
WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

Planning application no. 08/00954

**AWE BURGFIELD, READING
NEW CONVENTIONAL MANUFACTURING RATIONALISATION
FACILITY (CMR)**

Introduction

The proposals were reviewed in June 2008. Site visits have been undertaken over the last 2 years.

Discussions have been held with RPS over time on the nature of the development and the factors to consider in the landscape design and the LVIA. These have generally been taken on board, and a full description of the baseline has been provided, which I am happy with. I have not therefore included a full description of the site and its setting but highlight the key issues that have not been considered in sufficient depth.

I have only reviewed the Landscape Strategy in respect to the CMR application. The strategy for the whole site will be considered in due course so that a final landscape strategy can be agreed with AWE which will guide future development on the site. The submitted Landscape Strategy has not been seen before (although preliminary ideas were discussed) and has not been discussed in any detail.

Submissions

RPS	Landscape Strategy May 2008 Landscape and visual impact assessment May 2008 Location/Block Plan JWA.0467/17
AWE	Environmental Statement and drawings

Site Description

See LVIA.

The site is not within, nor close to, the AONB or any of the former ASLIs. It sits in an area of good ordinary landscape for which the general landscape and countryside policies apply. The character of the AWE site is obviously very different from the surrounding landscape. However it is important that the perimeter treatment and developments on the site do not undermine the objectives of the landscape character assessments for the wider landscape or the current visual amenity and value of the surrounding area.

The site itself is currently mainly grassed with hard standing giving it an open aspect and allowing views across the site from Rider's Lane, Burnthouse Farm, Burnthouse Lane, and the footpaths (LVIA view 4) to the open farmland to the north and east and into AWE character areas 8 and 10. Nearby buildings are 4 to 5m high, but there are views across to the 20m high lightning masts. The current less obtrusive character of the CMR site is a key aspect of this part of AWE, and important so close to public viewpoints. However the perimeter fencing and perimeter circulation road clearly define the nature of the AWE site.

The built form will inevitably increase over this site with a much higher standard of new built form and landscape treatment. However at present the low key nature of the facilities in general, with the exception of the lightning towers, belie the presence of the facilities in the rural landscape. The most exposed public view is from the east, except for an elevated view from the M4 bridge to the north (other views are from the private road access, although this is used by the public). The CMR impacts on these most exposed views.

As the mass and scale of the built form increases at this AWE site, it is important that it does not significantly urbanise the local rural setting. The close proximity of the M4 and Reading to the north (where an increase in built form is also proposed) does not justify unacceptable intrusion within the countryside south of the M4, but rather requires greater endeavour to conserve and enhance the existing landscape qualities which include a reasonable level of both day time and night time tranquillity.

The *Newbury District-wide Landscape Character Assessment* is of value for its greater detail, and has not been superseded. The *Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003* sets out current thinking in a more general way. Although the LVIA refers to these assessments it does not assess the indirect impact on these areas. The key is whether the CMR and its associated development will significantly undermine the landscape and visual qualities of these areas as a result of the visual impact.

Newbury District-wide Landscape Character Assessment 1993

The site lies in LCT12: London Clay. The area is described as 'a subtle landscape of some charm consisting of quiet, rural countryside' and 'a traditional lowland mixed farming area'. The guidelines are for conservation as the 'essentially rural landscape' is under pressure 'particularly on its northern boundary with the M4 corridor'. The guidelines recommend avoiding large scale development in this character area.

Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003

The site lies in LCA H5: Burghfield Woodland and Heathland Mosaic. The woodland cover and boundary vegetation is a key characteristic of the area. The guidelines seek the conservation and restoration of deciduous woodland and the enhancement of the boundaries of AWE. The principle visual receptors lie in LCA L4 to the east where the strategy is to conserve and enhance the landscape character, in view of the proximity of Reading and the M4 and A33. Development must be sensitive to the rural character.

Key Landscape Issues

- Effect of intensification and new built form on the local landscape character
- Visual impact of the development
- Lighting intensification

Relevant Policy

<i>National:</i>	PPS1, PPS7
<i>Berkshire Structure Plan:</i>	EN.1
<i>West Berkshire Local Plan</i>	OVS.2, ENV.1, ECON.2A, ENV.18

Assessment of the Scheme

General

The Landscape Strategy, the landscape concept scheme for the CMR site and the LVIA all recognise that a good landscape scheme is paramount. The building height has been kept as low as possible and has a curved roof to reduce its mass. However the roof and cladding materials are aluminium and metal respectively which will be more conspicuous, especially when caught in sunlight. The LVIA suggests that the roof colour will be darker but I found no further reference to this.

The Landscape Strategy shows the landscape proposals for the CMR site set within the context of a large woodland block to the south of CMR in landscape character area 10, a further woodland block in the eastern corner abutting Burnthouse Lane, parkland tree planting to the Pingewood Gate and at the southern end of the swale, and boundary hedgerows and trees to the eastern boundary of the temporary construction area, all of which do not seem constrained from being achieved together with the CMR landscaping scheme.

All of these landscape features are key to the achievement of the 'strategic green capital'. I fully support this. I have one concern that the green capital, as it affects CMR, does not include for the creation of a woodland and hedgerow belt along the northern boundary. This is a key interface between the site and the rural landscape which is currently in a poor condition. The off site former hedgerow is gappy and unmanaged and there is almost no on-site existing vegetation. The proposals show a scatter of linear small wetland coppice and parkland trees north of the CMR building and a small woodland copse east of the Chillers block and no further planting to the eastern area. Although visibility is obviously paramount, this does not preclude planting on the perimeter elsewhere.

The LVIA asserts that although there will be considerably more lighting provided in the form of downlighters to the building, roadside lighting to the access, lighting to the car park and light emission from the windows in the building, the increase in light on the site will not be perceptible in the context of the existing peripheral lighting. However I could not find any data or analysis on this. A much higher level of lighting is inevitable on this site than on any normal commercial site, but the local rural landscape is otherwise a dark one and would fall into the ILE's Environmental

Zone E2. The light level on site would be E4. It is important that the light pollution is minimised and that the surrounding landscape retains levels commensurate with E2. The presence of the M4 and Reading to the north does not justify the spread of light pollution further into the rural landscape.

The development proposals mention hoppers up to eaves height – where are these?

Direct Impacts

The development will not affect any landscape features of importance. It will however significantly alter the present character of landscape character area 10 from 'open valley grassland' to a commercial zone set in parkland and with service access. Within the internal context of the AWE site this is acceptable, provided that the change in character does not have a wider impact on the AWE's rural setting.

The parkland style landscaping proposed is all welcomed, as is the SUDS landscape treatment. However it is restricted to the immediate area of the CMR, with no proposals for the temporary construction site or the remainder of landscape character area 10. The benefit to the wider landscape is therefore limited.

I would like to see the large woodland block to the south of CMR in landscape character area 10, a further woodland block in the eastern corner abutting Burnthouse Lane, parkland tree planting to the Pingewood Gate and at the southern end of the swale, and boundary hedgerows and trees to the eastern boundary of the temporary construction area all included in the proposals for the CMR development.

The SUDS proposals in JWA. 0467/17 do not seem to tie in with the SUDS proposals elsewhere. 0467/17 shows ponds at the southern end of the temporary construction area and along the road side swale east of CMR, not shown in the SUDS design and omits a swale shown down the east side of the temporary construction area.

Lighting to area 10 will considerably increase but within the internal context of the AWE site this is acceptable.

Indirect Impacts

As a result of excluding much of the landscape strategy planting, as described above, the CMR will be very visible on its eastern edge and from the rural landscape setting. It will have a significant adverse impact on the sensitive viewpoints in this area and will change the character of the interface between the rural area and the AWE.

Although the LVIA asserts that the lighting lux levels will be 5, there is no evidence to support this and to demonstrate that all light pollution to the rural landscape has been avoided through minimising the additional lighting provision. Is it really necessary to duplicate the perimeter lighting? If the perimeter lighting is older and more polluting, why not replace this with a system to serve all security purposes? I accept that the lighting on the building has been designed to minimise the light pollution.

The proposed building materials will be conspicuous in this location. Notwithstanding their architectural merit, such an expanse of metal cladding, albeit broken up in texture, is totally alien to the rural setting and will draw the eye. The landscaping will take time to have a significant impact in breaking up the façade and as deciduous planting is to be selected, and rightly so for the boundaries of the AWE site, the building will be all the more exposed in winter. I feel that the colour and finish needs further consideration as a conspicuous building is not appropriate here.

Conclusion

I feel that AWE has not gone far enough to mitigate the adverse landscape and visual impacts of the CMR development. The landscape scheme should be substantially increased in line with the Landscape Strategy and further measures taken to reduce the visual impact of the building.

Recommendation

The scheme should include:

- Evidence from lighting engineers that the most sustainable, efficient and least polluting scheme has been designed and that the effect on the surrounding rural area is within the standards required by Environmental Zone E2. Lighting to be amended if necessary.
- A darker matt roof colour should be specified for the roof and the wall cladding reconsidered to reduce its visual intrusion on the rural landscape.
- The large woodland block to the south of CMR in landscape character area 10, a further woodland block in the eastern corner abutting Burnthouse Lane, parkland tree planting to the Pingewood Gate and at the southern end of the swale, and boundary hedgerows and trees to the eastern boundary of the temporary construction area should all be included in the proposals for the CMR development.
- The Landscape Strategy should show a woodland/hedgerow belt along the northern boundary as part of the emerging green capital. This should link into the 'treed avenue' and 'rural hedgerow route' of the green capital strategy.
- The SUDS proposals should all agree. Drawings to be amended as necessary. If a swale is proposed to the eastern boundary of the temporary construction site, how will it relate to the proposed boundary hedgerow with trees?