



Chapter Twelve

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

INTRODUCTION

12.1 This chapter of the Environmental Statement (ES) assesses the potential landscape and visual effects that may arise within the study area as a result of implementing the proposed development. The assessment presents a summary of the current baseline landscape character and features of the site and the study area, highlights important views towards the site and potential visual receptors that may be affected. It goes on to describe the changes predicted as a result of the proposals, both during construction, and once the entire development is operational. It includes an assessment of the potential changes in the view in winter. The assessment takes into account where appropriate, the inclusion of any identified mitigation measures to address any significant negative effects that are identified.

12.2 The term 'landscape' is used throughout, although the assessment covers both landscape and townscape effects. Where the term landscape is used, it should also be taken to include townscape. The assessment is based on the proposed development as described in chapters 1-4. This consists of a combined recycling, commercial and energy generation 'park' located on previously developed land at the Hirwaun Industrial Estate north of Aberdare. The figures that accompany this chapter are listed below:

- Figure 12.1 Site Location and Context
- Figure 12.2 Landscape Related Designations
- Figure 12.3 Landscape Character Areas
- Figure 12.4 Approximate Boundaries of CCW Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas
- Figure 12.5 Vegetation, Ridgelines and Public Access
- Figure 12.6 Zone of Visual Influence and Viewpoint Areas
- Figure 12.7 Photographic Viewpoint Locations
- Figures 12.8 – 12.17 Photographic Viewpoints
- Figures 12.18 – 12.22 Photomontage Sheets

CONTEXT

Methodology

12.3 The methodology used for the study is based on the principles and criteria set out in the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition (2002), hereafter referred to as the 'LI and IEMA Guidelines'. The assessment has included:

- Baseline landscape and visual surveys



- Mitigation recommendations
- Identification and assessment of potential landscape and visual effects

12.4 The study area was defined generally by the area within which it could be expected that there may be a view of the site, owing to the topography of the surrounding landscape and location of potential visual receptors. The area extends from Hirwaun Common to the south, as far as the parking and viewing point at Mynydd Beili-glas, to Penderyn to the north, and from the Hirwaun settlement to the east, to Rhigos and Pontneddfechan to the west. The study area, showing the location of the site, and areas and roads mentioned in this chapter is shown on Figure 12.1. The baseline landscape and visual appraisal was based on a desk study and a field survey.

Desk Study

12.5 The desk study included a review of the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey maps of the area, aerial photographs and relevant designations and planning policies that cover both the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) Authority as well as the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Borough Council administrative areas. Details of the relevant landscape, townscape and visual policies are set out in Appendix 12.5.

12.6 Data covering relevant designations was also checked via information received from RCT Borough Council and via the Countryside Council for Wales's (CCW) web-based databases. As part of this, the study included a review of level 3 Visual and Sensory Aspect data from the CCW Landmap database, which has been compiled by others in accordance with the Landmap methodology.

Field Survey

12.7 The field survey was undertaken by a chartered landscape architect on 7 and 8 September 2008. The site visit was used to confirm the information arising from the desk study, to appraise any landscape features not already highlighted, and to assess views into and out of the site. By assessing the existing baseline character and views, an assessment could be made as to the predicted changes to these arising from the development.

12.8 The site assessment was undertaken from the following places within the study area:

- The site and its immediate environs
- Roads
- Public rights of way/ open access land areas
- Public and private recreation and amenity areas
- Commercial sites
- Interpretation of assessments from residential properties – taken from the nearest available publicly accessible location.

12.9 During the site visit the weather was mostly dry, but overcast with occasional bright spells. Visibility was changeable and varied from poor, through moderate to good. Photographs for the purpose of the assessment were taken with a high resolution digital camera - Canon EOS 400D (focal length equivalent to 1.6x the focal length of the lens), set



to auto-focus with the lens set to 50mm to give the same perspective as a 35mm SLR set at 50mm.

Proposed Landscape Mitigation

12.10 The description of the proposed mitigation is based on the plan, section and elevation drawings for the development produced by PRC Architects, as well as discussion with them on the proposals including heights of buildings and structures, proposed materials and finishes and treatment of the external areas to the development.

Significance Criteria

12.11 Changes brought by the development on landscape character or views, whether adverse or beneficial, will have different levels of significance depending on their magnitude or scale, the landscape character and sensitivity or tolerance to change, and the visual receptors affected and their sensitivity. The significance criteria used to provide a consistent identification of effects in the assessment are shown in the tables below.

Table 12.1: Landscape character impact significance criteria

(Source: Modification of criteria contained in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition. 2002).

<i>Significance</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
Moderate Adverse	Where the development: <ul style="list-style-type: none">would be a new element in the landscape, but has consistencies with existing landscape characteristics or features by way of its scale, layout, mix or appearance, and is one of a number of elements in the landscape setting,can be mitigated by the retention or replacement of key features,is consistent with planning policy relating to landscape, and would result in a recognisable effect on the existing landscape character.
Minor Adverse	Where the development: <ul style="list-style-type: none">would be a minor element in the landscape,has some consistencies with existing landscape characteristics or features by way of its scale, layout, mix or appearance, and is one of a number of elements in the landscape setting,can be mitigated by existing landscape features such as vegetative screening,is consistent with planning policy relating to landscape and would result in a barely perceptible effect on the existing landscape character.
Negligible / None	Where the development would form none or only a minor component within the landscape, and would have an insignificant effect on landscape character.



Minor Beneficial	Where any changes arising from the development would result in a slight enhancement of the landscape character.
Moderate Beneficial	Where any changes arising from the development would result in a moderate enhancement or improvement in the landscape character.
Major Beneficial	Where any changes arising from the development would result in a substantial enhancements or improvements to the landscape character.

Table 12.2: Visual impact significance criteria – Visual receptors with a higher sensitivity to visual change

(Source: Modification of criteria contained in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition. 2002).

<i>Significance (Adverse or Beneficial)</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
Major	<i>Where the development would form a dominant feature and immediately apparent part of the scene that affects and changes its overall character and therefore the view.</i>
Moderate	Where the development would form a visible and recognisable new element within the scene and may be readily noticed by the observer. The development may be one of a number of other elements in the view.
Minor	<i>Where the development would be a minor component of the wider view and may be missed by the casual observer – awareness of the proposals would not have a marked effect on the scene.</i>
Negligible	Where none or only a very minor part of the development would be discernable, or is viewed from a distant location, so that it would be scarcely appreciated and on balance, would have little effect on the scene.
No change	Where no part of the development would be discernable.

Table 12.3: Visual impact significance criteria – Visual receptors with a lower sensitivity to visual change

(Source: Modification of criteria contained in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition. 2002).

<i>Significance (Adverse or Beneficial)</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
Moderate	<i>Where the development would form a dominant feature and immediately apparent part of the scene that affects and changes its overall character and therefore the view.</i>



Minor	<i>Where the development would form a visible and recognisable new element within the scene and may be readily noticed by the observer. The development may be one of a number of other elements in the view.</i>
Negligible	<i>Where the development would be a minor component of the wider view and may be missed by the casual observer – awareness of the proposals would not have a marked effect on the scene.</i>
No change	<i>Where no part of the development would be discernable.</i>

Scale or Magnitude of Visual Effects

12.12 The evaluation of the effects on views and visual amenity has taken into account the scale or magnitude of change as defined in the LI and IEMA Guidelines. These are set out below:

- *‘The scale of change in the view with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition including the proportion of the view occupied by the development;*
- *The degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape with the existing or remaining landscape elements and characteristics in terms of form, scale and mass, line, height, colour and texture;*
- *The duration and nature of the effect, whether temporary or permanent, intermittent or continuous, etc;*
- *The angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor;*
- *The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development;*
- *The extent of the area over which the changes would be visible.’*

Assessment of Landscape Character and Sensitivity

12.13 The LI and IEMA Guidelines indicate that analysis of the baseline landscape and effects on it requires an understanding of landscape character and characterisation, condition or quality and landscape value as well as its sensitivity. Reference is made to the Countryside Agency’s ‘Landscape Character Assessment Guidance’ to analyse the way in which the various components of the landscape interact to create its distinct character and unique sense of place. Condition refers to the state, quality or integrity of the landscape and the elements or features that are a part of it. Value is a judgement placed on the landscape. At policy level, this may be through designation, but at the local level, a community may value an undesignated landscape due to its physical or visual amenity.

12.14 The criteria for evaluating character, quality, value and sensitivity, on a scale of High, Medium or Low that have been adapted from criteria set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment are set out in Appendix 12.2.

12.15 A broad overview of the main character areas of the site is described based on the field survey, together with an assessment of character, quality, value and sensitivity based



on the criteria described above. More specific details about the character, condition, value and sensitivity of the landscapes has been derived from existing data available from CCW Landmap. Landmap sets out methodologies for each aspect of its mapping process, including the visual and sensory aspect. The visual and sensory methodology was updated in 2008, however, since the assessments of the aspect areas were carried out previous to this, a copy of the previous Landmap 2003 visual and sensory methodology is included in Appendix 12.3. It states that the methodology is similar to the Landscape Character Approach used in England and Scotland, *'to map what is perceived through our senses, primarily visually, from the physical attributes of landform and landcover to their visible patterns of distribution and their consistent relationships in particular areas'*. An objective approach is taken by using consistent definitions, methods of assessment and wording for each area. Visual and sensory 'aspect areas' are defined through desk study and then refined by field assessment. They are classified in a hierarchy from levels 1 to 4 according to the level of detail of the captured data, with level 1 being the least detailed.

12.16 Technical Reports or Annexes set out the justification and explanation of the decisions for the visual and sensory aspect. The landscape areas surrounding the site are mainly located within the Bridgend/ Caerphilly/ Rhondda Cynon Taf Technical Report area. Outlying or more distant areas from the site are included within the Neath Port Talbot Technical Annex and Brecknockshire Technical Annex. The reports list the level classification and evaluation for the aspect areas located within the study area. Copies of the reports are included in Appendix 12.4.

12.17 The data captured for each aspect area includes elements such as landcover and topography, and qualities such as diversity and scale is recorded on standard forms. The data capture form includes an overall summary description of the aspect area, together with management recommendations such as conserve, enhance or change. In addition, an 'evaluation matrix' makes judgements about the evaluation criteria that are scenic quality, integrity, character and rarity, and then combines these to give an 'overall evaluation'. The Landmap methodology scale for scoring this evaluation is shown below. Copies of the Visual and Sensory Aspect Area data capture forms that cover the study area are included in Appendix 12.7.

Table 12.5: CCW Landmap visual and sensory definitions for evaluation criteria

(Source: Adapted from the Countryside Council for Wales' LANDMAP Information Visual & Sensory guidance methodology 2003).

<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Outstanding	Of international or national importance to the Aspect
High	Of regional or county importance to the Aspect
Moderate	Of local importance to the Aspect
Low	Of little or no importance to the Aspect
Unknown	Insufficient information exists to evaluate this Area



12.18 There is an option to include ‘tolerance to change’ as part of the data capture, however the subject area is under review, and it has not been recorded for the aspect areas within the study area for this development proposal. It is stated that the likely defining factors will be:

- *‘The intrinsic capacity of the landscape to absorb development through characteristics such as scale, topography and presence of vertical elements.*
- *The sensitivity of the landscape derived from its perceived value or the presence of sensitive viewpoints.*
- *The magnitude of the effect of development derived from its scale and extent.’*

Visual Assessment

12.19 Due to the large scale of the landscape of the study area, variable topography including areas of open high ground, and presence of large areas of vegetation, the desk study alone could not identify all of the areas from which the site may be visible. A visual assessment was carried out on site to determine the locations of the visual receptors within five viewpoint areas as shown on Figure 12.6 and listed below:

- Site Environs
- Brecon Beacons National Park
- Hirwaun
- Hirwaun Common
- Rhigos

12.20 The visual receptors within these viewpoint areas include users of roads, occupiers of residential and commercial properties, and users of public rights of way and open access land as defined by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). Nine of the visual receptor locations within these areas were chosen on the basis of a request from Members of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council that these were checked for any potential views of the proposed development. These were given as:

HIRWAUN WARD – from:

- Rhigos Road
- The nearest residential property
- Mount Pleasant Inn pub
- The Fairview estate (residential)
- The Welfare Ground

RHIGOS WARD – from:

- The houses on Halt Rd
- The new hotel near the industrial estate
- Rights of way
- The nearest bus stop



Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

12.21 The criteria for assessment of sensitivity of the visual receptors are shown in the table below. The sensitivity arises from a combination of the type of receptor as well as their location, for example, views from a designated landscape have a greater significance than those from a landscape with a lower value assessment.

Table 12.6: Sensitivity of visual receptor

(Source: Adapted from the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition. 2002).

<i>Sensitivity</i>	<i>Definition</i>
High Sensitivity	Views of or from within valued/ designated landscapes Views from public rights of way or access land Views from residential properties
Medium Sensitivity	Views from sports and recreational facilities Views from commercial properties with residents, namely hotels
Low Sensitivity	Views from roads Views from commercial/ employment sites including public houses

Assessment of residual effects

12.22 Residual effects have been assessed on the assumption that all of the mitigation measures described have been implemented, and that the proposed landscape structure planting has been successfully established, is subject to regular maintenance and management, and is achieving the objectives for which it was proposed.

Scope of the landscape and visual assessment

12.23 The assessment has been based on the proposed development designed by PRC architects and other technical specialists. The main features of the proposed development are described in detail earlier in this Statement and summarised in Section 12.4. Four flare stacks are proposed on the site. The assessment is based on the understanding that the flare stacks would have the flame contained within a cowl and would therefore run 'clean'. The proposals include one stack up to 40m in height and 2.5m diameter that would enclose 3 flues. It is understood that there is a possibility that some dark smoke may be emitted at the very start up of the diesel tallow engines, however technical design details would be incorporated to minimise this. In addition, it is possible that in very cold weather, there may be some condensation in the plume that would be seen some distance from the stack. It is understood that this would be infrequent and seen as a thin steam plume. When the red light of sunrise or sunset shines through this steam plume, it may appear black in colour. The assessment of the landscape and visual effects are based on the stack structures themselves rather than any possible short-lived emissions.



12.24 Consideration of any potential effects from lighting has been considered based on discussions regarding a preliminary lighting design prepared by Pell Frischmann. It is understood that the site will operate 24 hours, seven days a week, and at all times between dusk and dawn there would be a requirement to light parts of the development to allow safe access to working areas. However, specific details regarding the operation and use of the site are subject to further design and discussion, and would determine the lighting requirements around the site. As such, the assessment has been based on the current available information. It is understood that lighting would be designed such that there would not be any significant spillage of light from the development or light pollution, and possible measures are set out in the mitigation chapter.

BASELINE CONDITIONS

Planning Policy

12.25 The relevant national and local policy documents and guidance that have been taken into consideration are listed below. Details of the main aims and objectives of each are then set out in Appendix 12.5.

- Welsh Assembly Government. Planning Policy Wales (2002), Technical Advice Note 12: Design
- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Local Plan (Adopted May 1999)
- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Unitary Development Plan (Approved April 2007)
- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Draft Management Plan 2009-2014 (2008)
- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Walking Tourism Strategy (undated)
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. Mid Glamorgan (Rhondda RCTCB) Replacement Structure Plan 1991-2006 (Adopted January 1999)
- Rhondda Cynon Taf (Cynon Valley) Local Plan (Including Waste Policies) 1991-2006 (Adopted January 2004)
- Rhondda Cynon Taf Community Plan 2004-2014

12.26 The main policy themes emerging from these documents and relating to the landscape and views are:

- The Brecon Beacons National Park is a landscape valued at an international, national, regional and local scale and is designated because of its special qualities. These include sensory and visual aspects, as well as geological, nature conservation and cultural heritage factors. Development should not compromise the integrity of these features, nor the opportunity for enjoyment of them by residents, workers or visitors to the Park.
- Parts of the Cynon Valley including Hirwaun Common to the south of the site are designated as a Local Landscape Area, by virtue of their special landscape features, geology, natural and cultural heritage and should be protected from adverse effects from development, including effects on the use of the landscape for leisure purposes.



- The special features worthy of retention in both the designated and non-designated landscapes and built-up areas contribute to a high quality of life in the locality and in particular in the National Park, and protection and enhancement of these features are an important factor in contributing to the aims of sustainable development.
- Particular consideration should be given to the potential effects of development on landscape character. Views from the protected landscapes are of significance in any proposals for development, whether these are to be located within or outside the boundaries of these landscapes.
- Policies recognise that landscapes are subject to change. Through sensitive, contextual design that responds to and reinforces locally distinct patterns and forms of development, it is possible to moderate the effects of development on landscape and views. This would include careful consideration of aspects such as siting, appearance, form, scale and massing, relationships between buildings and spaces, existing and proposed natural features, boundary treatments, and relationships to surrounding areas. Innovative and contemporary design can contribute to these aims.

Designations

12.27 The site lies in part within the Brecon Beacons National Park, and the boundary is shown on Figure 12.2 Designations. Designated in 1957, the statutory duties of the Park Authority are set out below:

- Protect the natural beauty of the Park
- Help visitors enjoy and understand it
- Foster well-being of local people.

12.28 The National Park is also designated as a Category V landscape by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). Category V is defined as:

'An area of land and/ or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.'

12.29 The remainder of the site falls within the administrative boundary of Rhondda Cynon Taf (Cynon Valley) Borough Council. The site is allocated for the development of industrial uses in the local plan documents for both planning authorities. Further detail is set out in Appendix 12.5, and other chapters of the Environmental Statement.

12.30 Land to the north of the site within the Brecon Beacons National Park, is also located in the 'Fforest Fawr' (Great Forest) Geopark. A Geopark is an area where the geological heritage is considered to be of European significance and will have a sustainable development strategy with a strong management structure. It comprises a swathe of upland country that includes mountains, moorlands, woods, meadows, waterbodies and settlements. Covering around 300square miles of land in the western half of the park, it stretches as far south to the edge of Merthyr Tydfil, east of the site. The Fforest Fawr Geopark is a



partnership between the Park Authority, British Geological Survey and Cardiff University.

12.31 A large area of land to the south of the site is designated as a Local Landscape Area in recognition of its landscape and cultural heritage features including former mining activities. RCT Local Plan policy seeks to protect the special qualities of this area and ability for people to enjoy these qualities. Further detail on the policy is given in Appendix 12.5.

12.32 RCT Borough Council has confirmed in a telephone conversation that there are no trees subject to tree preservation orders (TPO) on the site or in immediately surrounding areas including on the Industrial Estate. There are several TPO trees in Hirwaun and there are TPO woodland areas at Pontbren Llwyd and south of the A465 near Pontneddfechan. These are shown on Figure 12.2 Landscape Related Designations.

12.33 There are a number of sites within the study area that have protection at international and national level due to their nature conservation, biodiversity or geological value. These are shown on Figure 12.2. The nearest designated area is Blaen Cynon peat bog located approximately 150m to the east of the site adjacent to the existing industrial units, which is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Several other SSSIs and SACs are located at least 1km from the edge of the site. Further designated areas include a National Nature Reserve located around 2km north of the site, and Country Park around 3km to the southeast. The study area contains a number of National Monuments of Wales. There a limited number of listed buildings located in areas to the northeast of the site and within Hirwaun. Details regarding the nature conservation and cultural heritage features of the site are set out in the relevant chapters within this Statement.

12.34 Existing planning policy for the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Draft Management Plan make reference to a 'Section 3 Conservation Map' showing areas of mountain, moor, heath and woodland that are particularly important to conserve. A copy of this map was requested from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority but was not made available at the time of writing.

Site Location and Setting

12.35 Figure 12.1 Site Location and Context shows the location of the site together with major landscape features, roads and settlements within the study area. A view of the site from the southern edge of Penderyn Reservoir is shown in Photographic Viewpoint 1, Figure 12.8. The locations of individual properties around the study area are shown on Figure 12.6 Zone of Visual Influence and Viewpoint Areas.

12.36 The site is situated on the existing Hirwaun Industrial Estate just west of the small settlement of Hirwaun. The site consists of previously developed land, formerly used as an Ordnance factory. It is now grassed over and crossed by a network of herringbone drains that show as gravel 'lines' across the site. The site is bound to the south by Fifth Avenue and to the east by Ninth Avenue and sits below the level of these roads. There are large industrial units are located along Fifth Avenue and Ninth Avenue. A public footpath runs along the north edge of the site, which is screened by a belt of woodland and is contained to



the north by the steep embankment that retains Penderyn Reservoir. A stream runs along the north side of the footpath and then turns to cross the north-western corner of the site. The stream would be diverted around the edge of the site as part of the scheme proposals. To the west of the site there are small fields edged with hedge, tree and shrub vegetation that separate the site from the farmhouse and out-buildings at Tai-cwplau.

Access and local roads

12.37 The site is accessed from the A465, which runs parallel to Fifth Avenue to the south and bisects the Industrial Estate. The principal means of access from the A465 to the Industrial Estate is via the roundabout at the junction of the A465, A4059 and A4061 located just west of Hirwaun. The A4061 travels south from the junction towards Hirwaun Common and the Rhondda valleys to the south, while the A4059 travels north towards Penderyn and Pantecefnffordd and beyond into the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Topography

12.38 The site is located in a valley that is oriented approximately north-west to south east. The site lies at around 200m AOD. To the south and north of the site, the land rises dramatically toward major ridgelines at Hirwaun Common (around 500m AOD, 3-4km south of the site) and the lower hills of the Brecon Beacons National Park (around 300m-350m AOD), 2-3km northwest and northeast of the site. The landscape within the valley and on its side slopes has many subtle variations in topography, with minor hills and man-made landforms creating minor ridgelines. The major and minor ridgelines are shown on Figure 12.5, together with the principal areas of vegetation around the study area.

Vegetation

12.39 The site itself is grassed, with patches of rushes, occasional scrub and small groups of planted trees. A belt of mixed native planting is growing along the western boundary of the site. This would be removed and replaced with new planting as part of the scheme proposals. The Hirwaun Industrial Estate is enclosed by mature vegetation, including dense areas of mature conifers. Within the study area, there are large areas of deciduous woodland, particularly to the north and northeast of Penderyn Reservoir and within the river valley that leads from the Brecon Beacons towards Pontneddfechan to the west. In addition, within the study area there are extensive coniferous plantation forests, particularly on the upper slopes of the valley to the north and south. Most of the countryside areas are grassed, with pasture land generally located on the lower valley slopes and rough grassland with occasional scrub on higher ground and more exposed areas, parts of which are also grazed.

Watercourses

12.40 The main watercourses that flow through the study area are indicated on Figure 12.3, but these are not a prominent feature in views of the landscape around the site. Similarly, networks of ditches and small streams around the fields are a minor or negligible part of the view. In contrast, large waterbodies such as the Penderyn Reservoir are easily detected in the landscape, due to reflection of the surface, and act to a degree as orienteering landmarks in the landscape.



Colour

12.41 There is a variety of colour in the landscape, arising to a large extent from the wide variety of vegetation types, which themselves are a reflection of variations in for example, topography, geology, microclimate and human management. Overall, the colours include a range of dull yellows, greens and browns from light to dark tones. Bright colours are infrequent and where these occur, are visually prominent, such as the mown grassed edges of Penderyn Reservoir. In winter, areas of grass turn to a wheat colour, deciduous woodland appears brown, and areas of bracken appear brown or reddish brown.

Public rights of way and open access land

12.42 In May 2005 the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) came into force, clearly identifying open access land in Wales, where the Act created new rights for people to walk on areas of open country, registered common land and public forests.

12.43 As part of the CROW Act, the Countryside Council for Wales worked with landowners, tenants and other interested parties to produce accurate maps of all open access land, and these are now available to view on their website. The public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways, national trails, and national cycle routes, as well as areas of open access land in the study area are shown on Figure 12.5. There are no public rights of way or open access land located on the site itself. One public footpath runs along the northern edge of the site, beyond the site boundary. There are large areas of open access land on the upper valley slopes of the National Park and around Hirwaun Common to the south of the site.

Landscape character assessment

12.44 Review of the RCT local plan highlighted the document 'Landscape Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf'. The Final Draft of Volume 1, 'Vision and Strategy' was produced in January 2008, and describes the key issues and features of Rhondda Cynon Taff and sets out 'visions' for the future. Extracts from volume 1, describing character areas for parts of the study area around Hirwaun and to the north and west of the town have been received from Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council. It is understood from telephone discussions with the Council that the work has largely been superseded by the CCW Landmap process; however the document provides useful descriptive references of local landscape character. Comments within the document include:

- *'Ensure proposed development is sympathetically located and designed in relation to the surrounding landscape.'*
- *New industrial and commercial buildings should be in scale with the landscape and the colour of building materials is in keeping with the surrounding landscape. Any bright and reflective colours will be particularly intrusive.*
- *Selective views from major roads should be encouraged such as major employment sites set in an attractive and prosperous landscape or views of distant hills.*



- *Exposed industrial areas integrated into the surrounding landscape through tree planting.*

12.45 An appraisal of the landscape character of the study area was undertaken as part of the assessment of effects. This determined a number of broad character areas which are illustrated on Figure 12.3 and described below. An assessment of the landscape quality, value and sensitivity has been made for the areas, in accordance with the evaluation criteria set out in Appendix 12.2. Outlying areas around Pontneddfechan, to the north of Hirwaun, the Dare Valley Country Park and the area around Craig Hendre-fawr to the southwest were not visited as it was determined that any landscape and visual impacts for these areas would not be significant due to the distance from the site. However, where these areas could be seen from surrounding areas a general description is given. These areas have not been assessed for the purposes of this report. Within the character areas there is local variation, and this is reflected in the visual and sensory aspect areas defined by CCW Landmap. Extracts of the key elements of the aspect areas that are shown on Figure 12.4 is also set out in Table 12.7 below.

'Urbanized Valley' Landscape Character Area

12.46 The valley within which the site is located is predominantly urbanized, containing the main concentrations of transport infrastructure, large scale employment areas, settlements and routes of overhead power lines. The mixed planting in these areas includes roadside planting on steep embankments, small wooded areas and large areas of conifer screen planting. Hirwaun is the main settlement within this area, and is set below the level of the roads that constrain it. It is mainly residential with a small commercial centre. Hirwaun RFC rugby club grounds are located south of the town alongside the A465, and together with an adjacent equipped children's playground, are mostly enclosed by planting at the boundaries and alongside the road. Hirwaun Industrial Estate is the dominant feature of this urbanized valley landscape and is prominent in views from surrounding areas including designated landscapes, particularly where buildings have been constructed with very light coloured roofs.

Landscape quality: **Low/ Medium**
Landscape value: **Low/ Very Low**
Landscape sensitivity: **Low**

12.47 There is a distinct edge to this urbanized valley character area, beyond which the landscape becomes distinctly rural in character, with broad open landscapes, wooded areas, pasture land, minor settlements and narrow winding roads. Subsidiary valleys cross the main valley side slopes and are frequently well vegetated with deciduous woodland, while the open slopes of the hills both to the north and south include extensive areas of plantation forest.

'Lower valley slopes with urban and industrial influences' Landscape Character Area

12.48 To the south of the urbanized valley on the lower valley slopes, the rural character is interrupted by visually prominent industrial areas including workings of the Tower Colliery.



There are other areas of this landscape where the colour, texture and shape of landform indicate former mining activities. Field sizes on the southern lower valley slopes are generally larger than areas on the northern lower valley slopes and are bound by hedges, with limited areas of woodland. The main settlement is the village of Rhigos to the west. Along the local roads around Rhigos there are occasional individual properties, and a small concentration of dwellings at Cefn Rhigos to the northwest. Rhigos is easily distinguished in views of the landscape from wider areas, including from designated areas. The country park to the southeast is a managed landscape.

Landscape quality: Low/ Medium
Landscape value: Medium
Landscape sensitivity: Low/ Medium

‘Wooded countryside with scattered settlement’ Landscape Character Area

12.49 To the north of the urbanized valley, the landscape of the lower valley slopes is distinctly more wooded, with an irregular field pattern of mainly small to medium sized fields. The woodland provides a considerable degree of visual screening to the small settlements and individual properties located within this area. The main concentrations of residential properties are at Penderyn and Pontbren Llwyd, with other settlement comprising small groups of dwellings or individual properties, including some farmhouses.

Landscape quality: Medium/ High
Landscape value: High
Landscape sensitivity: High

‘Open countryside’ Landscape Character Area

12.50 The open countryside landscape areas are distinct from the lower valley slopes and wooded countryside in the lack of urbanization. Over much of the area this is a consequence of the steep and rugged slopes, and/ or planning controls in designated landscapes. Those areas that are more open in nature, but are located on lower ground are also included in this character area. The colours of the open countryside landscape areas are distinctly less strong and bright, and there is a strong rural character and in places a sense of ‘wilderness’, even where these are located close to areas with urban elements. The changing patterns of weather are particularly notable in these areas, for example through mists seen passing over the summits of hills, views of large ‘heavy’ skies, or the sense of exposure when walking through these landscapes. The higher slopes within the open countryside areas afford extensive views across many kilometres of the landscape, and offer an appreciation of the varied natural and cultural heritage of this part of Wales.

Landscape quality: High
Landscape value: High/ Exceptional
Landscape sensitivity: High



'Plantation and mixed forest' Landscape Character Area

12.51 The plantation and mixed forest areas comprise extensive blocks of trees grown for commercial purposes. Plantations describe exclusively coniferous areas, while mixed forest may include a proportion of deciduous trees. These areas appear very dark, almost black in the landscape, particularly when compared with the surrounding open grasslands, and have sharp, square edges, unlike the woodland areas, that are not necessarily congruous with the contours of the slopes on which they are located. Nonetheless, the forests are a regular feature of the wider landscape and some local value may be placed on their loss, in terms of loss of a characteristic feature.

Landscape quality: Medium
Landscape value: Medium
Landscape sensitivity: Medium

Extracts from CCW Landmap visual and sensory aspect areas

12.52 The CCW visual and sensory aspect areas within the study area are listed in Table 12.7, and include the summary description and overall evaluation. The general boundaries of these areas are shown on Figure 12.4. Copies of the full Landmap data capture forms are included in Appendix 12.7.

Table 12.7: Extracts from CCW Landmap visual and sensory aspect areas captured data

CCW Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Area and Summary Description	Overall Evaluation (with reasons)	Management Recommendation/ Guidelines
Bridgend/ Caerphilly/ Rhondda Cynon Taff		
Cynon VS 735 – Cadair Fawr Dramatic landscape of rough grazed grassland with rock outcrops and some marshy areas lying between approximately 300m and 485mAOD. Wind noise is a dominant aesthetic factor which evokes particular experience of exposure and wildness. Spectacular upland views dominated by large expanse of sky/ clouds. Strong visual link with Brecon Beacons	High Attractive largely unspoilt upland area with strong sop and good views.	Grazing Management Medium Term: Prevent overgrazing
Cynon VS 833 – Penderyn Upper valley sides with strong upland feel- both from the strong visual link that exists and the rough grazing with some woodland/conifer elements. Slight urban	Moderate Valley sides with pattern of field boundaries/woodland, but detractive elements e.g. urban edge, pylons traffic noise, of	Prevent Overgrazing Immediate: soften urban edge Medium Term: restrict pylons & reduce impact



CCW Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Area and Summary Description	Overall Evaluation (with reasons)	Management Recommendation/ Guidelines
feel on lower slopes but dominant character is that of an upland area. Visual detractors include pylons and the sharply defined urban edge. Noise and movement from the A465. Scattered farmsteads	local importance.	of A465 e.g. planting
Cynon VS 522 – Aberdare Urban development in floor of relatively wide valley. Range of built form creates visual complexity e.g. houses/industrial estate/spoil heaps. Some views out to neighbouring upland areas provide a partial antidote to the unattractive built environment and contribute to its sense of place within the wider upland setting. Background traffic noise from A4059.	Low Without any positive visual and sensory qualities, this urban area with remnants of past mining industry has little or no importance. The views out to the adjacent upland areas are the only limited visual quality, and these are usually compromised by an element of built form.	n/a Medium Term: careful development control to limit housing/urban sprawl
Cynon VS 368 – Open Cast area of opencast mining	Low No qualities of distinction apart from a relative amount of rarity.	n/a
Cynon VS 430 – Hirwaun Common Dramatic landscape of rough grazed grassland with rock outcrops and some marshy areas lying between approximately 200m and 515mAOD. Wind noise is a dominant aesthetic factor which evokes particular experience of exposure and wildness. Attractive upland views within and attractive rolling terrain to north. A475 is a visual detractor.	High Attractive largely unspoilt upland area with strong sense of place and good views.	Grazing Management Long Term: prevent over grazing
Cynon VS 580 – St Gwynno Upland landscape dominated by coniferous forest with small areas of rough grazing/open land interspersed. Strongly defined undulating topography with ridges and valleys creates a multi-scaled landscape with a variety of spaces. Limited views out to upland areas. Some car/refuse dumping minor eyesore/visual detractor.	Moderate Fairly typical upland plantation with moderate sop and limited views, mainly from higher open areas.	Introduce broadleaf woodland mix Immediate: Broadleaf planting along edge/stream course Medium Term: Maintain open spaces
Cynon VS 890 – Craing Nantmelyn Lower slopes to the east of Hirwaun Common. Generally grazing land with	Moderate No single defining feature of regional importance to justify	Land management (grazing, bracken control)



CCW Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Area and Summary Description	Overall Evaluation (with reasons)	Management Recommendation/ Guidelines
<p>bracken and small scattered clumps of woodland. Open character and more upland feel is tempered by urban edge presence to north (Penywaun). Views similarly polarised into upland to south west and urban to north east. Some more distant upland views to north past Penywaun however.</p>	<p>more than local importance. Scenic quality and integrity both reduced by the presence of urban areas.</p>	<p>Medium Term: limit urban spread up valley sides, reduce well defined edge</p>
<p>Brecknockshire</p>		
<p>BRCKN VS 876 – Nedd Fechan and Mellte Valleys</p> <p>The pastoral upland valleys of the Mellte and Nedd Fechan run south from the upland massif of Fforest Fawr cutting through the limestone upland. Between them is a low ridge which has rock outcrops and common land in places. This area is more open with larger fields and little woody vegetation. The landcover is dominated by pasture with riparian deciduous woodland, particularly on steep slopes, and grown out hedgerows, all of which contribute to an enclosed, sheltered landscape. Some of the woodlands are grazed, eliminating understorey and allowing clear views. Rectilinear blocks of coniferous forest lie on the upper slopes below Fan Llia and Fan Nedd. Occasional conifers associated with dwellings reinforce the upland character. Settlement is mainly scattered farmsteads. Ystradfellte and Pontneddfechan are the only settlements, nestling in the valley floor of the Mellte and Nedd Fechan respectively. The latter has crept up the hill with suburban housing which is out of character. The main interest in the area is focussed on the rivers with their associated waterfalls and limestone caves. The river courses are rocky and have strong riparian vegetation. Visitors focus on these areas for walking and caving</p>	<p>Outstanding</p> <p>The valleys have a high scenic quality through their unspoilt upland pastoral mosaic character. The main interest is in the river courses with their superb landscape of rocky beds, waterfalls and caves in a woodland setting. The area is known as Waterfall Country and has a strong sense of place. It is well visited for the beauty of the countryside as setting for the waterfalls which indicates consensus on value. The area is generally of consistent character.</p>	<p>Conserve river corridor, deciduous woodland and hedgerows</p> <p>Medium Term: manage river corridor to minimise impact of visitors on river, rocks and vegetation & conserve/manage woodland cover avoiding grazing of woodland floor & conserve/manage hedgerows, laying where appropriate</p> <p>Immediate: restrict growth of settlements</p>



CCW Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Area and Summary Description	Overall Evaluation (with reasons)	Management Recommendation/ Guidelines
<p>BRCKN VS 911 – Gwaun Hepste A significant area of coniferous forestry, some relatively immature and some already felled on a ridge between Mellte and Hepste Valleys. A small part of the coniferous forest lies west of the Mellte. The plantations are dominated by spruce but have some other species such as larch and are somewhat monotonous, visually. They form an abrupt edge against the adjoining pasture. The cleared areas are unsightly. The deciduous woodland of the Mellte Valley is very attractive. The river with waterfalls and rocky course is very attractive and is used by cavers and others for recreation. There are paths through this area and the coniferous woodland.</p>	<p>Moderate (Mellte Valley is outstanding) The forestry plantation is consistently managed and has consistent character with integrity. It is dominated by a single species which leads to monotony visually. The Mellte Valley is covered with deciduous woodland focussing on the impressive water falls and rocky channel. This area is of outstanding/high value.</p>	<p>Diversify tree species in coniferous plantations especially in publicly accessible areas Medium Term: selectively fell conifers over time and diversify especially on edge & manage deciduous woodland to encourage regeneration/diversity</p>
<p>BRCKN VS 597 – Coed-y-Rhaiadr An extensive area of coniferous plantation dominated by spruce with some larch. The area covers previously enclosed land and there is a central area of rough pasture which is still retained with two dwellings. The area acts as simple backcloth to Nedd Valley. Within the lower part of the Nedd Valley there is deciduous woodland with waterfalls on the river. There is public access and this is a popular visitor attraction serviced by car parks to the south and north.</p>	<p>Moderate The forestry plantation is consistently managed and has a consistent character with integrity. It is dominated by a single species which leads to some monotony visually. The Nedd Valley lower area is covered with deciduous woodland focussing on the river with impressive waterfalls and rocky channel. This area is of outstanding quality in all categories.</p>	<p>Diversify tree species creating more interesting edges in particular Medium Term: selectively fell conifers overtime and diversify species especially on edge & manage deciduous woodland to encourage regeneration and Diversity & manage recreational routes to encourage access without damage to river/woodland.</p>
<p>Neath, Port Talbot</p>		
<p>NPT VS 430 – Gelliceibrun/ Pont Walby Both sides of Neath valley east of Glynnedd, deeply cut with minor valleys. The areas are heavily wooded with enclosed areas of pasture, boundaries of</p>	<p>Moderate Heavily wooded pastoral landscape with an intimate scenic quality. Although there has been some disturbance in</p>	<p>Maintain deciduous tree cover Medium Term: reinstate hedges, lay and replant gaps &</p>



CCW Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Area and Summary Description	Overall Evaluation (with reasons)	Management Recommendation/ Guidelines
<p>which are predominantly grown out hedges. The deciduous cover gives a more sheltered, settled feel than much of the surrounding area. The woodland hides evidence of workings to the south west. There are scattered settlements throughout the area and only minor roads and footpaths. Deciduous woodland contrasts with surrounding land cover - moorland/ coniferous plantations. This area appears run down with areas of encroachment of bracken and scrub.</p>	<p>areas, deciduous cover helps maintain a constant character throughout the area. To the east, in the Nedd Fechan valley, a series of waterfalls attract visitors, confirming the scenic quality of the area.</p>	<p>maintain grazing regime & control bracken</p>
<p>NPT VS 962 – Mynydd Nant y bar/ Mynydd Blaenafan Large area of undulating plateau running across the high ground between the Afan valley and Neath valley to the east of county borough. Rising from approx 50m AOD in Neath valley to 600m AOD. Numerous small valleys provide added topographical interest to this landscape which the conifers emphasise and add drama to. The area is almost entirely covered with coniferous plantation, mainly spruce, with larch which leads to a monotonous cover on the plateau tops. There are some areas of open ground and exposed rock, primarily at summits or steeper ground. There are no roads or settlements in this area although the Coed Morgannwy Way which almost dissects the area and provides access along a long distance trail. In many areas the abrupt forest edge sits uncomfortably with the surrounding open landscape. Cleared areas of forest are unsightly.</p>	<p>Moderate Area of forestry is consistently managed and contains numerous landscape features, exposed rock and open upland, which add to the aesthetic quality of this area. The edges and skyline against the Afan and Neath valley complement the valleys' characters.</p>	<p>Vary composition of woodland to increase visual variety – larch/deciduous Medium Term: enhance landscape features within forestry by selective thinning and felling & maintain open heath and exposed rock.</p>



Visual Assessment

12.53 From each visual receptor location within the viewpoint areas, the visual assessment gathered data on the context of the existing view, whether there are any views towards the site, and whether it would be likely that the receptor would have a view of the proposed development. Within these areas, some of the receptor viewpoints indicate that the proposals would not be visible from certain areas.

12.54 A summary of the existing views from each of the five viewpoint areas shown on Figure 12.6 is set out below. Appendix 12.8 sets out details of each of the visual receptors assessed within each viewpoint area including their distance from the site and sensitivity, and where relevant refers to the relevant Photographic Viewpoints. The visual receptors that are roads or places are located on Figure 12.1 Site Location and Context. Footpaths, areas of CROW open access land and significant areas of vegetation are shown on Figure 12.5, while specific properties are located on Figure 12.6. The information has been used to undertake the impact assessment in section 12.5.

Existing views around the study area – Viewpoint Area 01 Site Environs

12.55 The area includes the local and major roads to the south and west of the site, residential and commercial properties located along them, and one public footpath that passes along the northern edge of the site. These areas are located in the lowest parts of the valley, where the character is strongly influenced by the high proportion of urban and industrial elements in the views and traffic noise. The area is well vegetated including plantation conifers on the Industrial Estate that screen the buildings, as well deciduous vegetation along roads and within the small undeveloped urban fringe areas. The low topography, road bunds, vegetation and large buildings create a high degree of visual containment and limit the number of available views towards the site.

Existing views around the study area – Viewpoint Area 02 Brecon Beacons National Park

12.56 This viewpoint area encompasses a large area of land to the east north and west of the site. It includes the lower wooded slopes and grazing land of the Brecon Beacon hills that contain local lanes, several public rights of way, very small settlements and isolated properties and farms. Penderyn Reservoir is located just north of the site. To the northeast, the open exposed landscapes are used for rough grazing and are crossed by a bridleway and areas of CROW open access land. The topography of this area has many local variations and combined with the extents of woodland cover; create a high degree of visual screening of the site. However, within these areas, there are locations where there is a view, often through vegetation, of the Hirwaun Industrial Estate and from this the location of the site can be inferred. From higher ground where the landscape is open, there are points where there is a clear view towards the Industrial Estate and the site. These views also include the wider valley landscape and slopes to the south.



Existing views around the study area – Viewpoint Area 03 Rhigos and Cefn Rhigos

12.57 The area is located to the southwest of the site, and has a sense of separation from it, in part due to the change in landscape character from urbanized valley to urban fringes/ semi rural character on the lower valley slopes, but also arising from the changes in the available views of the wider landscape. The urbanized valley is generally less prominent or is not part of many of the panoramic views of the landscape from these areas. The main settlement is at Rhigos, while there are smaller collections of dwellings and individual properties and farms located on the minor roads to the west and northwest. The local area is well connected with a network of footpaths and bridleways.

Existing views around the study area – Viewpoint Area 04 Hirwaun Common

12.58 There is one major transport route, the A4061, and several access tracks that serve the industrial sites and plantation forests located in this area. There are few public rights of way, however most of Hirwaun Common and the forests and woodlands on it are designated CROW open access areas. The landscape is largely open and the extensive landscape views encompass the full extent of the urbanized valley, including Hirwaun Industrial Estate and Penderyn Reservoir. While there are generally no views of the site itself, due to the screening effect of existing vegetation on the Industrial Estate, the location of the site can be determined in these views from other features, in particular the reservoir which is located behind it. Overall the views are more extensive from higher ground, but also more distant, so that the urbanized valley, while prominent, is one of a number of elements in the view.

Existing views around the study area – Viewpoint Area 05 Hirwaun

12.59 The visual receptors include users of major transport routes, a small town, commercial properties and a recreation ground. Similar to Rhigos, the Hirwaun settlement and visual receptors around it have a sense of separation from the site and its immediate environs, even though the landscape here is more markedly urban in character than at Rhigos. This is due to the visual containment that arises from the local topography, man-made bunds and mounds, and planted vegetation. Glimpsed views of the Tower Colliery mine south of Hirwaun are the main indicator of the proximity of this viewpoint area to the Industrial Estate.

The Proposed Development and Landscape Mitigation

12.60 A description of the development proposals is set out in Chapter 3 of the ES. This section describes the main features of the development to set the context to the landscape mitigation proposals. Reference has been made to the latest revisions of the following drawings by PRC Architects:

- Existing Site Survey, Dwg. No. PL002
- Proposed Site Plan, Dwg. No. PL 003
- Existing Site Sections, Dwg. No. PL010
- Proposed Site Section, Dwg. No. PL011



- Floor plans, elevations and sections for the Gatehouse, Visitors Centre, Fuel Preparation Area, Engine House, Pyrolysis, Biomax and High Energy User Dwg. Nos. PL020, PL031, PL041, PL051, PL061 and PL081.

12.61 The site is approximately 7ha in area, of which around 5ha would comprise built development, including roads and other hard-surfaced areas. The combined recycling, commercial and energy generation functions of the site are collectively termed a 'park'. There are four main zones of operation comprising:

- Fuel Preparation Area - located in the south-eastern part of the park
- Anaerobic Digestion (AD) and Pyrolysis - located to the west of the park
- 'Biomax' Separator - located in the north-eastern part of the park
- Plasma Conversion - located in the south-western part of the park

12.62 In addition, there would be an on-site 'Engine House' electricity generation plant located in the centre of the park, and a 'High Energy Use Unit' third party development located along its northern edge. A Visitors Centre including accommodation for administration and education functions would be located in the southeast corner of the site. The development also includes several ancillary structures, as well as parking for cars and lorries. There would be two distinct phases of development.

12.63 The park has been designed to provide an efficient use of the site, allowing links where required between related processes. The Fuel Preparation Area, Biomax Separator and High Energy Use Unit comprise the three largest buildings on the site and would be approximately 11-14m in height to the ridgeline. Located around the edges of the park, these buildings would enclose a central area that accommodates the AD tanks, Pyrolysis building and associated structures as well as the Engine House. These elements would be around 15m, 11.5m and 8.5m respectively, to the highest point, with the AD tanks set 2.5m below normal ground level. The larger buildings would provide a degree of visual screening to these internal functions, particularly when viewed from Fifth Avenue and Ninth Avenue.

12.64 The Plasma Conversion comprises an area of structures, containers and associated pipework and ducting located immediately west of the Fuel Preparation Area. This would be set back from Fifth Avenue, and surrounded on two sides by green walls that extend across part of the AD area. A detailed design would be carried out for the green walls and could comprise a combination of living panels and trellis structures on which climbers could grow. The height of the upper section of the green wall could be varying to avoid creating a uniform structure.

12.65 The proposed buildings are fenestrated using a palette of complimentary colours and materials of contrasting textures pre-selected by PRC architects. These are used to create an architectural rhythm and create visual interest to larger buildings. The shared palette of materials and colours is intended to create the sense of a family of buildings across the site.



12.66 To increase legibility and visual interest the entrances of the larger buildings the PRC design provides accents with full height curtain walling and projecting glazed canopies. Anti-glare roof lights have been introduced to the roofscape in order to provide visual relief and reduce the mass of the roofscape.

12.67 The visitors centre is located in a prominent position at the junction of Fifth and Ninth Avenue providing a point of visual interest. A living green sedum roof is proposed to this gateway building contributing to the park's contemporary design and green credentials.

12.68 The main area of car parking is located just north of the visitors centre. The pedestrian and vehicular access route around these areas are surfaced in block paving of contrasting colours, which is further enhanced with formal landscaping which would provide an attractive setting for workers and visitors to the park. Adjacent to the car park is a waiting and inspection zone for lorries entering the site. The area would be set below the level of Ninth Avenue, and this combined with bunding, railings and landscape planting alongside it, would screen much of the view of the vehicles and structures as seen from the road.

12.69 The additional structures around the site include four flare stacks around 17.5m in height. The two flare stacks located by the AD structures would be set on ground 2.5m below normal ground level. A further stack around 2.5m in diameter and containing three flues would be located in the centre of the site. The final height of this stack would be dependent on selection of the preferred dispersion model, however the maximum height is not expected to exceed 40m. The stack would include an inspection platform around 1m wide and positioned not higher than the ridge of the adjacent buildings. The proposed development would also include two water treatment plants, further car parking areas and a weighbridge area with adjacent 'Gate House' (small security and welfare building).

12.70 The proposed development would be set below the level of Fifth Avenue and Ninth Avenue and there would be gentle gradients from the entrance points into the site. The hard surfaced areas would be predominantly made up of brushed concrete, with 'blacktop' surfaces within the parking circulation areas. Block paving would be used within parking bays. Further areas of tree and shrub planting, both at the park boundaries and within it, are intended to create additional areas of visual screening, a foil to security fencing within the site and a 'green' landscape setting. Signage would be kept to the minimum required to aid orientation to and within the development.

12.71 In terms of materials, cedar boarding has been selected by PRC to clad the main elevations to the buildings. The colours for cladding panels to the buildings, roofing and various structures around the park have been pre-selected by PRC from Corus Colours 'Colorcoat HPS200 Ultra'. The chosen Corus colours are 'Heather' (RAL:040 70 05), 'Seal' (RAL: 040 50 05), and 'Fox' (RAL: 040 50 20) for pre-finished steel cladding. These colours have a textured matt finish. They range respectively from a light grey with a pink hue, a dark grey with a pinkish tone and an earthy red/ brown. 'Seal' is proposed for roofs and doors, while panel cladding to the buildings would be in the colours 'Fox' and 'Heather'.



The palette of materials is intended to blend effectively with colours occurring in the surrounding landscapes as well as other buildings.

12.72 The proposed development is intended to operate for 24 hours, seven days a week, and some lighting will be required at all times to allow safe working and access. While the design of the lighting and operation of the site, including movements of vehicles on and off the site is subject to further detailed design and agreement, the general requirements and measures that could be undertaken to minimise any effects of light pollution are summarised below:

- Some areas such as roadways may need to be lit at all times. This is likely to be lighting mounted on columns around 6m in height, and directed towards the ground. The lighting could be controlled via switches contained in buildings on the site, such as the gatehouse.
- To facilitate movement between buildings at night, lighting could be controlled using light switches.
- Other areas requiring to be lit may require floodlighting mounted on columns around 6m in height. The angle of the fittings would be directed towards the ground.
- Based on the preliminary lighting design, light levels at the site boundary are anticipated to be around 10lux, which is equivalent to a barely sufficient level to walk in. The proposed landscape planting at the edges of the site would reduce this level even further.
- Lighting would be designed in accordance with BREEAM recommendations to achieve a lower level of brightness and minimise or avoid any reflection of light from ground surfaces.

12.73 The whole of the park would be contained by a substantial landscape buffer comprising both existing and proposed planting, together with bunding and water features. The intention would be to create a swathe of predominantly native tree and shrub planting around the site that enhances existing vegetated areas. Along the northern and western edges of the park, the existing belt of woodland growing alongside the public footpath and diverted stream would be retained and enhanced with a new landscape buffer around 20-30m in width to the north, and around 10-20m wide to the west.

12.74 The southern edge to the park alongside Fifth Avenue would include a landscaped area around 20-25m wide and accommodating a series of swales and ponds that would provide a sustainable urban drainage system (SUDS) and reduce the site's contribution to stormwater discharge. Where appropriate, and in accordance with the water attenuation and drainage requirements, these waterbodies would be enhanced by varying the slope profiles to provide areas for a variety of native aquatic and marginal planting, with the aim of enhancing both their visual aesthetic and nature conservation value. Surrounding these ponds would be a series of bunds and level areas, planted with a mixed palette of tree and shrub species. A variety of sizes of plants would be accommodated, to create a diverse structure of vegetation, with larger trees creating an instant visual screening, and smaller plants that would provide similar benefit in years to come. The grassed setting to the



waterbodies and planting could include native species with potential to enhance the nature conservation value of this area.

12.75 The detailed tree and shrub planting proposals for the site would be based on those species observed to be growing successfully on and around the site, as well as the list of tree species native to the Brecon Beacons National Park as set out in the Appendix 3 to Approved Unitary Development Plan. A copy of the UDP list is included in Appendix 12.6. Existing vegetation, including landscape planting along Ninth Avenue includes Ash, Willow, Birch, Alder and Oak, as well as Dogwood, Guelder Rose, Hazel, Blackthorn and Field Rose. Native species would predominate in new planting at the site edges, adjacent to existing vegetation in the landscape, and where available, local provenance species would be incorporated. Within the site, a greater proportion of non-native species would be incorporated, making use of hardy plants that are suited to the conditions of the site and scale of spaces, and that would not compromise vehicular circulation around the park.

12.76 Existing developed areas of the Hirwaun Industrial Estate include large areas of coniferous screen planting. The use of any conifers within and around the proposed park would be at most, minimal, the intention being that the design and layout of the buildings and proposed areas of planting would provide effective moderation of any effects on landscape character or views, including both within the site environs and the wider landscape, without the need for a blanket planted screen.

12.77 Detailed landscape proposals would be prepared for the park, and a management plan would be provided and implemented. The plan would set out the landscape and ecological design objectives, routine maintenance operations and long term management requirements. The aim would be to ensure that the various planted features around the park are successfully established, and provide an enduring and robust landscape setting to the scheme into the future.

POTENTIAL EFFECTS

Potential effects on landscape

12.78 The potential effects on landscape have been assessed for those areas within each of the five viewpoint areas shown on Figure 12.6. The assessment does not include the outlying parts of the study area as these are not considered significant in terms of potential landscape effects arising from the development, largely due to their distance from the site. These include the Dare Valley Country Park, areas around Craig Hendre-fawr to the southwest, landscapes north of Hirwaun and east of the A4059, and the landscapes around Pontneddfechan to the west. For similar reasons, the corresponding CCW Landmap visual and sensory areas have not been included in the impact assessment. These are:

Cynon

- CYNON VS735 – Cadair Fawr
- BRCKN VS597 – Coed-y-Rhaiadr



Brecknockshire

- BRCKN VS876 – Nedd Fechan and Mellte Valleys
- BRCKN VS597 – Coed-y-Rhaiadr
- BRCKN VS911 – Gwaun Hepste

Neath, Port Talbot

- NPT VS430 – Gelliceibryn/ Pont Walby
- NPT VS962 – Mynydd Nant y bar/ Mynydd Blaenafan

12.79 Appendix 12.9 sets out the predicted impacts for the landscape character and visual and sensory aspect areas during construction and at Year 1. Year 1 is taken as the year when the entire development is complete, including all phases of work. Year 15 is the year taken to assess residual effects and further detail is set out in section 12.6.

12.80 The assessment of effects during construction assumes there would be no mitigation of landscape and visual effects and therefore represents a 'worst case scenario'. The table assumes that the effects on landscape character would arise from the addition of elements or features at variance with those normally visible in the landscape. Examples are large cranes, storage areas or a greater number of large vehicles using the surrounding roads.

12.81 The assessment of operational effects has taken into account the year 1 photomontage views shown in Figures 12.18 to 12.22. While the colours of the development shown in the photomontages is not necessarily an exact representation of the likely final appearance of the development, they are intended to demonstrate that from the key landscapes to the north and south of the site, the development could be effectively integrated into its immediate landscape setting, reducing the significance of the perception of it from surrounding landscapes, or the ability of people to enjoy those landscapes. The reader is referred to material supplied by PRC architects to support the planning submission, including any samples of materials proposed for the development.

12.82 The proposed development would be contained within the extents of both the Industrial Estate and urbanized valley and as such would not have direct impacts on the landscape character of the surrounding areas. The landscapes adjoining the site are developed and include a variety of industrial activities and moving traffic. Where developments have been carefully and sensitively designed, for example with an appearance or finish that is typical of the environs, and with an appropriate degree of visual screening, then these have been integrated in the landscape setting and are less significant when considering effects on landscape character of the surrounding areas. Developments or features that are more visually intrusive when perceived from adjoining landscapes are often those that are at variance with the landscape in which they are sited, for example through their scale, form, height or visual appearance, siting on exposed slopes, or lack of appropriate visual screening.



12.83 Appendix 12.9 demonstrates that effects on landscape character arising from the perception of the development from the outlying areas would be greater from areas of higher ground and more open and sensitive landscapes, where there would be a view of a greater extent of the development than from lower lying areas due to the elevation. However, the highest points from which the site may be seen are within the areas of the zone of visual influence that are most distant from the site. From these areas, perception of the landscape encompasses not only the various elements of the Industrial Estate and surrounding urban uses, but also nearby settlements and extensive open and wooded landscapes. The development itself would be a small part of this view, and would benefit from the visual containment provided by existing planting around the Industrial Estate and within the immediate site environs.

12.84 The proposed development would include buildings and structures that are of a similar scale, height, form and massing to existing buildings on the Hirwaun Industrial Estate and would be designed to a high standard with quality materials and a comprehensive landscape setting. It would be located within a small part of the National Park that already has significant urban influences. While it would result in the loss of an open area of grassed land with landscape structure planting, it is considered that it would not have any significant effect on the much more extensive areas of the National Park that have characteristics more typical of the visual and sensory aspect areas described by CCW Landmap.

12.85 The lighting required to allow the functioning of the site is likely to be perceived from outlying areas, in particular from areas that look down onto the development, and for much of the time would be likely to be seen in context of other areas of lighting within the urbanized valley, such as around settlements, highways or areas of commercial development. Lighting would be designed to contain light within the site itself and minimise or avoid any light pollution.

12.86 The stack proposed at the centre of the site would be a maximum of 40m in height. Although the stack itself would be noticeably taller than the other buildings and structures within the development, particularly when viewed from areas close to the site, it would be consistent in scale with high-voltage electricity pylons that pass nearby to the site, which themselves are around 49m in height. The stack would not break the horizon when viewed from the higher ground of the National Park to the north or from the elevated publicly accessible areas of Hirwaun Common to the south, and would not obscure the available views of the wider landscape setting from these areas.

Potential impacts on views

12.87 A summary of the potential impacts from each of the five viewpoint areas shown on Figure 12.6 is set out below, while Appendix 12.10 sets out the impacts for each of the visual receptors during construction, and at Year 1 of operation. Year 1 is taken as the year when the entire development is complete including all phases of work. Year 15 is the year taken to assess residual effects, and further detail is set out in section 12.6. Five viewpoints were selected for the production of photomontage views, based on the visual assessment described in section 12.3, and are shown in Figures 12.18 to 12.22. The illustrations show



the existing view, anticipated view at Year 1 and anticipated view at Year 15. The photomontage views have been used in the assessment of the potential impacts on views, visual amenity and landscape character.

12.88 The assessment of effects during construction assumes there would be no mitigation of landscape and visual effects and therefore represents a 'worst case scenario'. However, it is recognised that construction activities would be subject to a number of conditions such as restriction of working hours and measures to reduce dust in the atmosphere. It is assumed that visual receptors would generally consider a construction site to be of low visual amenity. The assessment shows that the effects would be greater from those areas that are elevated above the site. The effects on views during construction would arise from activities taking place on site, including the presence of plant, site compounds, storage areas and excavations. In addition, there may be temporary disruptions to the layout of surrounding roads and use of any footpaths near to the site. Construction traffic including delivery vehicles would also be present on surrounding roads, although due to the likely large scale of these, it is unlikely that these would use the local or minor roads in the area.

12.89 As described for the impacts on landscape character, lighting required to allow the 24hour functioning of the site is likely to be perceived by visual receptors around the site, in particular from areas that would look down onto the development. It is noted however, that from visual receptor locations such as public rights of way and open access areas, this is likely to be insignificant at times of darkness, when it is unlikely these areas would be used. Where there may be glimpsed views of the development by road users, and these are from elevated locations, then lighting on the site may be visible. However, this would be seen in context of other lighting, such as around settlements, highways or areas of commercial development. As described, measures would be taken to minimise contain light within the site itself as far as possible. The buildings themselves would provide some screening of lighting in views from areas surrounding the site.

Potential Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 01 Site Environs

12.90 The construction activities and proposed development would benefit from the high level of visual containment that already exists due to the large areas of planting within this lower part of the valley. The most significant effect on views would be those from Fifth Avenue and Ninth Avenue, where much of the view towards the lower slopes of the National Park are likely to be obscured by the development, altering the context of the view. Elsewhere, while much of the main part of the development is likely to be screened from views, the upper parts of the proposed 40m stack may be visible from some areas where much of the remainder of the development may not be, such as from properties to the west of the site, and glimpses from roads to the south and east.

Potential Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 02 Brecon Beacons National Park

12.91 For the visual receptors located on the wooded slopes around the site, existing vegetation in the landscape is likely to provide a significant degree of visual screening from



both the construction activities and the development itself. Where there are already glimpsed views towards the Industrial Estate from the wooded slope areas, these views are therefore likely to encompass the new development. There are limited areas within the open landscapes on the higher slopes that already have a clear view towards the Industrial Estate, and would have a view of the development. The colours selected by the architects for the development are intended to mitigate the change in the view, by integrating the development visually within its context. The development would also be one of a number of elements in the view, including both urban elements and broad open landscapes. In the available views of the development, the proposed 40m stack would be seen to be taller than adjacent buildings and structures on the Industrial Estate, however, from more elevated areas, this would be seen in context of other development and structures located on higher ground. These are either taller than the proposed stack, in the case of high voltage pylons, or would appear 'above' the stack in the view.

Potential Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 03 Rhigos and Cefn Rhigos

12.92 The effects during construction are likely to include some views of larger structures on the site, such as cranes. The separation of these areas from the site and already limited views towards the Industrial Estate are likely to temper the effects of the new development. There may be some views of the upper parts of the development including the proposed 40m stack, seen behind the roofs of existing buildings and planting around the Estate and nearby roads. These views would also include other urban elements, such as pylons crossing the valley, as well as panoramic and distant views of the hills both to the north and the south.

Potential Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 04 Hirwaun Common

12.93 The majority of the visual receptors have some views towards the Industrial Estate and buildings within it, and are likely therefore to have a view of part of the development. From the lower slopes, these views are likely to encompass only the upper parts of the development, including taller structures and the higher parts of roofs, with lower parts of the development screened by existing buildings, road bunds and mature vegetation. The colours chosen by PRC architects for these are intended to integrate the development within its landscape setting. Views from higher ground would encompass a greater proportion of the development, and combined with the greater sensitivity of the receptors located on public footpaths or in open access areas, the significance of the effects would be greater. The proposed 40m stack would be seen to be taller than other parts of the development, however, similar to views from other areas, this would be in context of nearby electricity pylons and other industrial functions both on the Industrial Estate and within the wider landscape.

Potential Visual Effects – 05 Hirwaun

12.94 The receptors benefit from the existing screening effects on the site of topography, road embankments and well as vegetation. However, in the winter months, the loss of leaves from deciduous vegetation may reveal glimpsed views towards the upper parts of the development, including the upper part of the proposed 40m stack from some areas, for example from Hirwaun RFC and the grounds of Mount Pleasant Public House.



RESIDUAL EFFECTS

12.95 The residual landscape and visual effects have been assessed at Year 15. The residual landscape impacts are shown in Appendix 12.9, and the residual visual impacts are shown on in Appendix 12.10. The photomontage views in Figures 12.18 to 12.22 also show the potential impact at five locations – Mynydd Beili-glas carpark/ viewing point, public footpath by the A4061, Penderyn Reservoir (southern and northern edges) and the bridleway in the National Park north of the site.

12.96 With the high quality approach to the buildings, structures, finishes and external spaces around the development, combined with the site layout that responds to the urban form of the Industrial Estate, the residual landscape and visual effects could be reduced.

12.97 The principal change to the development on which the assessment of the residual effects is based, would be that the proposed structural planting around and within the site would be reaching semi-maturity and would provide an attractive landscape setting to the site. The planting would provide a degree of visual screening of the buildings, structures, ancillary spaces and parking areas, as well as the activities within these areas. Planting would help to break up the mass of the development particularly when viewed from the more sensitive locations on the higher slopes and open access land. Use of a large proportion of native trees and shrubs in the planted buffers around the development would relate in landscape character and visual terms, to the lower wooded slopes that surround the site to the north, west and northeast.

12.98 The planting would also be beneficial in breaking up any views of lighting on the development in hours of darkness, when perceived from areas of ground elevated above the development site. The planting would also have the effect of reducing the lux levels at the periphery of the site, and combined with the screening effect of buildings on the site, would benefit visual receptors in the vicinity.

Residual Landscape Effects

12.99 Appendix 12.9 shows that the effect of the maturing landscape setting to the development is to reduce the extent of the development that would be seen, and to integrate it in its immediate landscape setting. The proposed planting around the site may also benefit the landscape character of the Industrial Estate as a whole, by adding a new structure of planting that will improve the setting of both the new development and existing nearby buildings, for years to come.



Residual Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 01 Site Environs

12.100 The visual containment of the development created by vegetation within this area, would be increased as the mitigation planting around the site matures, gaining height and closing the canopy of planted wooded areas. While this would not screen the upper parts of the proposed 40m stack, the finishes proposed by PRC architects are intended to reduce the visual prominence of this structure when viewed from surrounding areas. In addition, vegetation in the landscape and the glimpsed or brief nature of some of these views are likely to reduce their significance.

Residual Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 02 Brecon Beacons National Park

12.101 From areas within the National Park, particularly where the view would be from open land elevated above the development, the effect of maturing planting within and enveloping the site would not necessarily be to visually screen it, but rather create a well vegetated setting that is consistent with the character of the wooded valley slopes, and also breaks up the form and massing of the buildings within the site. The proposed 40m stack may be glimpsed in several views from the Park, however, the wooded areas within the surrounding landscapes are likely to provide a significant visual foil to it, including in winter views. From higher open ground, maturing planting would not screen the upper part of the stack, however it would be seen in the context of other structures of similar height, or buildings on ground elevated above the development. The development would be clearly distinguished in the view from the southern banks of Penderyn Reservoir, however, planting around the site would break up the form of the development and views of the wider valley landscape would not be obscured. Fishermen at this private recreational site are likely to have their back to this view, when standing on the southern edge of the reservoir. From the northern edge of the reservoir, the waterbody and surrounding embankments, together with vegetation to the south of it would provide a significant degree of screening of most of the proposed development.

Residual Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 03 Rhigos and Cefn Rhigos

12.102 The vegetation planted around and within the proposed development would be maturing and would provide an increasingly effective visual foil to it, and assist in its integration into the landscape. The vegetation would not screen the upper part of the proposed 40m stack, and this is likely to be visible from some areas, such as footpath west of Rhigos and properties at the north-eastern edge of Rhigos. However, these views would also include a number of pylons, the height of which is around 49m above ground level, and parts of other large industrial buildings, so that the development would not be significantly at variance with its setting. In addition, views from these areas tend to be distant and encompass extensive views of the wider landscape, and the development would be a small part of this view.



Residual Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 04 Hirwaun Common

12.103 By year 15, the landscape planting proposed around and within the development would provide a substantial vegetated setting to the buildings and structures, increasing the degree to which it is integrated in the landscape and reducing the visibility of the development as a whole. As in year 1, the proposed 40m stack would be taller than the other parts of the development and much of the vegetation surrounding it, however, it would be one of a number of urban elements in the view including pylons, warehouses and industrial works. The pylon would not obscure wider views towards the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Residual Visual Effects – Viewpoint Area 05 Hirwaun

12.104 There would be little change in the residual effects from year 1, since the maturing landscape planting around the site would have limited additional effect on the existing high degree of visual containment to the development. Where there would potentially be glimpsed views of the upper part of the 40m stack in year 1, these are also likely to be available in year 15.

CONCLUSIONS

12.105 The application site is proposed for the development of a recycling, commercial and energy generation 'park'. The site is allocated for industrial uses in the local plans of the two administrative authorities that govern the area.

12.106 The landscapes surrounding the site have a significant natural and cultural heritage that is reflected in the number of historic sites and areas protected for nature conservation value. Part of the site is situated with the Brecon Beacons National Park. The Park itself is valued from international through to local level for its qualities such as scenic beauty, geological resource, landscape character and tranquillity.

12.107 Open land and forested landscapes to the south of the site around Hirwaun Common are designated as a Local Landscape Area with the aim of protecting landscape quality and views, and the ability to enjoy the landscape.

12.108 There is a broad range of national, regional and local guidance and policy that seeks to protect the special features of the designated and undesignated landscapes and their visual and recreational amenity, by minimising any adverse effects from development, and requiring quality design that relates to its context. The overriding objectives are to ensure sustainable development and a high quality of life for the residents, workers and visitors to the area.

12.109 As part of this EIA, Savills undertook a landscape, townscape and visual assessment based on the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2nd edition (Landscape Institute & Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2002.) and



incorporating visual and sensory aspect data prepared by the Countryside Council for Wales Landmap process.

12.110 The site comprises previously developed land, and while it consists of open land, it is located within an area of transitional character, considerably influenced by the industrial uses around it. It is not typical of the pastures, wooded countryside or open grasslands of the areas of the National Park to the north. In views from the wider landscapes, these industrial uses are not necessarily a significant detraction from the enjoyment of these areas, particularly where measures have been taken to integrate industries or other urban elements within the landscape setting. In addition, the steep slopes above the 'urbanized valley' where the development is proposed to be located, afford extensive panoramic views of dramatic hillsides, and the valley itself is a relatively small part of the overall scene when viewed from many areas.

12.111 Existing vegetation around the site, in particular the wooded slopes to the north, west and northwest, and planting around the Industrial Estate and roads within the urbanized valley, combined with the varied topography of the area, creates a high level of physical and visual separation of the site from many of the surrounding landscape areas.

12.112 As shown in Appendix 12.10, there are few high sensitivity visual receptors that would be affected by the proposals. The limited areas to the north of the site from which the development is likely to be clearly visible include Penderyn Reservoir, the un-named lane to the northwest and a section of public bridleway and area of open access land to the north of the lane. These are located at distances of up to 1.5km. Views from these areas include other parts of the Industrial Estate, mining activities around Hirwaun Common to the south and extensive views of the surrounding hills and valley sides. Elsewhere, the location of the site can be interpreted in a limited number of views from areas to the west and northeast of the site, due to the presence of the roofs of existing buildings on the Industrial Estate, or the reservoir in the view. Some of these views are glimpses through existing vegetation in the landscape.

12.113 From the south, there is a clear view of Penderyn Reservoir which lies just north of the site, from the open access land, and the Local Landscape Area, and from the public parking place and viewing point at Mynydd Beili-glas (located at approximately 500m AOD, 3-4km south of the site). The development would be partly screened by existing mature deciduous and coniferous vegetation located within the Hirwaun Industrial Estate and along the A465. Further north, a less elevated view of the reservoir is available from the public footpath that crosses land below Hirwaun Common. At this lower level, mature vegetation in the valley landscape would provide a greater screening effect to the development. The majority of views from the south are panoramic, encompassing extensive areas of the southern slopes and valleys of the Brecon Beacons, as well as the urbanized valley to the south of this, and the development would be one of a number of elements in these panoramic views.



12.114 The proposed development has been designed to a high standard by PRC architects and will be contained within wide planted buffers at the periphery. The majority of the proposed buildings and structures on the site would be similar in scale, height and massing to existing buildings on the Hirwaun Industrial Estate, including those located on Ninth Avenue. The choice of colours for the buildings and structures within the proposed park is aimed at integrating the development within the surrounding landscapes and minimising visual intrusion, particularly when viewed from outlying areas. The various areas of bunding, buffer vegetation, ponds and internal planting to the park would provide an effective visual foil to the buildings, structures and vehicles located around it, breaking up the mass of the development, creating an attractive aesthetic, and integrating the park with both the immediate and wider landscape setting. These features are likely to also have the additional benefit of providing extended wildlife habitats and movement corridors, contributing to local biodiversity objectives.

12.115 The four flare stacks proposed on the site would be similar in height or only slightly taller (around 3m) than adjacent buildings on the site, and are likely to be perceived as part of the overall development. The upper part of the stack proposed to be located at the centre of the site, which would be up to 40m from local ground level, would be visible above the tallest buildings and structures on the site. The photomontage views demonstrate that this view is most notable from the elevated banks of Penderyn Reservoir that would look over the 'rooftops' of the development. However, several high voltage pylons (around 49m in height) are also visible from this location and appear to be similar in scale to the proposed stack. In views from most areas surrounding the site including from the elevated open landscapes, while the stack would be visible above the other buildings and structures on the site, it is unlikely to break the horizon in most views, and would not result in any significant obstruction of views, most notably the panoramic views. In distant views, the stack would appear as one of several structures located within the urbanized valley. Due to the scale of the stack, it would not be possible to screen views of the upper part of it with planting, however PRC architects' proposed palette of colours and finishes for the structures is intended to minimise visual prominence and effectively integrate the development into the surrounding landscapes.

12.116 Development of the site will not lead to the loss of agricultural land, public rights of way, open access areas or trees subject to tree preservation orders. There is some existing landscape planting along the eastern edge of the site that would be removed to facilitate the development but this would be replaced with new landscape bunding and planting with a high proportion of native species to provide a visual screen and containment to the development.

12.117 The proposals comply with the national, regional and local guidance and planning policy, and are not considered to have significant harmful effects on the natural beauty of the National Park or the recreational and visual amenity of its residents or visitors. The landscape proposals could have a positive effect on the landscape character and setting of the site, by extending the character of the adjacent lower wooded slopes of the National Park.