

ASHTON KEYNES AD

LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

REPLACEMENT CHAPTER

Document Properties		
Local Planning Authority Reference	PL/2023/03359	
Title	Chapter 7: Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment: Replacement Chapter	
Prepared By	Pegasus Group	
Version History		
Version	Date	Version Status
V1	October 2024	V1

7. Landscape and Visual

7.1. Introduction

7.1.1. Pegasus Group have been commissioned by Acorn Bioenergy Limited to prepare a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in support of an outline planning application for the construction of an anaerobic digestion facility on agricultural land off Ashton Road, southeast of South Cerney, Ashton Keynes, Wiltshire (the 'proposed development') (Site Location Plan at **Figure 7.1** and Landscape Strategy Plan at **Appendix 7.2**).

7.1.2. This chapter assesses the likely significant effects associated with the existing physical landscape and potential changes to its character and visual amenity.

7.1.3. This document comprises a replacement chapter of the Environmental Statement considers the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development and should be read in conjunction with ES Chapter 3 and revised scheme drawings, of which the key amended drawings most relevant to landscape and visual matters are:

- GGP-29419-P2-101_PO2 Site Layout Plan (2 sheets)
- GGP-29410-P2-103-PO1 Site Drainage Layout (2 sheets)

7.1.4. An initial desk-top study was carried out to review a range of published information relating to the Site and its context, landscape designations, published landscape character assessments and the accompanying guidance. A site visit was carried out on in July 2024 to review the findings of the desktop study and to determine the extent of the visual influence of the Site. Due to the timing of project instruction assessment was undertaken when trees and hedgerows were in full leaf, however assessment accounts for professional judgement of increased visibility in winter, which is an acceptable approach regarding best practice guidance.

7.1.5. The main objectives of the assessment are as follows:

- Identify, evaluate and describe the current landscape character of the Site and its surroundings;
- Determine the sensitivity of the landscape to the type of development proposed;
- Identify potential visual receptors (i.e. people who would be able to see the development) and representative viewpoints, and evaluate their sensitivity to the type of changes proposed;
- Identify and describe any likely effects of the development on identified landscape and visual receptors;
- Evaluate the magnitude of change and its significance;
- Identify and integrate any mitigation measures that may help in offsetting or reducing adverse effects; and
- Assess the residual effects upon the identified landscape and visual receptors.

7.1.6. This chapter is supported by figures and appendices. Figures included are:

- Figure 7.1: Site Location Plan

- Figure 7.2: Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility
- Figure 7.3: Topography Plan
- Figure 7.4: Environmental Designations Plan
- Figure 7.5: Public Rights of Way Plan
- Figure 7.6: Regional Landscape Character
- Figure 7.7: Local Landscape Character
- Figure 7.8: Viewpoint Location Plan

7.1.7. Appendices included are:

- 7.1: Detailed Methodology
- 7.2: Landscape Strategy Plan
- 7.3: Visualisations: Existing Views, Photomontages and Photowires
- 7.4: Landscape Receptor Assessment
- 7.5: Visual Receptor Assessment

7.2. Assessment Approach

Methodology

7.2.1. This assessment has been undertaken with regard to the current best practice, as outlined within the following publications:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd Edition, 2013) – Landscape Institute / Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (hereafter referred to as GLVIA3).
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014) – Natural England.
- An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – To Inform Spatial Planning and Land Management (2019) – Natural England.
- Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals, 17 September 2019 by the Landscape Institute.
- Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 2/21 Assessing landscape value outside national designations, May 2021 by the Landscape Institute.
- Notes and Clarifications on aspects of the 3rd Edition Guidelines on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3), LITGN-2024-01 (August 2024) published by the Landscape Institute.

Study Area

7.2.2. This assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development on the landscape and visual resource has taken account of all attributes of the landscape in establishing the study area. This was informed by a review of published documents,

including relevant landscape character assessments, and field surveys. A study area extending to a 2km radius from the Site boundary has been used for the purpose of this assessment.

Assessment of Effects

- 7.2.3. Several factors are considered in relation to the sensitivity and magnitude of change that would be experienced by landscape elements, landscape character, and visual receptors are set out in the **Detailed Methodology** at **Appendix 7.1**.
- 7.2.4. For each landscape and visual receptor scoped into the assessment, sensitivity and magnitude are separately assessed and transparently combined to reach a conclusion on whether the effects as a result of the Proposed Development are significant or not as set out in **Table 7.1** below, where Major effects shaded grey are considered Significant.
- 7.2.5. A likely significant effect occurs where the combination of the variables results in the proposed development having a definitive effect on landscape character and/or the view. A not significant effect will occur where the appearance of the proposed development is not definitive, and the effect continues to be defined principally by its baseline condition.

Table 7.1: Significance of landscape and visual effects

		Sensitivity		
		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Magnitude of Change	HIGH	Major	Major	Moderate
	MEDIUM	Major	Moderate	Minor
	LOW	Moderate	Minor	Minor
	NEGLIGIBLE	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

Legislative and Policy Framework

- 7.2.6. This assessment has been undertaken with reference to national and local planning policy including the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023. The Planning Statement details the overall planning policy context. Those policies that are relevant in terms of landscape and visual issues are described in the following paragraphs.

National Planning Policy

- 7.2.7. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in December 2023, is a material consideration in planning decisions and any development would need to accord with the following planning provisions. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out at Paragraph 11. The NPPF sets out overarching objectives to achieve sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. For decision-taking, a development that accords with a current development plan should be approved without delay; and, where the development plan is absent, silent, or relevant policies are out of date, permission should be granted unless:

"i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

- 7.2.8. Footnote 7 outlines the protected areas or assets of particular importance to the NPPF policies (rather than those in development plans) which relate to:

- Habitat sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 187); and/or
- Designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- Land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscape), a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast;
- Irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 72); and
- Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

- 7.2.9. The Site and its immediate setting do not lie within any area designated for its landscape value. At Paragraph 8, criterion 'c' describes the 'environmental objective' to *"protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy"*.

- 7.2.10. Paragraph 20 refers to strategic policies that should make sufficient provision for the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built, and historic environment, including landscapes, and green infrastructure and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation. Paragraph 135 relates to achieving well-designed places, criterion 'b' requires developments to be *"visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping"*. Criterion 'c' also sets out to ensure that developments

Landscape and Visual

"are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)".

- 7.2.11. Para. 136 describes how trees make an *"important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change."* It states how *"new streets [should be] tree-lined", and 'that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible'.* In respect to this matter, it is important to note that this is a recent addition to the NPPF and whilst this is an outline planning application, the requirements for tree-lined streets have been considered at this stage and seek to ensure that this can be provided within the outline scheme parameters.
- 7.2.12. Section 15: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment specifies how planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Paragraph 180a states that protection and enhancement of *"valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils"* should be *"in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan"*. It also notes that the *"intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services"* should be recognised.
- 7.2.13. Paragraph 181 makes it clear that there is a hierarchy to the importance and value attributed to landscapes, and that the development plan should identify the quality of particular landscapes that are not subject to statutory protection. Para. 182 describes how the *"scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas"*.
- 7.2.14. Within Section 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, Paragraph 196 states how local authorities should take into account amongst other things, *"the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness"*.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 7.2.15. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is a regularly updated online planning resource which provides further advice to the NPPF in relation to developments. The section 'Natural Environment' refers to key issues in implementing policy to protect and enhance the natural environment, including green infrastructure, biodiversity, geodiversity and ecosystems, and landscape. It outlines that green infrastructure can assist in achieving well-designed places, stating *"green infrastructure exists within a wider landscape context and can reinforce and enhance local landscape character, contributing to a sense of place and natural beauty"*.

Local Planning Policy

- 7.2.16. The following planning policy should be read in conjunction with the planning statement.
- 7.2.17. Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning decisions should be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

7.2.18. The Site lies within the administrative boundaries of Wiltshire County Council and in close proximity to the administrative boundary of Gloucestershire County Council/Cotswold District Council just under 400m to the north.

7.2.19. The following documents form part of Wiltshire's planning policy and are relevant to the Study Area:

- Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted 2015)
- A Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire – Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan 2022–2030 (adopted February 2022)
- Ashton Keynes Neighbourhood Plan 2015–2026 (made May 2017)
- Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (December 2006)
- Cotswolds Water Park Landscape Character Assessment (August 2009)

Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted 2015)

7.2.20. The Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) was adopted in January 2015 and is under review at the time of writing.

7.2.21. The planning context for the area is set out in the Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted January 2015) which is currently under review. The Site lies within the boundaries of the neighbourhood of Ashton Keynes, which has a made Neighbourhood Plan.

7.2.22. The following policies covering landscape and visual matters are of relevance to the proposed development:

7.2.23. Core policy 42 relates to 'Standalone renewable energy installations', and states:

"Proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site specific constraints. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate how impacts on the following factors have been satisfactorily assessed, including any cumulative effects, and taken into account:

i. The landscape, particularly in and around AONBs

[...]

iv. Biodiversity

v. The historic environment including the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting

vi. Use of the local transport network

vii. Residential amenity, including noise, odour, visual amenity and safety

viii. Best and most versatile agricultural land."

Landscape and Visual

7.2.24. Core Policy 50 relates to 'Biodiversity and geodiversity' and states that:

"All development should seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity. Major development in particular must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to restore, enhance and create valuable habitats, ecological networks and ecosystem services. Such enhancement measures will contribute to the objectives and targets of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) or River Basin/ Catchment Management Plan, particularly through landscape scale projects, and be relevant to the local landscape character."

7.2.25. Core Policy 50 further states that in relation to 'Local sites':

"Sustainable development will avoid direct and indirect impacts upon local sites through sensitive site location and layout, and by maintaining sufficient buffers and ecological connectivity with the wider environment. Damage or disturbance to local sites will generally be unacceptable, other than in exceptional circumstances where it has been demonstrated that such impacts:

- i. cannot reasonably be avoided*
- ii. are reduced as far as possible*
- iii. are outweighed by other planning considerations in the public interest*
- iv. where appropriate compensation measures can be secured through planning obligations or agreements. Development proposals affecting local sites must make a reasonable contribution to their favourable management in the long-term."*

7.2.26. Core Policy 51 relates to 'Landscape' matters within the boundaries of Wiltshire Council, and states that:

"[...] proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures:

- i. The locally distinctive pattern and species composition of natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and waterbodies.*
- ii. The locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings.*
- iii. The separate identity of settlements and the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the urban fringe.*
- iv. Visually sensitive skylines, soils, geological and topographical features.*
- v. Landscape features of cultural, historic and heritage value.*
- vi. Important views and visual amenity.*
- vii. Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*
- viii. Landscape functions including places to live, work, relax and recreate.*

- ix. *Special qualities of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the New Forest National Park, where great weight will be afforded to conserving and enhancing landscapes and scenic beauty."*

7.2.27. Core Policy 52 relates to 'Green Infrastructure'

"Where development is permitted developers will be required to:

- i. *retain and enhance existing on site green infrastructure*
- ii. *[...]*
- iii. *put measures in place to ensure appropriate long-term management of any green infrastructure directly related to the development*
- iv. *provide appropriate contributions towards the delivery of the Wiltshire Green Infrastructure Strategy*
- v. *identify and provide opportunities to enhance and improve linkages between the natural and historic landscapes of Wiltshire. [...]*

Proposals for major development should be accompanied by an audit of the existing green infrastructure within and around the site and a statement demonstrating how this will be retained and enhanced through the development process."

7.2.28. Core Policy 54 relates to 'Cotswold Water Park' in which the Site lies within its boundaries. Proposals for any such development within this area must meet the following criteria listed within the WCS:

- i. *"Increase or enhance public accessibility and enjoyment of the lakes and countryside.*
- ii. *Contribute towards the local economy in the Cotswold Water Park.*
- iii. *Strengthen the local landscape character and engender a sense of place.*
- iv. *Contribute towards enhancement of biodiversity within the Cotswold Water Park.*
- v. *Retain the character of individual settlements including the tranquillity of their settings.*
- vi. *Protect the Cotswold Water Park's built heritage, and enhance accessibility and interpretation of such features where possible.*
- vii. *Demonstrate high levels of sustainability, particularly including sustainable building design, accessibility by sustainable transport modes and sustainable drainage systems."*

7.2.29. Core Policy 57 relates to 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping'. Within this core policy, it is stated how applications for new development must be accompanied by appropriate information to demonstrate how the proposal will make a positive contribution to the character of Wiltshire by:

"i. enhancing local distinctiveness by responding to the value of the natural and historic environment, relating positively to its landscape setting and the existing pattern of development and responding to local topography by ensuring that important views into, within and out of the site are to be retained and enhanced

ii. the retention and enhancement of existing important landscaping and natural features, [...] in order to take opportunities to enhance biodiversity, create wildlife and recreational corridors, effectively integrate the development into its setting and to justify and mitigate against any losses that may occur through the development

iii. responding positively to the existing townscape and landscape features in terms of building layouts, built form, height, mass, scale, building line, [...] elevational design, materials, streetscape and rooflines to effectively integrate the building into its setting

iv. being sympathetic to and conserving historic buildings and historic landscapes

v. [...] use of renewable energy sources [...] in accordance with Core Policy 41 (Sustainable Construction and Low Carbon Energy)

vi. making efficient use of land whilst taking account of the characteristics of the site and the local context to deliver an appropriate development which relates effectively to the immediate setting and to the wider character of the area

[...]

xiii. the case of major developments, ensuring they are accompanied by a detailed design statement and masterplan, which is based on an analysis of the local context and assessment of constraints and opportunities of the site and is informed by a development concept, including clearly stated design principles, which will underpin the character of the new place"

- 7.2.30. Core Policy 58 relates to 'Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment'. This report does not assess the impact of the proposed development on heritage assets and the historic environment, these features have a contribution to landscape character. The conservation areas and listed buildings indicated on the EDP at **Figure 7.4**, are located some distance from the proposed development and do not fall within the visual envelope of the proposals (see SZTV at **Figure 7.2**).

Wiltshire and Swindon Waste Core Strategy (adopted July 2009)

- 7.2.31. This published document sets out the strategic planning policy framework for waste management in Wiltshire and Swindon over a period of 20 years. One of the strategic objectives for Wiltshire and Swindon is stated as follows:

"Protect and enhance the diverse and highly valued natural and historical environment of Wiltshire and Swindon, incorporating the landscape character, biodiversity and geological interests and cultural heritage. Ensure the protection of the water environment whilst minimising and mitigating flood risk."

7.2.32. Policy Area WDC1 sets out 'Key Criteria for Ensuring Sustainable Waste Management Development' and outlines the key criteria for ensuring that sustainable waste management is delivered. It states that the following impacts can be minimised:

- *"Environmental and Cumulative impacts;*
- *Transporting waste;*
- *Flood risk and the water environment;*
- *Biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural heritage;*
- *Landscape; and;*
- *The extent to which appropriate restoration can be delivered."*

7.2.33. Policy Area WDC2 'Management the Impact of Waste Management Development' sets out which of the following should be protected from the impacts of waste management development:

- *amenity;*
- *visual aspects;*
- *noise and light emissions;*
- *vibration;*
- *air emissions and climate change;*
- *contaminated land; and*
- *agricultural land.*

Ashton Keynes Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2026 (made May 2017)

7.2.34. As identified on the Wiltshire Council website, the Site lies within the area pertaining to the Ashton Keynes Neighbourhood Plan (AKNP) which has been made.

7.2.35. Despite the Environment Policies of the Wiltshire Core Strategy being the principal Environment Policies for Ashton Keynes, within the published document, Policy ENP1 relates to the 'Protection of biodiversity and Wildlife' and states that:

"Development should minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible."

7.2.36. The Site is located well beyond any County Wildlife Sites or Natural Water Features and is located over 350m north of an identified biodiversity corridor.

Supplementary Planning Documents

A Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire – Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan 2022-2030 (February 2022)

Landscape and Visual

- 7.2.37. This published document is being used as framework for all forthcoming council policies and plans to ensure the council is on track to meet its pledge of making the county of Wiltshire carbon neutral. This document also sets out the how green and blue infrastructure will be delivered within the WCCs administrative boundary.
- 7.2.38. Within the published document, 'Strategic GBI Corridors' are set out, focused on river systems and navigable waterways with the Site lying within 'Thames Corridor'. This document also sets out 'Strategic GBI Opportunity Areas' within Wiltshire, defined to provide an integrated spatial framework for identifying strategic priorities and opportunities to strengthen its GBI Network, with the Site lying within 'Thames Vale'.

Limitations to the Assessment

- 7.2.39. This chapter comprises a replacement chapter for an LVIA chapter prepared of an original, larger scheme on the Site, prepared by SLR. The LVIA has been undertaken independently by Pegasus Group without any reference to this original assessment.
- 7.2.40. In undertaking the landscape and visual assessment in relation to the Proposed Development, there are limitations affecting the outputs from this work and key assumptions. These include:
- The assessment has been based on information readily available at the time of undertaking the assessment;
 - The Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility (SZTV) at **Figure 7.2** has been used to understand the extent of potential visibility to identify receptors. The SZTV does not demonstrate absolute visibility and is therefore refined through field work with the potential visibility of the Proposed Development assessed;
 - During fieldwork, weather conditions, the time of day, and seasonal factors have influenced the visual assessment and photographic record of the Site and its surroundings. Every effort has been made to ensure that the photographs and their locations are "representative" of the variety of receptors and views from a range of distances and directions. Due to timing of project instruction it was not possible to agree the locations of viewpoints in advance with the Planning Authority;
 - Winter views (illustrating deciduous trees devoid of leaf cover) have not been obtained for the baseline views due to timing of project instruction, however, the assessment assumes winter conditions based on professional judgement;
 - The Landscape Strategy, SZTV and visualisations included within this chapter that inform the assessment are based on revised planning application drawings, prepared by GPP. This LVIA has been prepared on the assumption that the Proposed Development is delivered in line with these drawings and associated timescales;
 - The development at Year 15 is assessed on the assumption that the native tree and shrub planting is delivered in line with the Landscape Strategy and allows for estimated conservative growth of proposed planting (with trees up to 9m tall); and
 - The Proposed Development is of a long-term nature (approximately 25 years) although all effects are assumed to be temporary unless otherwise stated.

- 7.2.41. The focus of this chapter is on landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development; however, whilst effects on cultural heritage and ecology are beyond the scope of this chapter, heritage assets and nature conservation designations in the study area are shown in **Figure 7.2**.
- 7.2.42. No other consented or planned developments, subject to a valid planning application, have been identified by the Council that would be considered as having significant cumulative effects in combination with the Proposed Development. Construction is underway for a residential development on the site of a former special needs school 'Cotswold Community' that lies ca.470m to the southwest of the Site, noting that due to intervening landform, the proposed development would not be visible (see SZTV at **Figure 7.2**).

7.3. Baseline Conditions

Site Description and Context

Site Description

- 7.3.1. The Site is located on arable land adjacent to Ashton Road that follows the eastern boundary of the Site. In the wider study area the settlement of South Cerney is located just over 0.5km to east and Ashton Keynes is approximately 1.7km to the south. Somerford Keynes lies ca. 1.7km to the southwest (refer to **Figure 7.1: Site Location Plan**).
- 7.3.2. The Site is bound by mature hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees to the north, east, and west, with the southern boundary not defined on the ground. Towards the southern end of the Site, a hedgerow runs east/west across the Site. A farm track along the western boundary of the Site provides access to a derelict agricultural barn that lies in close proximity to the northwestern corner of the Site.
- 7.3.3. There are several Public Rights of Way (PROW) within the surrounding landscape, providing connections between the various settlements, farmsteads and scattered properties (refer to **Figure 7.5 Public Rights of Way Plan**). Commentary is only provided on routes that fall within or close to the edge of the SZTV at **Figure 7.2**. Closest to the Site is Footpath 'AKEY4' passing the western boundary of the Site and crossing farmland to the north. The Footpath 'AKEY5' lies further to the west running broadly north/south through Cotswold Community, connecting to the Bridleway 'AKEY3' to the south. To the north, 'AKEY5' connects to Footpath 'BSC11' running from a field boundary to 'Broadway Lane' within South Cerney. 'AKEY33' is a Bridleway ca.160m to the southeast of the Site running broadly northeast/southwest between Ashton Road connecting to Bridleway 'BSC4' within South Cerney.
- 7.3.4. There are no watercourses or waterbodies within the Site. Due to the Site's location in proximity to Cotswold Water Park, there is a high density of waterbodies and watercourses within the study area. With the River Churn lying ca.1km to the northeast, and the River Thames lying ca.1.8km to the south of the Site. The landform across the Site falls broadly west to east from high points of ca.100m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) along the western boundary to ca.90m AOD in the southeastern corner. The Site lies on gently rising land (**Figure 7.3: Topography Plan**), noting other rising land is located within the study area including land north of South Cerney and also higher land to the west, north of Somerford Keynes.

Landscape and Visual

Landscape Features Sensitivity

- 7.3.5. Public Rights of Way surrounding the Site are assessed as being of high value, susceptibility and sensitivity. They are not assessed as part of the landscape assessment as there would be no changes to public access as a result of the proposals and indirect changes on visual amenity are covered in the separate visual assessment section of the chapter.
- 7.3.6. The hedgerows and hedgerow trees within the Site and along its boundaries are a substantial component. The existing hedgerow and hedgerow tree resource is considered to be of medium value in overall terms. Trees are of high susceptibility to changes arising from the development proposed reflecting the time it takes for the establishment of this landscape element and hedgerows are of medium susceptibility as they can be more quickly replaced in the landscape. When combined with a medium value, this results in an overall high sensitivity of the tree resource and a medium sensitivity for the hedgerows.
- 7.3.7. The existing land cover is considered to be of a medium value and susceptibility, being predominantly formed of intensively managed vegetation that is replaced annually. A medium value and susceptibility result in a medium sensitivity.
- 7.3.8. Due to the gently sloping profile of the land, it is more susceptible to change to the type of development proposed, than the flatter land that is more common in the immediate locality, noting that the area has been subject and is currently subject to widespread mineral extraction that has modified the natural topographical profile of the land. The topography of the Site is assessed as being medium susceptibility, which when combined with a medium value, results in a medium sensitivity.

Published Landscape Character Assessment

- 7.3.9. This section seeks to establish how the proposed development would have a bearing on landscape character locally. The effects on landscape character consider how the introduction of new landscape elements physically alters the landform, landcover, landscape pattern, and perceptual attributes of the Site or how the visibility of the proposals changes the way in which landscape character is perceived. Landscape character is defined in GLVIA3 as the:

“Distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.”

- 7.3.10. The landscape within the Site and study area has been subject to several separate landscape character assessments, undertaken at a range of different scales (refer to **Figure 7.6: Regional Landscape Character**, and **Figure 7.7 Local Landscape Character**. Since the study area spans two administrative areas, the information has been summarised in tabular format in **Table 7.2** below.

Table 7.2: The varying scales of Published Character Assessments pertaining to the study area.

Scale	Published Character Assessment	Landscape Type (LT)	Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Approximate distance from Site
National Level	National Character Assessment (NCA)	n/a	108: 'Upper Thames Clay Vales'	Covers the Site
County Level	Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (WLCA) (December 2005)	LT 12: Open Clay Vale	LCA 12A: Thames Open Clay Vale	Covers the Site
	Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment (GLCA) (January 2006)	River Basin Lowland	TV 1A: Somerford Keynes	350m to the northeast
		Cornbrash Lowland	TV 2A: Poole Keynes and Ewen Lowlands	1.4km to the west
			TV 2B: Driffield Lowlands	1.7km to the northeast
Detailed County Level	North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (NWLCA) 2004	Alluvium River Terrace Farmland	LCA 1: Thames Valley Floor	Covers the Site
Local Level	Cotswold Water Park Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (CWPILCA) 2009	LT 3: River Basin Clay Vale	LCA 3A: South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands	Covers the Site
		LT 2: Cornbrash Limestone Lowland	LCA 2A: Poole Keynes and Ewen Lowlands	1.4km to the west
			LCA 2B: Driffield Lowlands	1.7km to the northeast

Landscape and Visual

Natural England 'Upper Thames Clay Vales' (NCA 108)

- 7.3.11. Natural England has identified 159 geographical areas of similar landscape character known as National Character Areas (NCAs). This mapping sometimes described as *"The Character of England Map"* provides a description of landscape character at the national scale. It is considered that whilst the NCAs provide a national spatial framework, the scale of the mapping and information is of limited use as a strategic planning tool at the local scale. The Site is located within the 'Upper Thames Clay Vales' (NCA 108).
- 7.3.12. Key characteristics of NCA 108 considered relevant to this LVIA include:
- *"Low-lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits, including alluvium and gravel terraces, spread over 40 per cent of the area, creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands of the gravel."*
 - *The large river system of the River Thames drains the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north [...]. Where mineral extraction takes place, pits naturally fill with water, and limestone gravels from the Cotswolds give rise to marl formation. There are a high number of nationally important geological sites.*
 - *Woodland cover is low at only about 3 per cent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by lines of willows and, particularly in the [...] Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.*
 - *Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls. [...]*
 - *In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. [...] There are also rich and extensive ditch systems.*
 - *Gravel extraction has left a legacy of geological exposures, numerous waterbodies and, at the Cotswold Water Park, a nationally important complex of marl lakes.*
 - *Wetland habitat attracts regionally important numbers of birds including snipe, redshank, curlew and lapwing and wintering wildfowl such as pochard. [...] The area also supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl, tree sparrow and skylark.*
 - *[...] There are many heritage features, including [...] deserted medieval [...].*
 - *Brick and tile from local clays, timber and thatch are traditional building materials across the area, combined with limestone near the Cotswolds [...]*
 - *Major routes include [...] canals, [...] and [...] Thames Path National Trails."*

County Landscape Character

7.3.13. At a county level, Wiltshire's landscape is divided into 16 Landscape Character Types (LT) and 38 Landscape Character Areas (LCA). The Site is located within LCT 12: Open Clay Vales, and LCA 12A: Thames Open Clay Vale.

7.3.14. Key characteristics of LCT 12: Open Clay Vales are as follows:

- *"Level land form with wide open skies and views to ridges and downs.*
- *Pastoral land use with some arable.*
- *Large scale geometric fields with hedgerows or open drainage channels defining boundaries.*
- *Presence of rivers, tributaries, drainage channels and open water bodies.*
- *Watercourses lined with riparian vegetation with prominent lines of willows (some pollarded).* •
- *Floristically rich hay meadows.*
- *Settlement pattern varies from large towns and small scattered villages to sparse farmsteads.*
- *Buildings in varied materials of brick, render and stone.*
- *Crossed by major transport corridors, and a network of minor roads linking settlements.*
- *Historic use for transport evident in canals."*

7.3.15. The LT Description includes:

"During the 20th century there was extensive quarrying of Sand, Gravel and some Clay (deriving from the Jurassic Limestone of the Cotswolds Hills) in area 12A: Thames Open Clay Vale. These pits flooded and the lime rich waters have formed the Marl lakes of the Cotswold Water Park."

7.3.16. Further the LT Description mentions, with reference to the Cotswold Water Park SSSI:

"Here quarrying has created over a hundred lakes with nationally scarce marl waters caused by the lime rich geology. The series of lakes that form the SSSI include a range of the varied plant communities including open water (including those associated with marl waters), reed beds and surrounding grassland habitats."

7.3.17. The description of LCA 12A: Thames Open Clay Vale includes:

"[...] Thames Open Clay Vale is a low lying area centred on the River Thames and its floodplain. It is a largely tranquil, rural landscape, predominantly level, with vertical elements of lines of willow and other wetland trees. The agricultural use of the area combines arable and wet pasture, with open water ditches as well as hedgerows defining boundaries. Field patterns vary from small and irregular to larger, geometric fields often in

Landscape and Visual

arable use on dryer or drained gravel areas. A major feature of the area is the large extent of open water resulting from gravel extraction and afterwards put to leisure use as the Cotswold Water Park. The many water bodies with their varied vegetation are of national significance as scarce marl waters (Cotswold Water Park SSSI). There are also a number of hay meadows of high ecological interest. The presence of water is felt throughout this area in the rivers, tributaries, drainage ditches with frequent lines of willows and other wetland vegetation. Settlement is sparse in the Thames Open Clay Vale with a few small settlements such as the village of Ashton Keynes [...] but mainly scattered isolated farmsteads. Vernacular building materials are brick and stone. [...] most of the roads are minor rural routes with small bridges crossing the waterways and ditches."

7.3.18. Further in the published document, under the 'Evaluation' section, 'Positive landscape features of significance' are listed:

- *"Wide open skies and views to ridges and downs.*
- *Rich variety of rivers, tributaries, drainage channels and open water bodies, including scarce marl water habitats.*
- *Watercourses lined with riparian vegetation with prominent lines of willows (some pollarded).*
- *Hay meadows with unimproved grassland of ecological interest.*
- *Villages and farmsteads with vernacular mix of local stone and brick.*
- *Visible archaeology in Roman roads, pattern of medieval villages, long established grazing meadows, and the Kennet and Avon Canal corridor."*

7.3.19. 'Forces for Change' are also listed under the 'Evaluation' section:

- *"Agricultural intensification threatens the remaining small scale field patterns and traditional pastoral landscape.*
- *Loss of hedgerows boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.*
- *Elm loss of the 1970s.*
- *Intensification in farming leading to drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation.*
- *Pressure for further expansion of settlement and new development threatening the character of the small villages and scattered farmsteads.*
- *The presence of major transport corridors particularly the trunk roads has brought pressures for development and associated amenity planting and signage.*
- *Increasing road use which will further diminish the rural tranquillity of the vale landscape.*
- *Pressure to upgrade roads through additional kerbing and signage to accommodate an increase in traffic volume."*

7.3.20. It should be noted that the condition of the Open Clay Vales LT is judged by the published character assessment as “moderate”, with the strength of character also being judged as “moderate” by the WLCA.

7.3.21. The ‘Inherent landscape sensitivities’ of the Open Clay Vales LT are listed as:

- *“Rural tranquillity.*
- *Hedgerow pattern.*
- *Water bodies and water ways of varied character and ecological value.*
- *Streamside willows and other riparian vegetation.*
- *Remnant hay meadows.*
- *Wide open views.*
- *Settlement pattern of nucleated villages with variety of vernacular building materials.”*

7.3.22. It is mentioned in the WLCA that the strategy for Open Clay Vales LT is to:

“conserve the elements that contribute to the rural tranquil landscape; the rivers, streams and open water, the meadows and riverside tree lines, the brick and stone villages and farmsteads and to improve elements in decline such as the hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and the visual influence of the large settlement edges and major transport corridors.”

7.3.23. The Broad Management objectives are listed as:

- *“Retain and manage the hedgerow network and nurture new hedgerow trees.*
- *Promote appropriate management of arable land including retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields to encourage wildlife, particularly farmland birds.*
- *Retain and manage hay meadows.*
- *Introduce new tree planting along watercourses using typical riparian species such as alder and willow.*
- *Take opportunities to extend and enhance the varied wetland habitats (reedbeds, wet grassland and wet woodland) of the Cotswold Water Park through appropriate restoration of mineral workings.*
- *Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape.*
- *Consider developing guidance for built development to ensure both future construction and changes to existing buildings are designed to integrate with the existing character and structure of settlements.*
- *Consider screening views to intrusive urban edges through planting new woodland.”*

Landscape and Visual

- 7.3.24. A proportion of the study area lies within the Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment. Closest to the Site is the 'River Basin Lowland' LCT and the associated LCA of 'TV 1A: Somerford Keynes and South Cerney' lying ca.350m to the northeast of the Site. These LCT and LCA have been scoped out of the assessment as there is minimal visibility indicated by the SZTV at Figure 7.2 and therefore no potential for Significant landscape character effects.

Detailed County Landscape Character

- 7.3.25. The North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (June 2004) (NWLCA) provides a more detailed assessment over a smaller area within the county of Wiltshire. This divides North Wiltshire's landscape into fourteen LTs and sixteen LCAs, with the Site lying within the 'Alluvium River Terrace Farmland' LT and LCA 1 'Thames Valley Floor'. A general description of the Thames Valley Floor LCA is given and is described as a:

"low-lying area is centred on the River Thames and its floodplain. It is predominantly a flat landscape, punctuated by lines or small clumps of willows and other wetland trees. The agricultural use of the land includes both arable and wet pasture, with open water ditches as well as hedges in defining field boundaries."

- 7.3.26. The main characteristics of this LCA are listed as follows:

- *"Low-lying, largely level topography largely between 75–85m AOD, on river terrace and alluvial geology with heavy soils.*
- *Dominant presence of water in the form of ditches, gravel pits, rivers and streams.*
- *Land use and landscape features associated with the wetland environment, including raised tracks, wet meadows, drainage ditches and ponds, reed beds, groups or lines of willows, alders and poplars, and pollarded willows.*
- *Field sizes and types varying from small scale irregular water meadows and permanent pasture, through to large fields in regular shapes which have been drained and are used for arable crops.*
- *Some remnant ridge and furrow on meadow lands.*
- *Hawthorn and blackthorn hedges in the slightly drier areas with individual mature oak and ash.*
- *Dispersed and minimal settlement, including villages with distinctive drainage features, small hamlets and farmsteads on isolated areas of higher ground.*
- *Remnant historical features including Roman and early medieval roads or settlement, field patterns and drainage features.*
- *Rich biodiversity especially with regard to wet meadows and other wetland features.*
- *Views contained by hedgerows and tree belts in the flat landscape, but with features such as church spires forming key visual reference points."*

- 7.3.27. Management actions are listed within the published document and are as follows:

“Short term:

- *Conserve wetland features including open ditches, reed beds, meadows and associated tree species – especially willow, poplar and alder.*
- *Enhance the wetland character by pollarding willows, planting new reed beds, and planting alder, willow and poplar along water courses in informal groups and broken lines.*
- *Conserve hedgerows and mature trees, including allowing new trees to emerge in existing hedges, and discourage field amalgamation.*
- *Protect historical features including old field boundaries and ridge and furrow field patterns, in particular by discouraging arable activities on land where ridge and furrow patterns can still be seen.*
- *Enhance the sense of place through use of appropriate building materials in respect of new development, extensions or other built features – especially through the use of limestone, red brick and clay tiles.*
- *Encourage biodiversity by creating wetland habitats.*
- *Discourage development which would detract from the sense of remoteness and the quiet rural character.*

Long term:

- *Seek opportunities to enhance the character of the landscape by creating new wetland areas where agricultural futures may be marginal.*
- *Encourage the creation of public access along waterways, where consistent with nature conservation objectives.”*

7.3.28. The landscape sensitivity has been identified as *“highly sensitive to change”* by the NWLCA due to the *“overriding sense of tranquillity”* and its intact landscape which *“offers a fair representation of floodplain landscapes in this part of England”*.

Local Landscape Character

7.3.29. The Cotswold Water Park Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (August 2009) (CWPI LCA) was commissioned by Wiltshire County Council and undertaken by LDA Design, and its findings formed part of a suite of baseline studies to inform a Strategic Review of the Cotswold Water Park (CWP) and the development of a Masterplan and Management Strategy for the Area. This published document divides the area within and encompassing the CWP into five LTs and thirteen LCAs, with the Site lying within the ‘River Basin Clay Vale’ LT and LCA 3A ‘South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands’. LCA 3A is described as follows:

“Its character is mainly derived from the combination of an existing settled landscape of small mainly stone built village settlement with a dynamic and evolving wetland landscape. Large-scale sand and gravel extraction comprises the dominant influence on the landscape character of this area. In addition to extensive areas of post-extraction created lakes, there are a number of areas that are still undergoing active extraction, such as Shorncote Quarry.”

Landscape and Visual

- 7.3.30. The published document goes on further to mention:

"Despite the number of lakes, the visual influence of these water bodies within the wider landscape context of the area is often limited as the development of regenerating scrub vegetation and areas of woodland adjacent to many of the lakes restricts views towards the water bodies from neighbouring settlements and local roads."

- 7.3.31. Reference is made to Ashton Down, in which the Site is located which states that:

"Beyond the lakes of the Cotswold Water Park, a traditional land use pattern of small scale regularly enclosed pasture fields continues within the floodplain adjacent to the River Churn and River Thames, with horse and sheep grazing fields separated by low, well maintained and regularly trimmed hedgerows predominating along the valley bottom and occasional medium scale arable fields aligning the shallow slopes and occasional local hillocks that rise above the floodplain, as at Ashton Down to the west of South Cerney."

- 7.3.32. Regarding the recreational opportunities within CWP the CWPILCA states that:

"The creation of the Cotswold Water Park has facilitated a proliferation of recreational opportunities in the area with many of the lakes supporting yacht clubs, sailing schools, angling clubs and nature reserves, notably the Somerford Lakes Reserve, designated as a SSSI, and Keynes Country Park, to the west and east of Somerford Keynes respectively."

Sensitivity of Landscape Character

- 7.3.33. The following paragraphs analyse the Site's landscape character, based on an on-site assessment, and verify it against the published reports, mentioned in the previous paragraphs. By doing so, this LVIA aims to identify the landscape value and landscape susceptibility to Anaerobic Digestion Facilities. The analysis is carried out in accordance with Box 5.1 of the GLVIA3. Landscape factors identified in Box 5.1 are not analysed in detail, due to the scope of this LVIA but rather a general commentary is provided in the paragraphs below.

Landscape Value

- 7.3.34. The Site itself is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. There is a high density of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) cover within the study area due to the presence of the CWP. Another ecological designation is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) at Coke's Pit. To the east of this designation lies the 'Keynes' Country Park ca.850m to the west of the Site.
- 7.3.35. Four Scheduled Monuments are found within the study area with the closest present to the east of Cotswold Community ca.300m southwest of the Site. Three Conservation Areas are present within the study area at South Cerney (ca.600m northeast), Ashton Keynes (ca.1km south), and Somerford Keynes (ca.1.9km to the southwest). In addition to this, a number of Listed Buildings are found within the study area, typically clustered within the Conservation Areas, however the closest are found ca.590m to the southwest within Cotswold Community.
- 7.3.36. The condition of the landscape appears to be variable, and this is confirmed by the published landscape character assessments.
- 7.3.37. In terms of scenic qualities, the Site and adjacent areas are a combination of a pleasant but unremarkable rural landscape, along with areas of industrial and mineral extraction land uses

which detract from the overall character, but typically have a localised influence due to the surrounding landform and high level of hedgerow and tree cover.

- 7.3.38. The hillock of Ashton Down, on which the Site lies, is perceived in the wider context of other areas of higher ground within the study area. The elevated topography to the west of the Site offers medium range views to the east, south, and west characterised by a wooded horizon with frequent tree cover, and occasional views of industrial/mineral extraction activities. At the less elevated topography to the east of the Site, the landscape is much more secluded with the landform to the west, and frequent tree and hedgerow cover foreshortening views and reducing the appreciation of the local field pattern.
- 7.3.39. The Site and adjacent fields do not appear to contain any landscape features that would be rare or unique, however, some of the adjacent fields border Cotswold Water Park SSSIs to the east and west, and a Scheduled Monument to the southwest. There is no formal public access to the Site, however a PROW Footpath runs parallel to the western extents of the Site.
- 7.3.40. Based on the above analysis, the value of the Site and local landscape is assessed as being medium.

Landscape Susceptibility

- 7.3.41. The Site comprises two sections of two arable fields, with a single hedgerow running through the southernmost section of the Site. The arable crop is currently grown close to the field edge. The Site lies within the countryside and many established hedgerows, trees and woodland extend through the landscape.
- 7.3.42. The contrast to the modern agricultural landscape is the presence of significant industrial activity including mineral processing to the southeast of the Site at Aggregate Industries, extraction and progressive restoration at Shorncote Quarry ca.500m to the west, the Cirencester Wastewater Treatment Works ca.950m to the northwest, and Evergreen Industrial Park within South Cerney ca.530m to the east. These industries contain major infrastructure and are locally detracting features in the landscape with indirect effects upon landscape character resulting in HGV traffic along Ashton Road, adjacent to the Site. The existing vegetation within the study area filters views of these urbanising land uses in a flat landscape, indicating that large scale industrial and mineral extraction operations can be accommodated with only localised adverse effects.
- 7.3.43. The Site is divided near the southern end, by a poor quality hedgerow which crosses the Site from east/west. Historic mapping published in 1883 illustrates that the hedgerow running east/west through the site was not present at the time in the late 19th century and appeared from 1903 onwards. Gravel pits and quarries associated with the previous land use of the CWP appear in the last 100 years.
- 7.3.44. Views from the surrounding farmland into the Site from public rights of way and also the local road network are frequently interrupted by intervening field boundary vegetation, that would continue to have a screening role in winter due to its maturity, particularly where the lower parts of hedgerows have been clipped to create a dense twiggy visual barrier.
- 7.3.45. Since Anaerobic Digestion facilities are characterised by their medium scale footprints, and elements not dissimilar to large agricultural buildings, the susceptibility of the local landscape to this type of development is assessed as medium.

Landscape and Visual

Landscape Sensitivity

- 7.3.46. Based on the above analysis, and combining value and susceptibility, it is assessed that the Site and local landscape is of medium sensitivity to Anaerobic Digestion Facilities of the type proposed.
- 7.3.47. The published baseline assessments at a national, regional, and local level have been reviewed when undertaking a judgement of landscape susceptibility, value and sensitivity. In order to avoid 'double counting' effects where multiple landscape character areas apply to the Site and surrounding area, the proportionate approach is to focus on the most recent Landscape Character Assessment that covers the Site and the surrounding area potentially indirectly significantly affected by the proposals. This area is LCA 3A: South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands from the Cotswold Water Park Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (August 2009).
- 7.3.48. Other landscape character areas and types beyond the LCA 3A: South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands within the study area (where the SZTV indicates minimal or no theoretical visibility) do not have the potential to be significantly affected by the Proposed Development and have consequently been scoped out of the detailed assessment.

Visual Baseline

- 7.3.49. The effect on visual amenity considers the changes in views arising from the proposals in relation to visual receptors including the surrounding settlements, residential properties, highways, and public rights of way (PRoW) together with the effects on representative viewpoints. Visual amenity is defined in GLVIA3 as the:

"Overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area."

- 7.3.50. The assessment was carried out in July 2024 to record a range of potential views representing a range of receptor groups (**Appendix 7.3: Viewpoints 1-9**). Receptor groups and views represented by the nine selected viewpoints with the assessment, including baseline view description, contained in **Appendix 7.5: Visual Receptor Assessment**.
- 7.3.51. Site photographs were taken to record the character and nature of the views, and the existing visibility of the Site. The seasonal changes to the vegetative cover have been considered as part of the visual assessment.

Visual Receptors

- 7.3.52. In order to understand the potential visibility of the proposed development, a Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility (SZTV) plan has been prepared and included at **Figure 7.2**. This provides an indication of the extent and pattern of visibility using LiDAR data >0.5m in height, surveyed in 2022. Although this is data more accurate than using OS Woodland and Buildings as screening features, the actual extent and pattern of visibility in winter would only vary slightly from that indicated on the SZTV.
- 7.3.53. According to Natural England's MAGIC online mapping and the Ordnance Survey Explorer mapping, there is a single area of CRow Access Land located within South Cerney ca.1.4km to

the northeast of the Site. A Country Park named 'Keynes' lies ca.850m to the west of the Site, and the 'Thames Path' National Trail runs across the southern extents of the study area ca.1.8km to the south of the Site and outside the SZTV.

- 7.3.54. The selection of the representative viewpoints is based on the following criteria:
- The requirement to provide a relatively even spread of viewpoints in all directions from the Site and within the visual envelope from publicly accessible locations; and
 - From locations that represent a range of near (local views), middle, and long-distance views.

- 7.3.55. A variety of landscape and visual mitigation measures have been incorporated through the iterative design process in order to prevent, reduce or offset potential landscape and visual effects, and enhance the local landscape character.

Scoping of Receptors

- 7.3.56. With regards to the selection of visual receptors, the Public Rights of Way and public highways within the study area are shown in **Figure 7.5: Public Rights of Way Plan**. The routes have been cross referred to **Figure 7.2: SZTV** and only routes that fall within the SZTV have been scoped into the assessment.

- 7.3.57. The following routes on the edge of the SZTV have been scoped out of the detailed assessment as follows:
- PRoW 3 to southwest of Site on edge of SZTV due to screening from landform and views restricted in reality by buildings and/or hedgerows along the route;
 - PRoW 33 – a bridleway to the east of the Site connecting to Ashton Road, and scoped out due to dense and tall hedgerow planting along the route;
 - PRoW 32 within the Cotswold Water Park where views are typically restricted by local planting and any limited glimpses of the proposals would be set behind the Aggregate Industries complex.

7.4. Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects

Effects during Construction

- 7.4.1. Details of the Proposed Development are set out in Chapter 3 of the ES and the revised drawings prepared by GPP which have been used to inform the assessment of likely effects. Effects are set out in detail at **Appendix 7.4: Landscape Receptor Assessment**, and **Appendix 7.5: Visual Receptor Assessment**.

Landscape Elements

- 7.4.2. The nature of the construction works would introduce a change of land use to the Site, movement and temporary structures and facilities. Direct effects on the loss of existing land cover (ephemeral crops) which would include a change of use to the AD plant and associated landscaping including woodland planting and wildflower grassland was assessed to be **minor adverse (not significant)**. The Proposed Development would require the removal of a single

Landscape and Visual

poor quality ash tree and a length of poor quality hedgerow, assessed to be **negligible to minor adverse (not significant)**. It is expected that the short-term, localised construction activities would result in **Major adverse (significant)** short-term effects on the topography of the Site given the development platforms and retaining structures that would be created and perimeter earth mounds constructed. The integrity of the wider landform would be unaffected by the Proposed Development.

Landscape character

- 7.4.3. The Site and surrounding area within the study area are located within the LCA 3A: South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands. This is a medium sensitivity landscape that contains a variety of recreational, mineral extraction and industrial land uses. It is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations.
- 7.4.4. The Construction Phase would cause a notable change within the Site that has no public access, with construction activity and vehicle movements, temporary structures, and storage of materials. Key character-defining elements present on the boundaries of the Site comprising mature hedgerows with trees would be protected during the construction phase. The temporary effects during the construction phase upon the landscape character of the Site itself would be **Major adverse (significant)**.
- 7.4.5. The indirect changes to landscape character within the immediate context of the Site (within approximately 250m of the Site boundary) would be confined to a perception of the construction activity from a ca. 400m section of Ashton Road to the east of the Site and from PRoW AKEY4 to the west of the Site (including localised sections of the route to the north and south). Temporary construction lighting would be restricted in location and operation period and would comply with an Environmental Management Plan designed to minimise light spill. The temporary effects on the landscape character of the immediate context, resulting from the construction activity would be **Major adverse (significant)**.
- 7.4.6. It is predicted that the short-term construction period would result in **Negligible (not significant)** effects upon the wider landscape character, beyond the immediate context of the Site. In this wider context there would be no changes to any key characteristics of the LCA 3A: South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands or any adjoining character areas.

Visual Receptors

- 7.4.7. The potential visibility of construction activity on the Site is limited from locations in the surrounding landscape by intervening landform, vegetation, and buildings and comprises a relatively limited number of receptors in the surrounding landscape that can be split into views from public highways and active sport participants (both of medium sensitivity), and users of Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) and residents at the settlement edge (both of high sensitivity).
- 7.4.8. Users of the Ashton Road for a ca. 400m stretch in close proximity to the Site would experience localised **Major adverse (significant)** temporary effects during the construction phase. There would also be a **Major adverse (significant)** temporary effect experienced by users of Public footpath AKEY4 that pass the western boundary of the Site, noting views would be partially restricted by retained boundary hedgerow to the west and the permanent low level earth mounding to the south and west of the Site.

- 7.4.9. Residents on the edge of South Cerney to the east of the Site would experience **Moderate adverse (not significant)** temporary effects during the construction phase, noting a minimum 500m separation to the Site. Users of the Playing field in South Cerney and more elevated views experienced by users of PRow BSC3 to the north of South Cerney would experience **Negligible (not significant)** temporary effects during the construction phase. The construction activity from these locations would be barely discernible even in winter and predicted to be confined to filtered glimpses of the tallest parts of the structures on Site and temporary construction cranes.

Landscape and Visual

Table 7.3: Summary of Construction Phase Effects

Environmental Effect	Sensitivity of Receptor	Impact Magnitude	Nature of Impact (Permanent/ Temporary)	Effect and Significance
LANDSCAPE RECEPTORS				
Trees	High	Negligible	Short-term temporary	Negligible
Hedgerows	Medium	Low	Short-term temporary	Minor adverse Not Significant
Crops/grassland	Low	Medium	Short-term temporary	Minor adverse Not Significant
Topography	Medium	High	Short-term temporary	Major adverse Significant
Landscape Character of the Site	Medium	High	Short-term temporary	Major adverse Significant
Landscape Character of the immediate context	Medium	High	Short-term temporary	Major adverse Significant
Landscape Character of the wider landscape	Medium	Negligible	Short-term temporary	Negligible Not Significant
VISUAL RECEPTORS				
Users of Ashton Road	Medium	High	Short-term temporary	Major adverse Significant
Users of Public Footpath AKEY4	High	Medium	Short-term temporary	Major adverse Significant
Settlement of South Cerney	High	Low	Short-term temporary	Moderate adverse Not Significant
Users of Playing Fields, South Cerney	Medium	Negligible	Short-term temporary	Negligible Not Significant
Users of Footpath BSC3	High	Negligible	Short-term temporary	Negligible Not Significant

Effects during Operation

- 7.4.10. Details of the Proposed Development are shown on the revised plans by GPP and Chapter 3 of this ES, which have been used to inform the assessment of likely effects. Effects are set out in detail at **Appendix 7.4: Landscape Receptor Assessment**, and **Appendix 7.5: Visual Receptor Assessment**.

Landscape Receptors

- 7.4.11. A potential illustrative landscape scheme is set out at **Appendix 7.2: Landscape Strategy Plan** which includes native woodland belts, new native hedgerow and wildflower meadow. These measures would result in **Negligible (not significant)** effects on hedgerows and **Moderate beneficial (not significant)** effects on trees by Year 15. The replacement of a larger area of ephemeral crops with smaller peripheral areas of species rich wildflower grassland would represent a **Minor beneficial (not significant)** effect.
- 7.4.12. It is expected that the operational Proposed Development would result in a **Moderate adverse (not Significant)** effect upon the topography of the Site noting that the excavation for the AD plant and creation of low level perimeter earthworks would represent a notable change to parts of the Site, however the overall topographical character of the local context would be retained. In addition, the retained landform would restrict views of the proposals from the lakes and associated walking routes to the west that are associated with the higher intensity recreational uses of the CWP. The proposed earthworks to the perimeter of the Site would be further integrated into the surrounding landscape by woodland planting as demonstrated on the **Viewpoint 3** visualisations by comparing the Year 1 and Year 15 photomontages.
- 7.4.13. The Site and surrounding area within the study area are located within LCA 3A: South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands. This is a medium sensitivity landscape that contains a variety of recreational, mineral extraction and industrial land uses. It is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations.
- 7.4.14. The Operational Phase would cause a notable change to landscape character at a Site level, with the change from an open field to an AD plant that includes large agricultural buildings and associated infrastructure. Key character-defining elements present on the boundaries of the Site comprising mature hedgerows with trees that would be retained and reinforced with new planting. The long term temporary effects upon the landscape character of the Site itself would constitute a **Major adverse (significant)** effect. This significant effect is inevitable with any greenfield site developed as an AD Facility, noting the indirect changes upon wider landscape character are assessed separately.
- 7.4.15. The indirect changes to landscape character within the immediate context of the Site (within approximately 250m of the Site boundary) would be confined to a perception of the built structures and occasional vehicle movements in oblique views from a single PRow passing the western boundary of the Site and a short stretch of the Ashton Road to the east of the Site. The long term effects on the landscape character of the immediate Site context, resulting from the operational phase would be a **Moderate adverse (not significant)** effect at Year 1, reducing to a **Minor adverse (not significant)** effect at Year 15 following the growth of the mitigation planting.
- 7.4.16. In terms of the effects upon the wider landscape character beyond the immediate context of the Site, it is assessed that the operational phase would result in **Negligible (not significant)**

Landscape and Visual

effects, noting that there would be no changes to any key characteristics of the LCA 3A: South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands.

Visual Receptors

- 7.4.17. Users of the Ashton Road would experience localised **Major adverse (significant)** effects in close proximity to the Site at Year 1, however after growth of the existing hedgerow planting along the road corridor and new woodland planting set behind, these effects would reduce to **Moderate adverse (not significant)** degree. Users of public footpath AKEY4 to the west of the Site with localised views extending to the north and south, would experience a **Major adverse (significant)** effect at operational phase Year 1 that would reduce to a **Moderate neutral (not significant)** effect by Year 15 following the growth of mitigation planting which accounts for heavily filtered views in winter. The changes between Year 1 and Year 15 are illustrated in the photomontages, from Viewpoints 3, 4 and 5.
- 7.4.18. Residents on the edge of South Cerney to the east of the Site would experience **Moderate adverse (not significant)** effects at Year 1 of the operational phase, with a minimum 500m separation to the Site. The effects at Year 15 would reduce to a **Negligible** level following the growth of the existing eastern Site boundary hedgerow and the mitigation woodland planting set behind. Users of the Playing field in South Cerney and more elevated views experienced by users of PRoW BSC3 to the north of South Cerney would experience **Negligible (not significant)** effects during the operational phase. Views of the proposed development are predicted to be fully screened in summer. The tops of the tallest structures including the larger buildings and tanks may be glimpsed in heavily filtered views in winter.

Table 7.4: Summary of Operational Phase Effects at Year 15

Environmental Effect	Sensitivity of Receptor	Impact Magnitude	Nature of Impact (Permanent/ Temporary)	Effect and Significance at Year 15
LANDSCAPE RECEPTORS				
Trees	High	Low	Long-term permanent	Moderate beneficial Not Significant
Hedgerows	Medium	Negligible	Long-term permanent	Negligible Not Significant
Crops/grassland	Low	Medium	Long-term permanent	Minor beneficial Not Significant
Topography	Medium	High	Long-term permanent	Moderate adverse Not Significant
Landscape Character of the Site	Medium	High	Long-term temporary	Major adverse Significant
Landscape Character of the immediate context	Medium	Low	Long-term temporary	Minor adverse Not Significant
Landscape Character of the wider landscape	Medium	Negligible	Long-term temporary	Negligible Not Significant
VISUAL RECEPTORS				
Users of Ashton Road	Medium	Medium	Long-term temporary	Moderate adverse Not Significant

Users of Public Footpath AKEY4	High	Low	Long-term permanent	Moderate neutral Not Significant
Settlement of South Cerney	High	Negligible	Long-term temporary	Negligible Not Significant
Users of Playing Fields, South Cerney	Medium	Negligible	Long-term temporary	Negligible Not Significant
Users of Footpath BSC3	High	Negligible	Long-term temporary	Negligible Not Significant

7.5. Summary

Introduction

- 7.5.1. This revised chapter of the ES considers the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development. This chapter assesses the likely significant effects to the physical landscape elements on the Site and likely changes to landscape character and visual amenity from the wider study area, covering a 2km radius from the Site.
- 7.5.2. The assessment has been undertaken with regard to current best practice guidance, comprising a desktop study of relevant publications and a field appraisal conducted in July 2024 by a Chartered Landscape Architect.
- 7.5.3. Landscape and visual effects are assessed through professional judgements on the sensitivity of landscape elements, landscape character, visual receptors and representative viewpoints combined with the predicted magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development during the Construction and Operational Phase of the development.
- 7.5.4. A likely significant effect occurs where the combination of the variables results in the proposed development having a definitive effect on landscape character and/or the view. A not significant effect will occur where the appearance of the proposed development is not definitive, and the effect continues to be defined principally by its baseline condition.
- 7.5.5. This assessment has been undertaken with reference to national and local planning policy including the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023 and the Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted 2015). Reference is also made to the Ashton Keynes Neighbourhood Plan 2015–2026 and the Wiltshire and Swindon Waste Core Strategy (adopted July 2009).

Baseline Conditions

- 7.5.6. The Site is located on arable land adjacent to Ashton Road that follows the eastern boundary of the Site. In the wider study area the settlement of South Cerney is located just over 0.5km to east and Ashton Keynes is approximately 1.7km to the south.
- 7.5.7. The Site is bound by mature hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees to the north, east, and west, with the southern boundary not defined on the ground. Towards the southern end of the Site, a hedgerow runs east/west across the Site. A farm track along the western boundary of the Site provides access to a derelict agricultural barn that lies in close proximity to the northwestern corner of the Site.

Landscape and Visual

- 7.5.8. The Site is in private ownership with no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the Site and no public access permitted. There is an established network of PRoWs within the study area, and closest to the Site is Footpath 'AKEY4' passing the western boundary of the Site and crossing farmland to the north and south of the Site.
- 7.5.9. The landform across the Site falls broadly west to east from high points of ca.100m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) along the western boundary to ca.90m AOD in the southeastern corner. The Site lies on gently rising land, noting that within the wider study area land north of South Cerney and land to the west, north of Somerford Keynes is locally elevated.
- 7.5.10. In terms of the national landscape character context, the Site is located within the 'Upper Thames Clay Vales' (NCA 108). At a county level, the Site is located within LCT 12: Open Clay Vales, and LCA 12A: Thames Open Clay Vale. The most recent and detailed landscape character assessment is The Cotswold Water Park Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (August 2009). The Site lies within the 'River Basin Clay Vale' LT and LCA 3A 'South Cerney and Ashton Keynes Settled Wetlands'. The latter LCA is described as:
- "...Large-scale sand and gravel extraction comprises the dominant influence on the landscape character of this area. In addition to extensive areas of post-extraction created lakes, there are a number of areas that are still undergoing active extraction, such as Shorncote Quarry..."*
- 7.5.11. The landscape is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. The Site represents a typical example of an intensively managed arable farmland. The landscape is therefore not of high value in the context of the NPPF.

Mitigation and Enhancement

- 7.5.12. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would be prepared so to ensure that the likely significant effects that may arise from the construction of the Proposed Development, are actively managed and reduced to an acceptable level.
- 7.5.13. Mitigation measures that have been incorporated into the layout of the Proposed Development as 'embedded mitigation' as part of the iterative design process. Generally, the Proposed Development will seek to retain and enhance existing landscape elements that make a positive contribution to the local landscape character and will incorporate opportunities to enhance the landscape features of the Site.
- 7.5.14. Specific measures include:
- Reduction in the height of tanks and offset from existing boundary of Ashton Road with space for mitigation planting;
 - Utilisation of natural landform to cut development platforms into the Site, where the development would be screened from the most recreationally valuable parts of the Cotswold Water Park to the west;
 - Retention and enhancement of existing landscape elements, particularly hedgerows and trees;
 - Planting of areas of new woodland on low level earth mounding with gentle slopes and modest height to help screen the proposals;

- Planting of a species rich meadow grass mix in peripheral areas of the Site; and
- Consideration of Environmental Colour Assessment Principles¹ to minimize the appearance of buildings and structures in the landscape by using a neutral palette.

Likely Significant Effects

Construction Phase

- 7.5.15. The temporary effects upon landscape elements would be adverse and **Not Significant** with relatively small changes to existing trees and hedgerows, with those at the periphery of the Site protected. The direct impact of the Proposed Development upon the topography and landscape character of the Site itself would be **Significant** adverse, with landscape character effects extending to the immediate landscape context. The indirect effects upon the wider landscape, would however be **Not Significant**.
- 7.5.16. In terms of visual amenity during the construction phase, it is predicted that **Significant** adverse effects would be localised and confined to a perception of the construction activity from a 400m section of Ashton Road to the east of the Site and from PRoW AKEY4 along the western Site boundary, including localised sections of the route to the north and south. Views from PRoW AKEY4 would be partially restricted by retained boundary hedgerow to the west and the permanent low level earth mounding to the south and west of the Site.
- 7.5.17. Residents on the edge of South Cerney to the east of the Site would experience **Not Significant** temporary effects during the construction phase, with a minimum 500m separation to the Site. Users of the Playing field in South Cerney and more elevated views experienced by users of PRoW BSC3 to the north of South Cerney would experience **Not Significant** temporary effects as construction activity would be barely perceptible due to multiple layers of intervening planting.

Operational Phase

- 7.5.18. The growth of the landscape mitigation schemes would result in **Not Significant** beneficial effects upon hedgerows, trees and species rich grassland. The long term temporary effects upon the landscape character of the Site itself would constitute a **Significant** adverse effect. A significant adverse effect at a Site level is inevitable with any green field site developed as an AD Facility, noting the indirect changes upon wider landscape character are assessed separately and would be **Not Significant**.
- 7.5.19. Operational lighting would be restricted and designed to minimise light spill so as to comply with ILP guidance and satisfy the requirements of the Environmental Lighting Zone in which the Site is located.
- 7.5.20. Users of the Ashton Road would experience localised **Significant** effect in close proximity to the Site at Year 1, however after growth of the existing hedgerow planting along the road corridor and new woodland planting set behind, these effects would reduce to **not significant** degree. Users of public footpath AKEY4 to the west of the Site with localised views extending to the

¹ Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 04/2018

Landscape and Visual

north and south, would experience a **Significant** effect at Year 1 that would reduce to a **Not Significant** effect by Year 15 following the growth of mitigation planting.

- 7.5.21. Residents on the edge of South Cerney to the east of the Site would experience **Not Significant** effects at Year 1 with further reduction following the growth of the existing eastern Site boundary hedgerow and the mitigation woodland planting set behind. Users of the Playing field in South Cerney and more elevated views experienced by users of PRoW BSC3 to the north of South Cerney would experience **Not Significant** effects during the operational phase.

Overall Conclusion

- 7.5.22. The Proposed Development has been landscape led and incorporates a range of embedded design measures. Temporary **Significant** landscape and visual effects during the construction phase would be highly localised and have been minimised by the scheme design. Adverse effects during the operational phase of the project would also be minimised by a range of embedded landscape led mitigation measures including low level earth mounding and mitigation woodland planting. The only **Significant** residual effect identified, would be to the landscape character of the Site itself, which is inevitable with any green field development of a modern AD facility.