ASHTON SMALL SCALE GAS-FIRED ENERGY RESERVE FACILITY: ASHTON OLD ROAD, OPENSHAW

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL STATEMENT

Date: **September 2016**

Our Ref: **OXF9722**

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Date:	**September 2016**
Project Number/Document Reference:	OXF9725 **ASHTON VF**

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1 INTRODUCTION

General

1.1 RPS has been commissioned by STOR 128 Ltd. to produce a Landscape and Visual Statement (LVS) of a Small Scale Gas-fired Energy Reserve (SSGER) at Ashton Old Road, Openshaw, Greater Manchester.

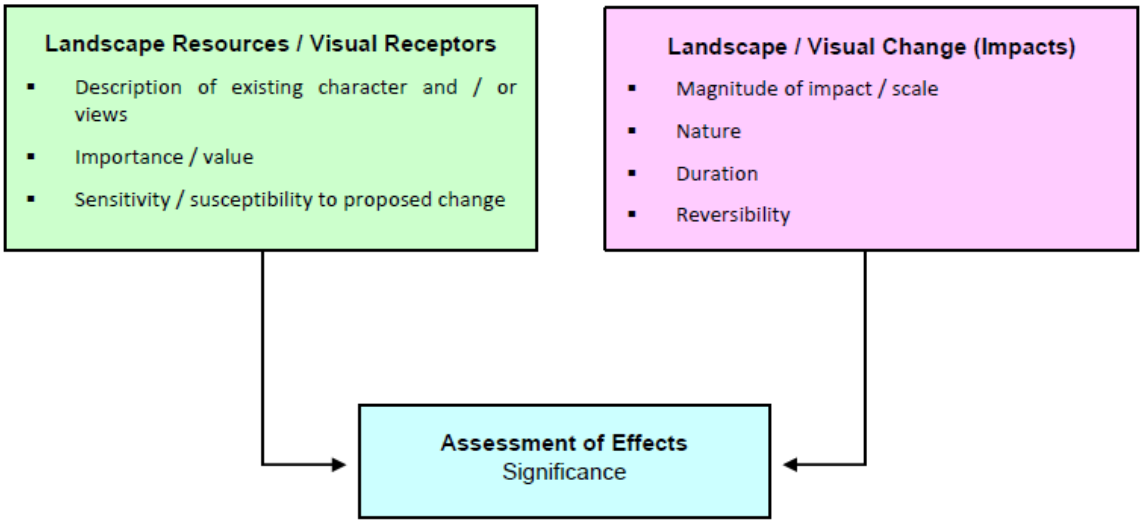
1.2 This report provides a consideration of the proposed development (described in Section 3 of the Planning, Design and Access Statement) within the context of the surrounding landscape. It outlines the existing landscape and visual baseline conditions, including published landscape character studies, any relevant designations and the current visual resources of the Application Site and surrounding area. The potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed SSGER facility are assessed against the existing baseline scenario.

Assessment Methodology

1.3 As a matter of best practice, the assessment for this LVS has been undertaken based on the relevant guidance on landscape and visual assessment. This includes:

- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) *'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Third Edition'*.

1.4 The assessment reviews the existing situation, and then considers the likely effects of the project in relation to the baseline conditions during the construction and operational phases. The level of the landscape and visual effects are assessed through consideration of the sensitivity or susceptibility of the resources/receptor to the proposed development and the magnitude of change. The process is summarised in the diagram below.



Assessment Methodology Summary

1.5 The effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape character of the site and the surrounding area, as well as on visual resources and receptors has been described. In this LVS the effects are assessed as being either significant or not significant.

Baseline Methodology

1.6 For this LVS a desk top review of published data, including landscape character assessments, OS maps and aerial photography was undertaken. This has identified the potential landscape and visual resources that might be affected by the Proposed Development.

2 BASELINE ENVIRONMENT

Application Site Context and Description

2.1 The Application Site is located to the north of Old Ashton Road (part of the A635) and to the west of Louisa Street, approximately 4.8km to the east of Manchester city centre. The surrounding landscape comprises a combination of residential development interspersed with pockets industrial and commercial development and areas of public open space.

2.2 The Application Site would be accessed from the south via Ashton Old Road and via the A635 which provides direct link to the wider primary highway network including the M60 (east) and the A6010 (west).

2.3 The Application Site is located within a gently undulating, low-lying urban landscape at between 75m and 80m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The topography of the landscape immediately surrounding the Application Site is broadly consistent with the Application Site itself. Notable variations in topography in the wider context of the Site occur to the southeast (rising to 100m AOD) and to the west (descending to approximately 40m AOD in the direction of Manchester city centre).

2.4 There are number of man-made water courses in the area surrounding the Application Site. The Ashton Canal passes approximately 0.5km to the north of the Application Site on a broadly east-west alignment. Gorton Upper and Lower Reservoirs are located approximately 1.5km to the southeast of the Application Site and Audenshaw Reservoirs 1-3 effectively combine to form a single large water body located approximately 2km to the southeast of the Application Site. Rochdale Canal is located approximately 3km to the northwest of the Application Site.

2.5 The Application Site comprises a broadly square area of redundant and compacted ground defined on its northern and western edges by metal palisade fencing. The eastern and southern edges of the Application Site are broadly defined by and run parallel to a large commercial building to the south. An established line of native deciduous trees are located outside the western redline boundary of the Application Site.

2.6 The Application Site is broadly level and contains areas of pioneer vegetation and scrub, ruderal vegetation and emergent tree species. The Preliminary Ecological Survey describes a “steep grassy embankment” running along the southern edge of the Application Site and areas of hardstanding.

2.7 The Application Site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations.

2.8 The Application Site contains no public rights of way (PRoW). The closest PRoW is to the north of the residential development at Openshaw approximately 0.4km north; the Medlock Valley Way (a long distance trail) follows the towpath of the Ashton Canal and is located approximately 0.6km (north). In the wider context of the Application Site the Tameside Trail aligns broadly south from the Medlock Valley Way and provides the terminus of a number of public footpaths and bridleways in vicinity of Abbey Hey approximately 3km to the southeast of the Application Site.

Landscape Baseline

National Character Area Profile

2.9 The National Character Area profile published by Natural England (2013) has been reviewed to develop an appreciation of the wider landscape, landscape character and context of the area surrounding the Proposed Development.

2.10 The Application Site lies in National Character Area (NCA) 55: Manchester Conurbation. The key characteristics of this LCA that may be of relevance to the Application Site within are:

- *"Large settlements have come together to form the conurbation, characterised by dense urban and industrial development, commercial, financial, retail and administrative centres, commuter suburbs and housing;*
- *The area is centred on low hills, enclosed by the Pennine hills to the north and east, and crossed by several meandering river valleys;*
- *The geology is dominated by sandstones, with the underlying PermoTriassic sandstones forming an extensive aquifer; this is overlain by thick deposits of glacial till;*
- *Woodland is usually found in corridors along the slopes of the river valleys, and also on what was once brownfield land;*
- *There are small pockets of farmland, bounded by fences or hedges. However, an increasing number of farms are now given over to urban farming uses such as equestrian facilities, supplying the demand for recreation;*
- *Public parks and recreation facilities provide valuable open spaces for people within this urban environment; community gardens and allotments are places for local food growing.*
- *River valleys form important corridors of semi-natural habitats and natural green spaces – with open grassland, woodland and wetland – linking urban centres with open countryside. Many post-industrial sites and canals provide wildlife habitats;*
- *Drainage is through a series of river valleys that weave through the urban fabric, flowing broadly from the Pennine moors to the east and north, towards the lower-lying areas of the south and west;*
- *The area's legacy of industrial archaeology – particularly relating to the textile industry – is increasingly recognised. Red brick and sandstone buildings are prominent in the city and town centres, alongside buildings using a mix of modern materials, high-rise buildings, and landmark 19th-, 20th- and 21st-century buildings;* and
- *The Manchester Conurbation forms a busy transport hub, interlinked with surrounding areas by an extensive web of roads, tramways and railways – major communications corridors. Access is also provided by the canal network."*

Visual Baseline

2.11 A desk-based visual assessment has been conducted to establish the possible extent of visual influence of the Application Site. Principal views, sensitive visual receptors and the approximate visibility of the land within the Application Site have also been assessed.

Overview of Visual Resources

2.12 Visual receptors include residents, people travelling along roads, people using public rights of way, people involved with other recreational activities, people at their place of work, people using commercial and public facilities. These groups are deemed to have different sensitivities to the proposed development.

2.13 Residential receptors are deemed to have a high sensitivity to the proposed development. The closest residential properties to the Application Site are terraced properties located within the Openshaw estate approximately 0.1km to the east at Southsea Street and Old Lane and 0.1km to the northeast at the junction of Louisa Street and Orrell Street.

2.14 It is unlikely that the Application Site is visible from properties located on Southsea Street due to the intervening built form of the commercial units on the western edge of Louisa Street. Modern residential properties located on the eastern edge of Louisa Street may experience fragmented views of the Application Site through the tree line immediately to the west, however it is considered that the majority of the Application Site is visually contained as a result of the built form comprising commercial/industrial units on the Application Site's north eastern boundary.

2.15 It is not considered that the Application Site is visible from Old Lane as a result of the modern intervening residential development on the eastern edge of Louisa Street.

2.16 There are notable areas of residential development to the south of the Ashton Old Road approximately 0.15km southeast. It is not considered that the Application Site is visible from these private residences as a result of the large intervening buildings within the Varna Community Primary School complex located on the southern edge of Ashton Old Road.

2.17 It is not considered that the Application Site is visible from the residential development towards the western edge of Openshaw as a result of the sequential screening effect of built form and the large commercial buildings associated with the intervening retail park at the junction of Victoria Street and Ashton Old Road.

2.18 From the wider surrounding residential estates the Application Site is unlikely to be visible as a result of the sequential screening effect of dense built form.

2.19 The highway network surrounding the Application Site predominantly comprises local residential streets interspersed with short distributor roads to commercial, industrial and retail estates. The A635 (approximately 30m south) is the only primary route in the immediate vicinity of the Application Site. The A662 is located approximately 0.9km to the north. The A6010 is located approximately 1.4km west; the M60 motorway is located approximately 2.6km east.

2.20 Views towards the Application Site from the surrounding public highway network are considered to be limited as a result of tree cover associated with areas of public open space to the north and the large retail units to the south. Views of the Application Site are likely to be available from short

sections of Louisa Street however it is considered that such views would be fragmented and oblique as this public highway broadly aligns northwest-southeast.

2.21 It is not considered that the Application Site is likely to be visible from the western edge of Old Lane, Orrell Street or Southsea Street due to intervening built form and tree cover.

2.22 The Application Site is not visible from the A635 (Ashton Old Road) and is unlikely to be visible from the A662, A6010, or the M60 motorway as a result of the screening effect of intervening residential built form and distance.

2.23 A railway line extends to the east from central Manchester and passes approximately 0.5km to the south of the Application Site. It is not considered that the Application Site would be visible from this section of railway line as its northern edge benefits from extensive trees and vegetation. Additionally this section of railway line is in a cutting.

2.24 The Application Site is unlikely to be visible from the area of public open space beyond the builders' yard to the north as a result of intervening buildings and tree cover.

2.25 The Application Site is unlikely to be visible from the recreational space at Millennium Green at Sandywell as a result of the intervening extensive terraced residences beyond its south western edge.

2.26 It is not considered that the Application Site would be visible from Openshaw Park and the surrounding areas of public open space due to the intervening built form to the east.

2.27 Views towards the Application Site from the remaining recreational areas in the wider context of the Application Site including Denton Gold Club (approximately 2km southeast) are prohibited as a result of the sequential intervening screening effect of built form.

3 ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

Assessment of Construction Effects

General

3.1 Construction activities are described in Section 3 of the Planning, Design and Access Statement. The upper elements of the tallest construction plant i.e. cranes, would be visible on the skyline from some directions, however in many cases these would be viewed within the context of the existing surrounding retail buildings and against distant tower blocks to the south and west towards Manchester city centre. Consequently these effects are considered to be temporary and not significant.

Landscape Effects

3.2 During the construction phase the temporary changes, in the context of the surrounding existing retail, commercial and residential built form would have no significant effects on the key characteristics of Manchester Conurbation NCA.

Visual Effects

3.3 During construction the temporary changes, seen in the context of the industrial, commercial and retail estates, would have no significant effects on most visual receptors. There is a potential for some private residences on Louisa Street to the east (considered to be high sensitivity receptors) to experience significant effects. However, these effects would be temporary in nature and would, in the majority of views, be filtered by intervening tree cover. Consequently it is considered that any visual effect would not be significant.

Assessment of Operational Effects

General

3.4 Activities during the operational and maintenance phase of the development are described in Section 3 of the Planning, Design and Access Statement.

3.5 The greatest potential visual effects of the Proposed Development are likely to be in the immediate vicinity of the Application Site from the surrounding local highway network and private residences. However, the majority of the Proposed Development would be screened from these receptors by existing surrounding buildings and tree cover to the north, east and west of the Application Site. Localised views of the upper elements of the Proposed Development may be visible from short sections of Louisa Street and associated private residences however the continued growth of trees on the eastern edge of this highway is likely to reduce the proportion of such views over time.

Landscape Effects

3.6 During the operation and maintenance phase of the proposed SSGER facility the changes would have no significant effects on the key characteristics of the Manchester Conurbation NCA.

Visual Effects

3.7 During the operation and maintenance phase of the proposed SSGER facility it is not considered that there would be any significant visual effect on receptors using the surrounding PRoW network as a result of dense intervening built form.

3.8 From the Medlock Valley Way (promoted long distance path) which runs parallel to the Ashton Canal, it is anticipated that oblique and fragmented views of the upper elements (stacks) of the Proposed Development may be locally visible however such views would contain existing remnant industrial buildings in close views and distant vertical components comprising high-rise buildings towards the centre of Manchester. The Proposed Development would form a very small proportion of the wider panoramic view and therefore its visual effects are not considered to be significant from these high sensitivity receptors.

3.9 Views of the upper elements of the Proposed Development (stacks) are likely to be visible from the Tameside Trail and associated PRoW in the vicinity of Denton Golf Club to the east, however such views would generally be oblique and the Proposed Development would be seen at distance and as a very small proportion of the wider panoramic view. Consequently it is considered that any visual effects would not be significant.

3.10 Views of the Proposed Development from the access path to the public open space immediately to the west of the Application Site are likely to be heavily contained as a result of foliage associated with the intervening tree line. It may be possible that filtered views of the lower parts of the Proposed may be visible however such views would be oblique. It is therefore considered that these visual effects would not be significant.

3.11 It is not considered that views of the Proposed Development would be available from Openshaw Park as a result of the intervening built form on its eastern edge. Therefore it is not considered that there would be any significant visual effect with the Proposed Development in place.

3.12 The remaining PRoW in the wider vicinity of the Application Site tend to flank residential development and utilise minor and local access roads. Consequently views are heavily contained by close built form. Therefore it is not considered that there would be any significant visual effect with the Proposed Development in place.

3.13 Views of the upper elements of the Proposed Development (stacks) are likely to be limited to private residences immediately to the east of the Application Site, including the more modern development along the eastern edge of Louisa Street. However it is considered that such views from these private residences may reduce over time with the continued growth of intervening trees located within the builders' yard on the western edge of Louisa Street.

3.14 It is possible that localised views of the upper elements of the Application Site from private residences to the northwest and northeast of Openshaw would be available, however in most cases the street orientation and density limits distant views. Therefore it is not considered that there would be any significant visual effect with the Proposed Development in place from these areas.

3.15 From the residential development immediately to the south of the A635, the Proposed Development is unlikely to be visible due to the visual containment by large intervening buildings within the Varna Community Primary School complex and commercial/industrial units on the southern edge of Ashton Old Road.

3.16 The upper elements of the Proposed Development (stacks) may become visible with ever increasing distance from upper floor windows of private residences at junctions and along highways which align towards the site, namely Columbine Street and Paprika Close however it is likely that even from these residences intervening tree belts would heavily filter such views. Consequently it is not considered that there would be any significant visual effect with the Proposed Development in place.

3.17 It is considered that from the remaining private residences in the wider surrounding areas to the north, northeast and east the upper elements (stacks) of the Proposed Development, where visible, would be viewed as a very small proportion of the wider composite landscape already containing existing vertical elements including high-rise buildings beyond. Consequently it is not considered that there would be any significant visual effect with the Proposed Development in place.

3.18 With the exception of fragmented, filtered and oblique views of some of parts of the Proposed Development from a localised section of Louisa Street it is considered that majority of the Proposed Development would not be visible from the residential highway network in the immediate locality of the Application Site as a result of intervening and dense terraced housing which flank the majority of these roads. However there may be views of the upper elements of the Proposed Development (stacks) along highways which align towards the Application Site where more distant views are available. Such views are therefore considered not to be significant.

3.19 Views of the upper elements of the Proposed Development (stacks) may be available from sections of the A635, however such views are likely to be fragmented by large intervening buildings including the retail parks immediately to the south and to the southwest of the Application Site. Where views of the stacks are available they would be oblique and are likely to be filtered, glimpsed and transient. Therefore the visual effect would not be significant.

3.20 It is not considered that the Proposed Development would be visible from the A662 due to the screening effect of terraced residences flanking the southern edge of this public highway. From the A6010 the intervening distance and built form would prohibit views of the Application Site. Therefore the visual effect would not be significant.

3.21 The M60 motorway benefits from extensive roadside planting on its western edge and consequently views towards the Proposed Development are prohibited.

3.22 The Proposed Development would generally be screened from the area of public open space to the north of the Application Site by intervening trees and vegetation. The upper elements of the Proposed Development (stacks) may be visible from the north western edge of the public open space, however it is likely that such views would be filtered by intervening vegetation and would locally contain the backdrop of the far taller vertical components of the residential high-rise buildings beyond. Consequently the effect on this high sensitivity receptor would be not significant.

3.23 It is unlikely that the Proposed Development would generally be visible from Millennium Green at Sandywell, however it is anticipated that the upper elements of the stacks may be visible from the localised bund adjacent to the play area. Such views would, however, been seen against distant taller buildings to the west in the direction of the centre of Manchester and consequently it is considered that the visual effects of the Proposed Development from this high sensitivity receptor would not be significant.

3.24 It is not considered that the Proposed Development would be visible from the railway line to the south of the Application Site as a result of vegetation flanking its northern edge and the built form to

the north. Consequently it is considered that the visual effects of the Proposed Development from this medium sensitivity receptor would not be significant.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Landscape and Visual Effects

4.1 This LVS relates to a proposed SSGER facility located to the north of Old Ashton Road, Openshaw, Greater Manchester. The surrounding landscape comprises a combination of residential development interspersed with pockets industrial and commercial development and public open space.

4.2 The Application Site does not form part of any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations.

4.3 This LVS summarises that given the context of the existing land use surrounding the Application Site including large commercial and industrial units and the high-rise buildings in the wider context of the Application Site to the west and southwest, the Proposed Development would be appropriate (in landscape and visual terms) for its location.

4.4 There would be limited effects experienced as a result of the construction of the SSGER facility by the high sensitivity receptors comprising the surrounding residential development, public open space to the north and PRoW in the wider vicinity of the Application Site. It is therefore anticipated that none of these visual effects would be significant.

4.5 The effects of the construction of the SSGER facility on the surrounding highway network are assessed as being limited and localised and whilst views of the upper elements of the Proposed Development (stacks) may be available from the A635 and the immediate surrounding residential highway network, such views would be very localised and often filtered by the foliage of trees surrounding the Application Site. It is therefore anticipated that none of these visual effects would be significant.

4.6 It is considered that there would be limited visibility of the Proposed Development from the public open spaces within the immediate vicinity of the Application Site due to intervening tree belts. The Proposed Development is unlikely to be visible from public open space in the wider surrounding landscape as a result of extensive and dense built form. Consequently it is anticipated that the visual effects would not be significant.