the hydrology in a way that might impact on Ancient Woodland, Ancient or Veteran Trees;*
- viii. Destruction of important connecting habitats relating to Ancient Woodland;*
- ix. Destruction of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS); and/or*
- x. Development in close proximity to Ancient Woodland and Ancient and Veteran Trees.*

### 3.7 Policy EU 1: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Proposals.

3.7.1 The Site lies within a Local Search Area for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Proposals. *'Proposals for renewable or low carbon energy development will be permitted subject to the following criteria:*

- i. Strategic Search Area (SSA) - Within or adjacent to the SSA, proposals for wind energy development greater than 25MW will be permitted subject to criteria iii" to v; all other proposals for renewable and low carbon energy development will only be permitted where they can demonstrate they would not prejudice the purpose of the SSA.*
- ii. Local Search Areas (LSAs) -*
- iii. Within the LSAs, proposals for solar PV between 5 - 50 MW will be permitted subject to criteria iii to v. All other proposals for renewable and low carbon energy development will only be permitted where they can demonstrate they would not prejudice the purpose of the LSA.*
- iv. Proposals for all types of renewable and low carbon energy development and associated infrastructure, either on their own, cumulatively or in combination with existing, approved or proposed development, should comply with all other relevant policies in the Plan and should not have a significant adverse effect on:*
  - a. The characteristics and features of the proposed location as a result of the siting, design, layout, type of installation and materials used;*
  - b. Public amenity or public accessibility to the area;*
  - c. Radar, Aircraft Operations or Telecommunications;*
  - d. Carbon sinks, unless it can be demonstrated that on-site loss can be adequately mitigated;*
- v. Satisfactory mitigation should be in place to reduce the impact of the proposal and its associated infrastructure;*
- vi. and in the case of solar proposals must mitigate against any impacts of glint and glare. Proposals shall make provision for the restoration and after-care of the land for its beneficial re-use. This will be agreed with the LPA prior to the development being carried out*
- vii. Where necessary, additional compensatory benefits will be sought in accordance with Policy IO 1 Supporting Infrastructure and Planning Obligations. '*

### 3.8 Landscape Planning Designations

3.8.1 This section, which should be read in conjunction with Figure 04, identifies landscape planning policies, designations and constraints relevant to the LVA. Table 1 summarises the constraints within the Site and the 2 km study area (See appendix 1 ST19905 – 018 Site infrastructure).

Table 1.

Landscape Designations	Present Within Site Boundary	Present within 2 km of the site
National Parks	No	No
Special Landscape Areas	No	Yes
Special Areas of Conservation	No	No
World Heritage Sites	No	No

Scheduled Monuments	No	Yes
Conservation Areas	No	No
Listed Buildings	No	Yes
Registered Parks and Gardens	No	No
Historic Battlefields	No	No
Ancient Woodland	No	Yes
Tree Preservation Orders	No	Yes

### 3.9 Special Landscape Area

3.9.1 The Mawr Uplands Special Landscape Area (SLA) is located 1.7 km east of the Site as shown on Figure 04 Landscape and Visual Baseline.

#### **Listed Buildings**

3.9.2 There are no listed structures and buildings within the study area as shown on drawing ST19905- 0018 in appendix 1. Known Assets. These include:

#### **Scheduled Monument**

3.9.3 There are two scheduled monuments outside of the study area, located to the north west and south east of the Site as shown on Figure 04 Landscape and Visual Baseline. These will not be affected by the proposals.

- Earthwork 1,080 m NNW of Fforest Newydd - 1.4 km to the west.
- Llangyfelach Cross-Base - 1.8 km to the south, beyond the M4 motorway.

#### **Tree Preservation Order**

3.9.4 There is an area of woodland approximately 150 m to the north east of the site covered by a Tree Preservation Order which is to the north west of the Abergelli Power Station site.

#### **Ancient Woodland (AW)**

3.9.5 The nearest area of AW lies west of the Development area and is around the perimeter of the substation and gas compressor site. The proposed access road from the Abergelli access corridor into the substation will cross an area of former Ancient woodland which has been replanted. Further detail is included in the Arboriculture report. The Ancient woodland Site is described as 'Ancient Woodland Site of Unknown Category (AWSU) - woodlands which may be ASN RAWs or PAWS. These areas are predominantly in transition and existing tree cover is described as 'shrubs' 'young trees' 'felled' or 'ground prepared for planting.

## **4 LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL**

### **4.1 Introduction**

4.1.1 An appraisal of the baseline landscape character has been undertaken in order to determine the sensitivity of the landscape and its capacity to accommodate the Development.

4.1.2 The landscape character is considered at three levels:

- National setting, considering the National Landscape Character Areas (NLCA) produced by Natural Resources Wales;
- Regional setting, considering the LANDMAP data, produced by Natural Resources Wales; and
- Local setting, based on field observations to confirm the key features and characteristics pertinent to the study area and the application site.

### **4.2 National Landscape Character**

4.2.1 At a national level the study area falls within two National Landscape Character Areas 'Swansea Bay' NCLA 38 and the South Wales Valleys NCLA 37. See Figure 04. The site itself lies wholly within NCLA 38. Key characteristics are listed as:

#### ***Swansea Bay NCLA 38***

- Narrow coastal plain - a long lowland area, of limited width in its middle section, between uplands and the sea, and opening out into wider lowland areas at either end.
- Estuaries - including those of the Rivers Loughor, Tawe, Neath and Ogmore.
- Extensive soft coastline - sand dunes and sweeping sandy beaches and lagoons.
- Kenfig dunes /lagoon have important species including fen orchid and medicinal leech. Relict, prehistoric and later period landscapes, successively buried by wind blown sand.
- Setting of steeply rising hills - in the central section around Port Talbot, and belonging to South Wales Valleys to the north
- Coal measures - beneath much of the area, but Triassic mudstones form the northern bank of the Ogmore Estuary.
- Limestone outcrops - near and Mumbles Porthcawl.
- Major glacial moraine deposits by estuaries e.g. Glais Moraine 1 mile long x 45m high
- Urban areas - dominated by the city of Swansea and the coalescing towns of Llanelli, Neath and Port Talbot. Swansea, with its strong architectural heritage and cultural importance forms a regional focus. Housing and business planned in large estates.
- Heavy industry - giant apparatus with large buildings and chimneys with steam issuing focussed at Port Talbot, with dominating visual and audible presence.

- Major transport corridor - with main road and rail lines linking settlements along the corridor, with associated movement, busyness and noise.
- Ports and docks - at major river estuaries. Historically the focus for industry but today regenerating and redesigning as post-industrial housing, education and leisure marinas.
- Historically strategic location - recognised early for good coal for industry and sea transport, and latterly by rail.
- Agriculture - in areas away from dunes and lagoons that have not been built on. Predominantly pasture for dairy, sheep or horse paddocks in regular, hedged fields.
- In the few remaining rural parts - the pattern is settlements along roads, with scattered stone or white/cream render farmsteads.

### ***South Wales Valleys NCLA 37***

- Extensive Upland plateau - typically wild and windswept, often with unenclosed tracts, running roughly north-south as 'fingers' parallel between intervening deep valleys.
- Numerous steep-sided valleys - typically aligned in parallel, flowing in southerly directions, shaped by southward flowing glaciers, leaving behind distinctive corrie ('cwm') and crag features. Major rivers include the Tawe, Taff and Rhymney.
- Ribbon urban and industrial areas in valleys - in places extending up valley sides and to valley heads. The area is sometimes regarded as being part of a 'city region'. Middle and eastern valleys tend to be the most heavily and continuously developed, e.g Rhondda Valley. The uplands by comparison have little or no settlement.
- Extensive remains of heavy industry - with a mix of derelict, preserved and largely redeveloped areas, notably for coal mining. Preserved as heritage (World heritage Site) at Blaenafon this typically includes old railway alignments, buildings and former tips.
- Contrast of urban valley activity next to quiet uplands - e.g. busy roads, new developments, traffic noise, night lighting, versus the adjacent wilder, remoter, quieter uplands.
- Large blocks of coniferous plantation and deciduous woodland fringes - covering many steep hillsides and hilltops, most notably in the middle to western portion of the area, providing a softer contemporary landscape where there was once industry.
- Heather, rough grassland and steep bracken slopes - dominate many plateaux and are grazed mainly by sheep. Much is common land.
- Improved pastures on some lower valley sides - grazed by sheep and some dairy cattle.
- Field boundaries - dry stone walls mark the boundary of common land while fields on lower slopes are bounded by dense hawthorn hedges, interspersed with swathes of broadleaved woodland.



- Transport routes restricted to valleys - the intervening topography makes valley to valley travel difficult, except at heads and bottoms of valleys. Occasionally there are roads that climb steeply over passes with dramatic views and 'hair pin' bends.
- Iconic cultural identify- many popular images of a tough, rugby-playing, religious, radically-minded society still remain associated with the South Wales Valleys, however today's post-industrial, internet-connected reality is somewhat different.

### **4.3 Regional Landscape Character**

4.3.1 At a regional level the study area falls within the LANDMAP Aspect Areas below:

- Visual and Sensory Aspect Area - Rhyd-y-pandy. Overall evaluation - Moderate.
- Summary description - Rolling farmland mosaic on land ranging between 60m and 200m AOD, with slight upland character at these higher elevations generated by the adjacent uplands. Essentially rural landscape, although criss-crossed by network of minor roads and greater detractor of overhead power wires on steel pylons. The southern area is also influenced by road noise from the busy M4. Three separate parts to this aspect area. Change detection 2014: adjacent settlements have expanded into this area in three places - Morrison Hospital, Pontarddulais and Pontlliw. Plus new business park developing on former works site, adjacent to J46 of M4, general erosion of rural character.
- LANDMAP guidelines - Medium Term: Restrict overhead pylons, especially steel/lattice support. Sensitive management of urban edge and business park to reduce intrusion.
- Landscape Habitats Aspect Area - North of Gorseinon and Swansea. Overall evaluation - Moderate.
- Summary description - Largely improved grassland (95%) with walls and hedgerows as significant features of biodiversity. Bat species will be present within the area.
- LANDMAP guidelines - Medium Term: Try to implement Tir Gofal scheme throughout farms.
- Historic Landscape Aspect Area - H27 Gower Supraboscus Agricultural. Overall evaluation - outstanding.
- An area of fieldscape not based on the open-field system, but evolving as a result of gradual enclosure of the uplands and their foothills. There is some evidence for enclosure in the pre-Norman period, and the process continued into the second half of the 19th century. Some unenclosed land and woodland remains. Limited industrial activity, mainly mining took place in the 19th century. The settlement pattern is basically dispersed, but ribbon developments occurred in areas of industrial activity.
- LANDMAP guidelines - None
- Geological Landscape Aspect Area - Penllergaer. Overall evaluation - outstanding.



- Summary description - Broad low-level plateau of E-W low ridges (dip and scarp topography) in gently S dipping SW Pennant Formation (Gravesend Beds, Upper Carboniferous) sandstones and thin coals, dissected by meandering, N- Supper Lian valley. Extensive cover of boulder clay draping topography. Broad areas of glacial sand and gravel, alluvium and some peat through NW-SE broad upper Lian valley and plateau. NE-SW to N-S faults cutting topography. Tirdonkin Fault controlling upper Lian valley. Many disused coal mines.
- LANDMAP guidelines - Immediate: Ensure that SSSI is maintained in favourable condition by implementation of management plan. Long Term: Ensure that no further key features of geological or geomorphological significance are lost/damaged due to development, forestry, etc.
- Cultural Landscape Aspect Area - The Mawr. Overall evaluation - high.
- Summary description - Significant landscape character influences are: Agricultural, Rural Settlement and Other infrastructure (The Lliw Valley Reservoirs 015). Area includes Post 1950, Inter War, Victorian & Edwardian, Late Medieval and Medieval chronological periods.
- LANDMAP guidelines - None.

#### **4.4 Local Landscape Character**

- 4.4.1 The Site is located within a semi improved agricultural field which slopes gently from a high point of circa 90 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the north east corner of the field towards the south west. The site has a mix of boundaries in varying condition including post and wire fencing, ditch, stone bank and individual trees to the south, post and wire fence with a few scattered trees and gorse along the eastern boundary, to the north lies a taller hedge with gaps and to the west is post and wire fence and a vegetated ditch with small trees, bramble, gorse and rush.
- 4.4.2 The landscape is predominantly rural countryside with some man-made visual detractors but appears well wooded. There are several large scale-built features which sit within the landscape including the Moriston Hospital chimney to the south east, the DVLA building to the south which forms a striking and incongruous focal point on the hillside.
- 4.4.3 There is a large-scale pylon infrastructure passing the site, wooden electricity poles and overhead cables within the site, the substation to the west and solar farms to the east and north. The presence of these features creates visual detractors although due

to the high level of tree and woodland cover surrounding them, they are partially assimilated into the landscape and in many cases screened by the vegetation.

- 4.4.4 The wider landscape of the study area and beyond appears to have a good network of existing landscape features such as trees and woodlands although many of the field boundaries are post and wire with defunct hedgerows and taller trees grown out of the former hedge line and hedge banks removed. The surrounding agricultural land is predominately used for grazing sheep and horses. Fields across the Project Site are subdivided by ditches, post and wire fencing, remnant hedgerows and are interspersed with scrub vegetation.
- 4.4.5 Pastoral land and woodland are the predominant land uses within the wider valley, including Penllergaer Forest and other smaller broadleaved woodlands that are scattered throughout the valley. Combined with the network of hedgerows and hedgerow tree planting which define many of the small and irregular shaped fields as well as the network of minor roads, the landscape displays a well vegetated character. This character of woodland, rolling topography and visual containment helps integrate developments in the rural fabric
- 4.4.6 Footpath LCI 17 adjacent to the existing substation does not seem well used and is impassable and indistinct in places due to bramble undergrowth. The footpath entrance near Maes-egwlys is also blocked by a fallen tree and woodpile.
- 4.4.7 The topography within the study area is undulating rising to a high point of 213 m AOD to the east at Mynydd Gelliwasted and 127 m AOD to the west, 100 m AOD to the south and 140 m AOD to the north.
- 4.4.8 Residential building styles include the characteristic white rendered stone buildings as well as modern styles. Residential properties are predominantly individual farm steads and individual or small groups of rural houses to the north (properties at and adjacent to Abergelli farm), north east (Cefn Betingau) and larger clusters to the south at Pant-Issau near Swansea Hospital.
- 4.4.9 Part of the access road is located partly within an agricultural field and partly within an area of young to semi mature tree planting and natural regeneration.

#### **4.5 Landscape Sensitivity**

- 4.5.1 Sensitivity has been determined by consideration of the LANDMAP Aspect Areas which range from Moderate to Outstanding and consideration of the immediate landscape of the site and study area following fieldwork. The Site is considered to be

of medium landscape sensitivity due to the absence of designations, degraded boundary features together with the presence of landscape detractors in the form of the distant noise of the M4, the existing substation and gas compressor site and power lines immediately adjacent to the site.

4.5.2 However, the overgrown hedgerows and tall hedgerow trees and woodland cover provides a well wooded appearance in the wider landscape. The existing large-scale infrastructure present is well absorbed due to the level of woodland cover and the wider countryside maintains many of its rural qualities.

4.5.3 It is considered that the Site could absorb the type of structures proposed due to its location adjacent to existing woodland and with the mitigation planting suggested.

#### 4.6 Potential Landscape Effects

<b>Table 2: Potential Landscape Effects</b>	
<b>Changes to the landform</b>	The Site is located on gently sloping land within a relatively flat immediate landscape. The Site is located at approximately 90 m AOD. There will be localised changes to topography with approximately a 1 m depth cut to accommodate the site infrastructure.
<b>Changes to the type and extent of vegetation cover</b>	An area of young to semi mature tree planting and natural regeneration will be removed associated with access route. See Arboricultural Report for further detail.
<b>Change in land use</b>	The land use will change from agricultural land to a new Greener Grid Park with associated hard standing covering an area of approximately 1 ha with the remaining areas comprising woodland, scrub, grassland and the access road. At the location of the proposed access road the land use will change from pasture and young to semi mature woodland.
<b>Effects on water courses/bodies.</b>	A section of existing ditch will be culverted (approximately 4m) to allow the access road to be built to the south of the site. This section of road is already consented as part of the Abergelli Power Station.
<b>Effects on notable landscape features</b>	There will be an increase in electrical development into the receiving agricultural landscape. Several small trees/part of a hedgerow within the line of the field boundary are proposed to be removed to accommodate the access road and cutting.
<b>Effect on established footpaths, public rights of way and access</b>	Public footpath LC117 will cross the proposed access road. This access road will shortly be built as part of the approved Abergelli Power Station. The existing setting of the footpath is pastoral with the backdrop of power infrastructure and woodland. This will change due to an increase in hard surfacing and power infrastructure although over time the Development will be incrementally assimilated into the landscape once the mitigation woodland planting has matured. The setting of other paths and public rights of way are not predicted to be affected due to distance from the site and intervening vegetation. Footpaths in the vicinity are becoming over grown and almost unusable, this was noticeably in taking the VP's.

	Footpaths routes were overgrown and very wet making them virtually impassable during inclement weather.
<b>Changes to the remoteness/tranquility of the area</b>	There are elements of the wider landscape that appear remote and tranquil with narrow rural lanes. However, the noise of the M4 and the large-scale power infrastructure of the area partly erodes these qualities over much of the southern portion of the study area. The Development would form an extension of the recently installed and consented power infrastructure in the area.
<b>Changes to the character, pattern, colour and scale of the landscape</b>	Changes to the landscape pattern, colour and scale would be related to the extension of power infrastructure replacing existing farmland. The character of the landscape would be affected through the cumulative effects of the future Abergelli Power Station and the introduction of the Development into the landscape potentially providing a continuous band of man-made infrastructure. However, the proposed mitigation woodland planting is intended to limit this change in colour and pattern. It is considered the Development would have a limited effect on character due to the existing and planned power infrastructure in the area.

#### 4.7 Summary of Landscape Effects

- 4.7.1 Given the similar scale and height of the Development to existing adjacent infrastructure and mitigation measures it is assessed that the receiving landscape has the capacity to accommodate the Development without adverse effects on character and quality of the landscape.
- 4.7.2 The Site does not lie within any landscape designation. The Mawr Uplands Special Landscape Area is located 1.7 km east of the Site and the ZTV (ST19905-001, Appendix 1.) illustrates that views are potentially available from the edge of the SLA to the Development. However, these views are distant and limited by intervening vegetation.
- 4.7.3 There are areas of Ancient Woodland to the west of the Development, none of which would be affected. There is an area of woodland to the north east of the site with a TPO, however this will not be affected.
- 4.7.4 In terms of landscape character, the Site and study area show limited elements of NCLA 37 and more elements described in NCLA 38 and LANDMAP are present within the Study Area. The following create positive features in the wider landscape of the Site as follows:
- Coniferous plantation to the west and deciduous woodland areas;

- The pattern of settlement is along roads, with scattered stone or white/cream render farmsteads.

4.7.5 These landscape features provide positive landscape features within the study area. Given the scale and extent of the Development it is unlikely that the Development would affect or influence such features within the study area.

4.7.6 There are also some negative aspects of NCLA 37, NCLA 38 and LANDMAP which detract from the quality of the existing landscape and these are found within the immediate study area, within 300 m of the Site and further south towards the M4, as follows:

- Hedge and hedgerow bank loss weakening landscape character and increasing openness of agricultural landscape;
- General erosion of rural character through new infrastructure such as the new business park and noise associated with the M4 motorway;
- Detractors in the landscape include overhead power lines;
- Predominantly pasture for sheep or horse paddocks in regular fields bounded by defunct/tall hedgerows or post and wire fences.

4.7.7 The presence of hedge and hedgerow bank loss, substation and overhead cables adjacent and within the Site and noise of the M4 located approximately 2 km to the south reduces the value of the landscape within approximately 300 m of the Development southwards. It does however present an opportunity to improve the landscape baseline following Development through appropriate landscape enhancement in the form of hedgerow and woodland planting and other recommendations as detailed in Drawing ST19905-017 (Appendix 1.) Landscape and Biodiversity Mitigation Plan provided in Appendix 1.

4.7.8 Given the above it is assessed that the Site does have the capacity to absorb the Development due to the scale and height of development proposed and setting adjacent to existing and proposed infrastructure and woodland. No landscape designations are likely to be affected by the Development and there is opportunity to address the perceived expansion of power generating infrastructure through appropriate landscape enhancement.

## 5 VISUAL APPRASIAL

### 5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 This visual appraisal and considers the effects on visual receptors, who are currently afforded views towards the Site and therefore may be affected by the Development. These receptors remain the same as the consented application 2021/0163/FUL.

### 5.2 Zone of Theoretical Visibility

5.2.1 Drawing ST19905-001 The ZTV has been created using a bare earth model. It has limitations as it does not take into account existing vertical features such as buildings, structures, infrastructure or vegetation such as hedgerows which may screen views and or restrict visibility. It therefore provides a useful first analysis tool to help determine the extent of visual influence the Site has within the existing landscape.

### 5.3 Viewpoint Appraisal

5.3.1 An appraisal of visual effects was undertaken ON THE 02:12:2022 there were 11 of them selected to represent typical views from key receptors at varying distances and orientations from the Site at publicly accessible locations. In addition, other sensitive viewpoints were visited and assessed and a summary is provided in **Table 3 below**.

5.3.2 These 11 View points (**see Appendix 2**).

5.3.3 For each photographic viewpoint the following information is provided:

- A representative photograph;
- A description of the existing view; and
- A qualitative assessment of the potential visual effects.

5.3.4 The following sheets present a viewpoint image along with an overview of the typical viewer, the distance to the Development, a description of the existing view and a description of the change in view with the Development.

### 5.4 Predicted Visual Effects

5.4.1 Table 3 below sets out the key visual effects, which are likely to result from the Development.

<b>Table 3: Predicted Visual Effects</b>	
<b>Views points</b>	<p>The views from several of the photographs clearly indicate they are interrupted by vegetation, or the development site will be unseen due to landform or vegetation. Since the VPs were taken for the 2021 LVA, the vegetation has clearly grown and the development will be more obscured because of this. The positions of the VPs are shown in appendix 1. It is sometimes prudent to photographically illustrate viewpoints that are obscured from the development as well as ones which are not. This is the case from sensitive places such as near to residences, public footpaths and minor roads and cycle routes.</p> <p>VP 1 The view is a view down a slight incline towards the site. The skyline is dominated by Electricity pylons in both the near and far views. The site is obscured by vegetation. No views of the site.</p> <p>VP 2. The view towards the site is obscured by a hedge line planted on the top of an incline. Solar panels are then sited in the field which additionally block views. There are some mature trees growing in the hedge line. No Views of the site.</p> <p>VP 3. Long view towards the site over solar panels. The site is potentially seen via glimpsed views, and there is not a clear view through to the site. The view is dominated by infrastructure such as Electricity Pylons and solar panels with mature trees in the mid distance. There are no views of the site.</p> <p>VP 4. And 5. Shows a view across to the site which is typical of this area. Fields with hedges and trees surrounding them. The views to the skyline look towards Morriston hospital and the surrounding village. There are no views of the development site.</p> <p>VP 6. This is an enclosed field, surrounded by hedges and trees and there are no views of the development site.</p> <p>VP 7. and 8. These views are within the curtilage of the site and are predominantly of meadowland with enclosure planting of hedging and mature trees. Views of electric pylons and telegraph poles are prominent. The development will be clearly visible from these 2 VP locations. In addition to the site of the battery storage infrastructure there will be an access road leading to it, this view will be changed substantially from an agricultural field with a rural feel, to one with a more industrial presence and aligned to the adjacent power station.</p> <p>VP 9. Close view (170m) from a field to the north, however there are several trees impacting the site lines across to the site and a backdrop of mature trees take the eye. The scale of the view is very wide and the development of the site will be a minor part of this view. The impact of the development in the context of the view of the adjacent infrastructure is hardly notable.</p> <p>VP 10. This is a view dominated by Electricity Pylons with the views foreshortened by hedges and trees.</p> <p>VP 11. As with VP 3. The view is dominated by solar panels and electricity pylons, there are hedges and trees surrounding this field but the eye is taken by the industrial fabric contained within it. The site cannot be seen from this viewpoint.</p>

<b>Table 3: Predicted Visual Effects</b>	
<b>Zone of Theoretical Visibility</b>	<p>The ZTV indicates that theoretical uninterrupted views of the Development could be possible from up to 2 km to the east and south and approximately up to 700 m to the west and up to 500 m to 2 km of interrupted views to the north. The ZTV also suggest wider views are also theoretically possible from higher ground beyond the study area to the north east and south. ZTV's do have a couple of limitations which need to be considered when looking at the theoretical visibility illustrated. Firstly, whilst they do take account of tree data, they do not take account of screening elements such as buildings, vegetation, hedgerows and local landform which can substantially reduce visibility. Secondly, ZTVs do not take account of the decreasing size of the Development with increased distance as a proportion of the view, and the reduction in effect arising from this.</p> <p>The ZTV has therefore been augmented by field work to understand the visibility accurately. Viewpoints have been chosen to represent the extents of visibility likely to affect sensitive receptors from publicly accessible areas, but it is equally acceptable to prove there is no view from a View Point. Within the area the presence of existing vegetation, built form and structures reduces or removes visibility, or the Development is such a minor element in the landscape that it is not discernible within the view composition and unlikely to have any effects upon the receptor or there are no receptors present.</p>
<b>Views from residential properties</b>	<p>Views are available from approximately four groups of properties to the north west, north east and south east. These include: Houses along the western edge of Pant Issau; Maes-egwyls properties; Abergelli farm and 2 adjacent properties; and Cefn-betingau properties</p> <p>Views from properties at Pant Issau, Abergelli farm and Cefn-betingau are most affected due to proximity and the presence of direct views of the Development.</p> <p>Views from Maes-egwyls and adjacent properties are slightly oblique or oblique and partially limited by intervening landform and vegetation.</p>
<b>Visual obstruction</b>	<p>The Development would partially obstruct existing views over farmland and woodland from all these properties. In addition, the introduction of new native species woodland used to both screen and add green infrastructure to the landscape would partially screen views from the north east, south east and north west.</p>
<b>Views from Public Rights-of- Way</b>	<p>Close distance views of the Development would be available from a section of footpath LC117. This footpath will cross the access road to the south of the substation/gas compressor station/woodland area. Olose distance partly filtered views are available for approximately 0.5km+ although the section passing through the woodland is indistinct and heavily overgrown with bramble and seems unused. Hedgerow trees also partially limit views. The development is unlikely to be visible from other public rights of way in the study area predominately due to the tall hedgerow and hedgerow trees within the landscape. Footpath LC117 is overgrown (<a href="#">see photograph</a> below).</p>
<b>Views from other receptors</b>	<p>There are views from other receptors within the study area including the following: users of local roads, farm businesses and other places of work such as the Betingau solar farm. These receptors are considered to be of lower value and views from local roads are very restricted due to tall hedgerows along roadsides.</p>





**Overgrown Footpath LC117**

## **5.5 Summary of Visual Effects**

- 5.5.1 The LVA indicates that views of the Development from the surrounding areas would be limited to four groups of residential receptors, these include small farms, isolated rural properties and residential housing areas with some intermittent views from Rhyd-y-Pandy road at gaps in existing vegetation, and public footpaths.
- 5.5.2 Visual effects from residential properties are not represented by viewpoints as public access was not possible. The extent that the Development will be visible and will be seen, it will be as a potential visual extension to the existing substation/gas compressor for receptors to the south and east. However, the mature trees surrounding the substation and gas compressor assimilate the large infrastructure into the landscape. Residential receptors to the north will have views partially limited by the existing vegetation along the northern boundary.
- 5.5.3 Where the Development appears in views, it will do so against a backdrop of existing agricultural fields and/or mature hedgerows or woodland. All views are/or would be seen in the context of the existing substation/gas compressor, Abergelli Power Station and access road and associated power infrastructure consisting of metal pylons and overhead cables.

## **6 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

- 6.1.1 All views of the Development are seen or will be seen in the context of the existing substation/gas compressor and Abergelli Power Station and access road resulting a combination of landscape and visual cumulative effects. The Development considered cumulatively with the substation and the Abergelli Power Station would serve to increase the power infrastructure over a localised area this influence however is limited to a small geographical area.
- 6.1.2 The receiving landscape due to the high level of woodland and tall hedgerows has the capacity to absorb the Development alongside the existing substation/gas compressor and Abergelli Power Station due to existing mature woodland and tall hedgerows in the immediate area.
- 6.1.3 Furthermore, landscape mitigation and enhancement is proposed, see Section 7 and the accompanying planting plan (Appendix 1 drawing ST19905-017), seeks to reduce the visual impact of the Development, increase biodiversity and extend the green infrastructure network around the development and into the surrounding countryside.

## **7 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT MEASURES**

7.1.1 The landscape immediately surrounding the Site to the north, east and south has degraded landscape features, in the form of remnant hedgerows, although the overgrown hedges do provide a landscape perceived to be well wooded. The surrounding landscape beyond 300 m from the Site contains a more complex mixture of boundary hedgerows and pockets of woodland.

7.1.2 The Development provides an opportunity to both screen the Development from sensitive residential receptors and improve the existing baseline landscape features/green infrastructure of the immediate site. The Development includes a significant amount of new planting and biodiversity enhancements in the form of native species, hedgerow, woodland, attenuation ponds and scrub planting as follows:

- 35 m of native species hedgerow planting with hedgerow trees;
- 0.81 ha of native species woodland and shrub planting;
- 0.2 ha of wildflower and grass seeding on embankments.
- Attenuation pond with increased tree planting along the existing ditch line

7.1.3 Landscape and biodiversity mitigation is shown on the Landscape and Biodiversity Mitigation Plan ST19905 -017.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1.1 The Development is located to the east of the existing Swansea Substation and Gas Compressor site and adjacent field and is also bounded by agricultural land to the north, east and south. A line of overhead transmission lines on pylons runs close to the Site (250 m) to the south and overhead cables and wooden electricity poles cross the Site to the north. The site of the recently approved Abergelli Power Station lies to the north east adjacent to an area of woodland. The Development will utilise much of the access road which is being built for the above power station.
- 8.1.2 The Development consists of the construction and operation of a Greener Grid Park with an infrastructure part of the proposal having a footprint of 1.6 hectares (ha) with the wider Site area being 6.24 (ha) this includes the access road, site entrance and temporary construction compound area and mitigation planting. The proposal would result in the partial loss of agricultural grassland with the permanent replacement with power infrastructure, woodland, scrub, hedgerow and grassland. Views of the access route are limited to receptors using the nearby footpath LC117 otherwise the access route is well screened from the wider area by existing vegetation.
- 8.1.3 Any views of the Development are seen in the context of the existing substation and gas compressor site within a woodland area immediately to the west and overhead power lines. The Development is located within an open agricultural landscape with a mix of boundaries including overgrown and largely unmanaged hedgerows, post and wire fencing and stone hedge banks surrounded by pastoral agricultural land. Wooden electricity poles and cables currently cross the site within the northern portion of the boundary.
- 8.1.4 Views from residential receptors are limited to approximately 4 groups of properties, and potentially glimpsed views from a small number of locations on the local road network through gateways or gaps in vegetation. Properties at and near Abergelli Farm, Maes- eglwys, Pant-lasau and Cefn-Betingau would be most affected by the Development. All of these properties have oblique or direct views from their property curtilage, although partially limited by vegetation. Properties at and near Abergelli Farm are elevated with views of the Development although partially limited by the intervening tall hedgerow which lines the northern boundary of the Site.
- 8.1.5 Properties on the western edge of Pant -issau have open elevated views towards the Development. Properties at Maes-eglwys have oblique views although limited by

vegetation and topography. Properties at Cefn-Betingau have open elevated views across to the Site.

- 8.1.6 In Landscape terms, the Development is located on relatively flat ground with a localised change in topography of approximately 1 m rising from the south to the northeast. In order to minimise the impact of the Development and as part of the iterative design process the levels on site are proposed to be reduced at its deepest by approximately 1 m. This will result in much of the Development located on the 89 m AOD contour. This reduction in levels in the context of the existing vegetation along the northern boundary and height of the proposed structures partially reduces the effects upon both landscape and visual receptors.
- 8.1.7 A Landscape and Biodiversity Mitigation Plan has been produced (ST19905-017) to provide screen and hedgerow planting around the northern, eastern, and southern areas within the site boundary to screen and assimilate the Development into the landscape and provide biodiversity benefits. The substation and gas compressor site has been assimilated successfully by siting it adjacent to mature woodland, and with time the Development whilst potentially resulting in short term combined cumulative effects would be near similar infrastructure and contained and partially screened by the proposed mitigation planting. As such the Development is considered to be in line with policy 012 Development in the Countryside and EUI Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Proposals.
- 8.1.8 It is recognised, however that the proposed planting would take time to mature and subsequently limit the visibility of the Development.
- 8.1.9 The proposed planting introduces native planting into the landscape and extends into existing landscape features to connecting the new planting at the Site and existing vegetation. The introduction of these new features would overall have a positive effect on the local and wider landscape context and character once planting has matured, together with siting the Development at a lower level, close to existing infrastructure. This would minimise intrusion of the Development and help assimilate it into the landscape creating an improved green infrastructure network in line with policies ER2 Strategic Green Infrastructure Network and ER5 Landscape Protection.
- 8.1.10 Overall, the Development introduces new native planting surrounding the Development. Whilst introducing a change in land use from agriculture and expanding the power infrastructure in the immediate area, the position of the Development has been sensitively considered taking account of the landscape context and has the

ability to be screened from views in a short to medium (i.e. 5-10 years) period of time and would improve the baseline landscape above its current state.

8.1.11 Given the similar scale and height of the Development to both the consented application (2021-0163-FUL) for the site for similar infrastructure use, as well as the existing adjacent infrastructure, and associated mitigation measures proposed, it is assessed that the receiving landscape has the capacity to accommodate the Development without adverse effects on the character and quality of the landscape, (See Appendix 3 for 3D imaging of the consented proposal, the recent MMA application and this application being the final image, Appendix 3.)



**STOKE-ON-TRENT**

Sir Henry Doulton House  
Forge Lane  
Etruria  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST1 5BD  
Tel: +44 (0)1782 276 700

**BIRMINGHAM**

Two Devon Way  
Longbridge Technology Park  
Longbridge  
Birmingham  
B31 2TS  
Tel: +44 (0)121 580 0909

**BOLTON**

41-50 Futura Park  
Aspinall Way  
Middlebrook  
Bolton  
BL6 6SU  
Tel: +44 (0)1204 227 227

**BRISTOL**

Temple Studios  
Temple Gate  
Redcliffe  
Bristol  
BS1 6QA  
Tel: +44 (0)117 203 4477

**BURY ST EDMUNDS**

Armstrong House  
Lamdin Road  
Bury St Edmunds  
Suffolk  
IP32 6NU  
Tel: +44 (0)1284 765 210

**CARDIFF**

Tudor House  
16 Cathedral Road  
Cardiff  
CF11 9LJ  
Tel: +44 (0)292 072 9191

**CARLISLE**

Marconi Road  
Burgh Road Industrial Estate  
Carlisle  
Cumbria  
CA2 7NA  
Tel: +44 (0)1228 550 575

**EDINBURGH**

Great Michael House  
14 Links Place  
Edinburgh  
EH6 7EZ  
Tel: +44 (0)131 555 3311

**GLASGOW**

24 St Vincent Place  
Glasgow  
G1 2EU  
Tel: +44 (0)141 428 4499

**LEEDS**

36 Park Row  
Leeds  
LS1 5JL  
Tel: +44 (0)113 831 5533

**LONDON**

Third Floor  
46 Chancery Lane  
London  
WC2A 1JE  
Tel: +44 (0)207 242 3243

**NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE**

City Quadrant  
11 Waterloo Square  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4DP  
Tel: +44 (0)191 232 0943

**TRURO**

Baldhu House  
Wheal Jane Earth Science Park  
Baldhu  
Truro  
TR3 6EH  
Tel: +44 (0)187 256 0738

**International office:**

**ALMATY**

29/6 Satpaev Avenue  
Hyatt Regency Hotel  
Office Tower  
Almaty  
Kazakhstan  
050040  
Tel: +7(727) 334 1310