6. Landscape and Visual Impact

Introduction

6.1 Barton Willmore LLP (Landscape Planning and Design), now Stantec (Stantec) prepared the original ES chapter for the Hightown Quarry Application in 2014, to record the landscape and visual effects, together with a Design Statement entitled Design Evolution: Landscape and Visual Mitigation by Design (the 'Design Statement')[1], which was submitted to demonstrate the design response to the landscape and visual mitigation requirements. Stantec subsequently prepared an EIA Addendum in September 2014, and gave evidence at a Planning Appeal hearing in 2016. A further Addendum was prepared in 2018 (submitted in March 2019) to update the baseline context including planning policy, contextual changes within the Study Area and to reassess the scheme considering design changes.

6.2 It is noted that planning permission was refused by the then DfI Minister in April 2022 despite a recommendation of approval from planning officers. A refusal reason given related to landscape and visual impact citing Policy WM1 of Planning Policy Statement 11: Planning and Waste Management in that it had not been demonstrated that the visual impact of the waste management facility is acceptable in the landscape. From a review of the publicly available material, the Minister's concerns regarding landscape and visual impact were not substantiated in any detail.

6.3 This Addendum provides an update to the 2019 Addendum based upon a review of the baseline and Site visits carried out in February 2023. This 2023 Addendum report highlights any changes in the baseline of note and interest in consideration of the assessed landscape and visual effects. This is accompanied by an updated set of photographic information including Site Appraisal and Site Context Photographs, taken, and presented in accordance with the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19[2].

Policy Context

6.4 There have been no changes to planning policy relating to landscape and visual issues since the last Addendum in 2019.

Baseline Conditions

6.5 There have been no changes to the Application Site location, nor to the topography, vegetation, designations and landscape character within the Study Area since the 2019 Addendum was prepared.

6.6 The description of land use and settlement pattern within the Study Area, provided in the original ES Chapter and Addendum's remain broadly unchanged, whilst it is noted that the southwestern extents of Newtownabbey along Hyde Park Road continues to develop. This development

[1] Becon Consortium, November 2013. Hightown Quarry: Residual Waste Project. Design Evolution: Landscape & Visual Mitigation by Design.
[2] Landscape Institute, September 2019. Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19

includes a consented scheme for 180 dwellings to the south of Hyde Park Road (under construction) and the expansion of the Gibson Farm solar array on Sealstown Road.

Site Appraisal

6.7 The Site Appraisal photographs retaken (Appendix 6.1: Illustrative Material) illustrate that there has been little change within the Application Site except for encroachment of vegetation and changes to stockpile locations.

6.8 The site has recently secured full planning permission (LA03/022/0649/F) for the erection of replacement Coated Roadstone plant including an asphalt mixing tower (approximately 30m in height), bitumen storage tanks, aggregate storage bays, hoppers, storage silos and conveyors. It is therefore appreciated that the site will remain in use as an industrial quarry including sizable elements of industrial built form into the future, if not developed as a Residual Waste Treatment Facility.

6.9 As noted in the Officers Report accompanying the planning consent for the Coated Roadstone Plant, ***"It is accepted that the proposed plant, including the chimney stack and the associated exhaust gas will be visually evident in the landscape. However, this is a single, narrow structure, which must be considered in the context of the numerous tall vertical features present or approved in the nearby landscape, including pylons, masts and wind turbines. The ancillary structures are minimal in height and will be enclosed to a certain degree by the existing quarry face."*** In conclusion on visual effects the officer notes that ***"Given the existing quarry has a significant visual impact and evident from numerous viewpoints over a range of distances, combined with the existing tall vertical structures that exist throughout the area, the visual impact and impact on the character and appearance of the area is therefore not likely to be significant."***

6.10 Whilst is it accepted that the Coated Roadstone Plant would not result in detrimental effects upon the surrounding countryside, notably absent any landscape mitigation measures, it should be considered as part of the evolving baseline for the assessment of effects.

Visual Appraisal

6.11 Verification on the ground was undertaken in visual appraisal fieldwork exercises carried out in February/March 2023. The retaken Site Context Photographs are presented in Appendix 6.1: Illustrative Material.

6.12 The 2023 visual appraisal involved revisiting the locations identified during the 2013 assessment, as set out in the visual appraisal section of the original ES Chapter 10. The findings of the assessment are very similar and the description of the visibility of the application site contained in the original ES Chapter 10 and subsequent Addendums remain valid. The Site Context Photographs show the original 2013 blimp inset photos and the winter view from 2023, thus illustrating both the seasonal change and any physical changes that have occurred in the interim. There are no notable physical changes from the 2019 addendum with the exception of the extension of the Gibson Farm solar array at Sealstown Road.

6.13 The footpath network has been extended at Colinward Hill connecting Cave Hill with Hightown Road as shown on the amended Visual Appraisal Plan included in Appendix 6.1: Illustrative Material. This does not result in additional views towards the site which have not already been considered.

Lighting

Assessment of dark landscapes and existing lighting

6.14 As set out in the previous assessments the 2023 assessment also concludes that ***"the landscape surrounding and including the application site is subject to a range of light sources, with sky glow readily perceived across the area and sources of direct glare noticeable from a range of public viewpoints, notably when looking into the urban area of Newtownabbey from elevated areas, including the ridgeline between Carnmoney Hill and Sentry Hill, the Belfast Hills and rising landform to the north of the Three Mile Water valley."***

Landscape Strategy

6.15 The design proposals including the landscape design proposals are unchanged.

Likely Significant Effects

6.16 The assessment of likely significant effects is considered to be unchanged from 2019 given the unchanged nature of the proposals and the overall integrity of the baseline landscape and visual conditions.

Cumulative Effects

6.17 As shown on Figure 6.8, 6 applications within the Study Area have been consented and have been considered in the light of potential cumulative effects. These applications were considered cumulatively in 2018/19 and there are no further consented development requiring consideration.

6.18 The cumulative schemes will not contribute to the cumulative effects as predicted in previous assessments which considered introduction of the consented wind turbines resulting in ***"slightly higher magnitudes of adverse change in view and significance of adverse visual effect in isolated locations, as a result of the disturbance they create on the skyline of Bog Hill, McIlwhan's, Squires Hill and Collinward notably where these are perceived as locally characteristic rounded summits."***

Character Effects

6.19 As noted in the previous cumulative assessment, ***"the consented wind turbines, together with consented residential schemes and operational solar array and landfill sites, are the principal contributors to cumulative effects on character, the consented wind turbines (being) the principal contributors to the inevitable cumulative effects on character as their influence on the surrounding hills, is substantially greater than the influence of the proposed development, which is set within a quarry and subject to other mitigation by***

design approaches including sensitive siting, massing and colouration strategies, as set out in the Design Statement accompanying the submitted application."

6.20 As previously concluded, it is considered that the proposed development would appear a minor component of these cumulative infrastructural influences.

Conclusion

6.21 Noting the above changes in the baseline conditions, the conclusions of the submitted original ES chapter and subsequent landscape and visual submissions remain broadly valid, the only changes since being as a result of the increasing influence of infrastructure and urbanisation in the landscape surrounding the application site. This does not affect the significance of effects on features, character or views in relation to the proposed development alone and the submitted original ES Chapter 10 remains an assessment of the scenario of maximum significance of effects of the proposed development.