

8 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 This chapter of the Environmental Statement (ES) identifies and assesses the effects of the proposed AESC Plant 3 development on the landscape character and landscape resource, and on the visual amenity of the site and surrounding area. The proposed development is described in Chapter 3 of this ES.

8.1.2 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been carried out by an experienced landscape architect employed by Wardell Armstrong LLP. The methodology used in this study conforms to the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA, 3rd Edition 2013) and associated good practice guidance. This assessment includes consideration of construction and operational stages of the proposed development and an analysis of the likely impacts on key receptors.

8.2 Consultation and scope of the assessment

8.2.1 Informal consultation was carried out with Sunderland City Council (SCC) as part of the preparation of the LVIAs for the previous phases (AESC Plant 2 and IAMP ONE) and for this LVIA. It was agreed that the same approach adopted for the previous LVIAs would be acceptable for this LVIA, but with a more focused selection of viewpoints in order to focus the assessment on the likely significant effects. These are Viewpoints 16, A, B and C (re-numbered to Viewpoints 3 to 6) from the previous LVIAs and new Viewpoints 1 and 2 from the north and north-west to focus on the assessment on the Green Belt.

8.3 Methodology

General approach

8.3.1 Landscape effects associated with a development relate to changes to the fabric, character and quality of the landscape as a resource and how it is experienced. This requires consideration of the character of the landscape, the elements and features that it contains, and any value attached to the landscape (whether formally or informally). A landscape assessment studies:

- Direct effects upon specific landscape elements, especially prominent and eye-catching features;
- Change in character, which is the distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that creates distinctiveness and a sense of place;

- Subtle effects that contribute towards the experience of intangible characteristics (such as tranquillity, wildness and cultural associations); and
- Effects on designated landscapes, conservation sites and other acknowledged special areas of interest.

8.3.2 Visual effects relate closely to landscape effects, but they concern changes in views and visual amenity. Visual assessment concerns people's perception and response to changes in visual amenity. Effects may result from new landscape elements that cause visual intrusion or new features that obstruct views across the landscape.

8.3.3 Both landscape and visual effects can be adverse, beneficial or neutral, short, medium or long-term, permanent or temporary, reversible or irreversible, direct (i.e. an effect that is directly attributable to the proposed development) or indirect (i.e. effects resulting indirectly from the development as a consequence of the direct effects), and cumulative, relating to additional changes that may arise when the proposed development is considered in conjunction with other similar developments.

8.3.4 The methodology for this LVIA follows the recommendations and guidance set out in the following reports:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA 3)¹.
- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance².

8.3.5 GLVIA 3 stresses that the emphasis of landscape and visual impact assessments should be on the identification of likely significant effects, embracing all types of effects: adverse and beneficial, direct and indirect, and long, medium and short-term, as well as cumulative effects. It also stresses that the approach to the assessment needs to be proportionate to the scale of the project being assessed and the nature of the likely effects.

8.3.6 The Landscape Institute produced Technical Guidance Note 06/19³ to advise its members on the use of photography and photomontage in landscape and visual assessment and on visual representations of development proposals; the photographs in this LVIA have been produced and presented in accordance with this advice.

¹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013).

² An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England (2014).

Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002), Countryside Agency in conjunction with Scottish Natural Heritage.

³ Visual representation of development proposals, Landscape Institute TGN 06/19 (September 2019).

The study area

8.3.7 The LVIA considers the site and its surroundings, encompassing an area within a 2km radius of the outermost edge of the proposed development. This area has been determined by the topography of the landscape and intervening physical features. The LVIA has been carried out by means of a process of desk and site survey and analysis of this 2km study area.

Thresholds and criteria

8.3.8 GLVIA 3 (paragraph 1.20) states that the guidance is *“not intended to be prescriptive, in that it does not provide a ‘recipe’ that can be followed in every situation. It is always the primary responsibility of any landscape professional carrying out an assessment to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the particular circumstances.”* This LVIA has, therefore, defined a set of criteria to assess the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development that reflect the circumstances of the site and the surrounding area. Appendix 8.1 sets out in more detail the methodology used in undertaking this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

8.3.9 Overall, effects may be adverse, neutral or beneficial. Where significant effects are predicted, these are highlighted in bold text. Whilst significant adverse effects may be identified in connection with a proposed development, this does not imply necessarily that the development taken as a whole would be unacceptable in environmental terms.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility mapping

8.3.10 Zones of Theoretical Visibility (ZTVs) are also referred to as Zones of Visual Influence diagrams (ZVIs) or visual envelope maps (VEMs). However, ZTV is the preferred term as it emphasises the key factors of the plans; that they are theoretical and that they indicate potential visibility by coloured shading overlain on an Ordnance Survey (OS) background to illustrate the areas within the surrounding landscape from which the proposed development is theoretically visible. As they are based upon computer modelling of inter-visibility, they are theoretical. They do not convey the nature or significance of effects. In particular, it is relevant to note that the mapping depicts the theoretical view of the whole development in the same way as the theoretical view of a small part of the uppermost part of a single building.

8.3.11 For this LVIA, a ZTV has been created based on the LiDAR Digital Surface Model (DSM) data for the study area. This means that the effects of screening provided by surrounding vegetation and built development in the DSM can be illustrated. The ZTV is also based on the Proposed Site Plan (RPS Drawing 201), using the maximum building heights of 33m above ground level for the Factory Building and 18m for the Assembly and Warehouse Building. This is shown on ES Figure 8.1, together with the viewpoint locations (as below).

Selection of viewpoint locations

8.3.12 Viewpoints are chosen to illustrate the potential visual effects of a scheme. The principal criterion is that they must be representative of the range of views and viewer types likely to experience the development (paragraphs 6.19 and 6.20 of GLVIA 3). Specific points may also be chosen because they are important existing viewpoints in the landscape.

8.3.13 View types can include:

- Areas of high value such as designated landscapes, long distance footpaths and cycle routes, *etcetera*;
- Illustrations of different Landscape Character Areas (LCA), rather than specific receptors;
- Viewpoints that may have wide panoramic views or, by contrast, focused views;
- Viewpoints at different distances from the site;
- Viewpoints at different elevation; and
- Viewpoints from different aspects.

8.3.14 Viewer types can include:

- Views from residences, roads or recreational points where visitors may experience the landscape; and
- Viewpoints where viewers would be likely to be stationary, as well as those where they would be moving through the landscape.

8.3.15 Representative viewpoints were identified for the previous phases. As described in Section 8.2, above, in order to focus this LVIA on the likely significant effects and on the Green Belt, previous viewpoints (16, A, B and C, re-numbered to Viewpoints 3 to 6) have been retaken and new viewpoints (1 and 2) are provided, photomontages are also provided for Viewpoints 1, 2 and 3, see ES Figures 8.6 – 8.14.

8.3.16 New photographs have been taken from these viewpoint locations in August 2023 in order to ensure that the baseline images are up to date. The photographs were taken with a full frame digital SLR camera with a fixed 50 mm lens, mounted on a stable, levelled tripod with a professional panoramic head attached. This positions the focal centre of the camera lens above the pivot of the tripod and allows the photographs to be accurately stitched together using software.

8.4 Baseline conditions

Landscape character baseline

8.4.1 This section firstly reviews the published landscape character information relevant to the 2 km study area and the landscape designations and sensitive receptors. The site assessment then informed a description of the existing baseline condition of the area within the vicinity of the site.

8.4.2 The following studies provide a strategic assessment of the 2 km radius study area (see ES Figure 8.3):

- Natural England National Character Areas 14 Tyne and Wear Lowlands and 15 Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau;
- City of Sunderland Landscape Character Assessment (September 2015); and
- South Tyneside Landscape Character Study, March 2012.

8.4.3 These are discussed, below.

Natural England National Character Areas

8.4.4 The site and the majority of the study area to the south, west and north lies on the eastern edge of the Natural England National Character Area (NCA) 14 Tyne and Wear Lowlands. This is a 'T' shaped character area covering the lower valleys of the Rivers Tyne and Wear.

8.4.5 The NCA is described as:

“lowlands ...bounded to the south and east by the prominent escarpment of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau National Character Area (NCA). To the west, the land rises through the Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe NCA to the uplands of the North Pennines NCA. To the north, the extensive conurbation lying in the broad valley of the Tyne merges into the South East Northumberland Coastal Plain NCA.”

8.4.6 The key characteristics of this NCA, of relevance to the site and study area, are:

- *“Undulating landform incised by the river valleys of the Tyne and the Wear and their tributaries.*
- *Widespread urban and industrial development with a dense network of major road and rail links and the spreading conurbations of Tyneside in the north.*
- *Between settlements, wide stretches of agricultural land with large, regular, arable fields bordered by hedgerows with few hedgerow trees, often with large farmsteads and urban fringe pasture land with pony and cattle grazing.”*

8.4.7 The full NCA profile, including information on opportunities, landscape change and analysis supporting statements of environmental opportunity, can be found at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5130054698795008>.

8.4.8 Land to the east of the site lies within the north-westernmost part of NCA 15, Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau. This is described as:

“a striking, west-facing Magnesian Limestone escarpment which forms a series of spurs and valleys which mark the western boundary of the National Character Area (NCA), and overlooks the Tyne and Wear Lowlands to the north and west, affording dramatic views of the City of Durham. The plateau drops gradually to the Tees Lowlands to the south and the Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe to the south-west. Transport routes such as the A19 and coastal railway form prominent features in the landscape and provide links to the north and south, but also detract from tranquillity and create physical and psychological barriers to public access.”

8.1.1 The key characteristics of this NCA, of relevance to the site and study area, are:

- *“Strong influence of historic mining industry on both local culture and the landscape, in the form of ex-coal mining towns and villages with distinctive surrounding areas of allotments and pony paddocks, reclaimed colliery sites, disused and existing railways, and industrial archaeology.*
- *Widespread urban and industrial development in the north and major transport corridors throughout.”*

8.4.9 The full NCA profile, including information on opportunities, landscape change and analysis supporting statements of environmental opportunity, can be found at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/8461491>.

City of Sunderland Landscape Character Assessment

8.4.10 The City of Sunderland Landscape Character Assessment (September 2015) has categorised the district into Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which are further subdivided into more localised Landscape Character Areas (LCAs).

8.4.11 The site and the surrounding area to the immediate north, west, south and east lies within LCT 2 Coalfield Lowland Terraces and the LCA of 2a, Usworth Lowland. This covers an area of gently rolling topography that forms a transitional landscape between the Magnesian Limestone escarpment and the Wear Valley. Other key characteristics of this LCT, of relevance to the site and study area, are described as:

- *“Underlying Carboniferous Coal Measures masked by thick layers of glacial deposits;*
- *The topography is gently rolling or flat in areas of boulder clay, with a more undulating terrain associated with river valleys, ...;*
- *Agricultural land use is mixed but predominantly arable with semi-regular patterns of medium and large-scale fields bounded by low hawthorn hedges and pockets of recently planted woodland;*
- *Fragmented by industrial and residential development, the landscape includes corridors of open space between settlements, often with urban fringe character; and*
- *Large industrial complexes and industrial estates are present.”*

8.4.12 The LCA 2a Usworth Lowland extends from the boundary with South Tyneside Council in the north, around and to the east of the built-up area of Washington, east as far as the A19 and south to (and in part, just beyond) the A1231. This is described as:

“... large scale arable fields bordered by remnant and weak hedgerows with sparse tree cover. There are a few isolated farms in this area but little other development. Some woodland occurs along the River Don, and though some of this is in South Tyneside it contributes to the character of this area. South of the A1290, which bisects the area, industrial development becomes the main land use. Nissan and Vantec occupy a substantial section of this character area, incorporating numerous very large buildings, hardstandings, a test track and ten wind turbines. New and old woodland contains the development from some angles, though it is highly visible from elevated locations.

... The whole area is crossed by a number of high voltage electricity lines, with large

pylons appearing to overwhelm many landscape features and interrupting views. Roads, including the minor ones, are typically busy with traffic.

The landscape has an open character, which enables views over to the Boldon Hills to the north-east, in South Tyneside. Views looking south towards Sunderland are limited by the large industrial structures associated with the Nissan car factory. The area has a generally low recreational value, with a limited number of underused public footpaths and bridleways. The Great North Forest Heritage Trail passes through the north between Washington and West Boldon, and there are footpaths around Barmston Pond Local Nature Reserve ... A number of local wildlife sites cover plantations and grasslands around the Nissan factory, and the ponds and burns further north. This flat landscape was previously used as a RAF station during the First and Second World Wars. It later became Sunderland Airport, and today the North East Aviation Museum occupies part of the airfield north of the Nissan factory."

8.4.13 Sensitive features within the Coalfield Lowland Terraces LCT are defined as:

- *"Negative impact of infrastructure, including major roads and industrial and business parks;*
- *Recreational value of parks, footpaths and cycleways;*
- *Settlement fringe character of parts of the landscape; and*
- *Maintenance of the distinction between settlements."*

8.4.14 In relation to 'industrial estates and complexes', the guidance (Table 4.2) recommends that developments within this LCT *"seek opportunities to enhance and extend landscaping and integrate new buildings into the landscape. Utilise native species which occur locally, e.g. Grey Poplar. Aim to enhance maintenance of landscapes in and around industrial and commercial premises, including woodland and hedges."* Development should not be permitted that will *"adversely encroach on the Green Belt and block green corridors through this already fragmented landscape."*

8.4.15 The landscape strategy set out within the Sunderland Character Assessment for the LCA 2a Usworth Lowland is based on the key aspects and features of this area which contribute to landscape value, being:

- *"Large undeveloped area within north Sunderland, which acts as a settlement break between Sunderland and Washington.*
- *Continuous with large area of similar farmland in the north, in South Tyneside.*
- *North East Aircraft Museum (NELSAM) is a visitor attraction and also illustrates the*

history of this landscape as an airfield.

- *Barmston Pond Local Nature Reserve provides ecological interest in the area.”*

8.4.16 The overarching strategy for this LCA can be summarised as:

“Landscape enhancement towards a high-biodiversity area incorporating potential for recreation within and around the existing and potential future commercial development. The existing limited hedges and tree cover in the north should be maintained and this structure enhanced as part of any new proposals. The open aspect of land between Sunderland and South Tyneside should be retained in line with Green Belt purposes where applicable. Views to Boldon Downhill enhance the sense of place in this location. Connections could be improved through better green networks around the existing land uses, linking up currently isolated features such as the Barmston Pond nature reserve. Pedestrian and cycle links between adjacent residential areas and the River Wear would improve recreational opportunities and routes to work.”

8.4.17 To the west and east of the LCA 2a Usworth Lowland are landscape character types that are defined by their urban character, specifically LCA 4a Washington to the west (part of the Urban New Town LCT) and LCA 9f Hylton Castle, Downhill and Castletown (within the Urban Limestone Plateau LCT) to the east. Given the built-up nature of these areas, it is not proposed to go into the detail of their key characteristics, sensitive features or guidance and strategy for development, none of which relates to industrial development.

8.4.18 It is nevertheless relevant to note that for the Washington LCA, the overarching strategy includes reference to the ‘provision of green links to employment sites in this and in adjacent areas.’ The overall IAMP development proposes an extensive area of ecology and landscape mitigation (the Environmental and Landscape Management Area (ELMA)), which, when established, in conjunction with the perimeter site landscaping will provide a green corridor to the north of the site. SUDS areas and internal landscaping of the individual development plots will also provide green spaces within the development area.

South Tyneside Landscape Character Study

8.4.19 Within the South Tyneside Landscape Character Study (March 2012), land to the north of the site and in the north of the study area falls within the Urban Fringe, Boldon Fell LCA. This is described as a large area, occupying the south-west corner of the borough, either side of the A184 and extending south into Sunderland, as far as the A1290, and

south-west into Gateshead (to the A195). The key characteristics of this LCA are described as:

- *“Large scale arable fields with gappy hedges;*
- *Overhead power lines converging on the substation by the A19;*
- *Busy dual carriageways subdivide the area;*
- *Regenerating woodland and scrub on former extraction sites; and*
- *Farms and country house with associated woodland.”*

8.4.20 In terms of physical influences on the landscape, the watercourses flowing into the River Don are described as having limited impact on the wider area. Views across the open flat landscape are generally unimpeded by woodland and long views are possible, including to the landmark Peshaw Monument, to the south.

8.4.21 Guidelines for this LCA include supporting the reinstatement and restoration of hedges for landscape and habitat value and the planting of new woodland to reinforce the landscape structure. Enhancement of access networks across the area is also supported. In relation to the habitat network, the guidance seeks to promote the creation of linear links between sites of habitat value, using new hedge and woodland planting as appropriate, and focusing the habitat network on the burns in the area. Woodland planting that would obstruct key views should be resisted.

8.4.22 The ELMA proposed for the wider site will create a green corridor through and across the development area, as noted above.

Landscape designations and sensitive receptors

8.4.23 There are no landscape designations applicable to the site and 2km study area. ES Figure 8.2 illustrates the various sensitive receptors and designations within the study area.

8.4.24 The majority of the site is designated as Green Belt within the adopted Sunderland Core Strategy and Development Plan 2015-2033 (adopted January 2020). Land scheduled for built development within the AESC site to the east was removed from the Sunderland Green Belt as part of the approval of the IAMP Area Action Plan. The ELMA land remains within the Green Belt. The land to the west of the site is designated as Safeguarded Land.

8.4.25 Sensitive landscape receptors relate to the semi-mature and mature trees present within the site and on the boundary with the A1290, and the existing hedgerows

present within the site. It is acknowledged, however, that the nature of the proposed development makes it likely that the majority of the existing internal hedgerows and trees are likely to be removed to accommodate the proposed development.

Landform and drainage

8.4.26 The site is relatively flat, comprising gently undulating land at between 35m and 40m AOD, falling gradually to the north and the River Don. The river and its various tributaries meander through the landscape. ES Figure 8.4 illustrates the topography of the study area.

Landcover and land use

8.4.27 The site and land to the north and west comprises rectilinear fields of varying sizes, primarily in arable use (where not under construction for previous phases). Fields are enclosed by straight, generally gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees. Small triangular plantations and copses are present within and break up the landscape, as does the vegetation lining the River Don (on the boundary between Sunderland and South Tyneside) and its tributaries.

8.4.28 The overhead electricity transmission line on steel towers that previously ran through the eastern area of the site has recently been diverted round the eastern and northern boundaries of the site. This is one of several overhead lines running south through this general area from the substation at Mount Pleasant, on the south-western edge of West Boldon, north-east of the site.

8.4.29 To the south-west is the Elm Tree Farm Garden and Nursery, which includes a tearoom and children's play area.

8.4.30 The North East Air Museum is situated to the east of the A1290 and north of the Nissan site, further to the east along the Washington Road.

Settlements and individual properties

8.4.31 North Moor Farm is within the north of the site, accessed via a narrow farm track from International Drive, to the north-east; this property is to be demolished (with demolition works to be completed April 2024). Other individual and groups of properties are scattered across the wider area, mainly to the north, north-east and north-west along and off Follingsby Lane/ Downhill Lane, including Hylton Bridge and Hylton Grove Farms, Strother House Farm and East Farm, enclosed by the network of main roads encircling the site. Also within the wider area are the residential areas of

Usworth and Sulgrave, within Washington new town, to the west, and Town End Farm and Hylton Castle, on the north-west edge of Sunderland, to the east.

Transport corridors and rights of way

- 8.4.32 The A1290 linking Washington with the A19 runs along the southern boundary of the site. To the east of the site, the A19 is the primary north-south route within the area. To the south, the A1231 dual carriageway provides links to the A1(M), A184(M) and the A19. The minor roads of Follingsby Lane, Downhill Lane and West Pastures are to the north and provide links to the wider road network for the individual properties and other built developments within this general area.
- 8.4.33 There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) with the site. The closest include: a footpath that runs north-east from Follingsby Lane, east of Strother House Farm, to cross West Pastures and continue east-northeast to the A19. A Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) links East House with Follingsby Lane, to the west of Strother House Farm, with a footpath running west and south from East House to Usworth Hall. A bridleway running south off the A1290 to the south-west to Barmston Pond nature reserve.
- 8.1.2 The Great North Forest Heritage Trail runs along Follingsby Lane and Downhill Lane, to the north-east of the site. This long-distance route for walkers and cyclists covers 105 km as a circular route through the Tyne and Wear countryside, linking Tantobie, East Rainton, Houghton-le-Spring, Whitburn, West Boldon and Kibblesworth.
- 8.4.34 To the west, a dismantled railway line runs north-south, forming the eastern edge of Washington. The line (the Leamside Line) remains the property of Network Rail and is not, therefore, a PRoW, though there are ambitions to reopen this line for rail traffic⁴. The section of this line as it passes to the west of the site will, therefore, be included in the LVIA for potential users of the railway line. ES Figure 8.5 shows the PRoW and other access routes within the study area.

Formal and informal recreation areas and visitor attractions

- 8.4.35 There are no formal recreation areas within the 2 km study area and the ZTV for the site.
- 8.4.36 To the south-west of the site, the Barmston Pond nature reserve provides an informal recreation area. As noted in 8.4.29 above, there is an informal play area at the Elm Tree Nursery, to the south-west of the site.

⁴ <https://www.nexus.org.uk/sites/default/files/Metro%20Futures%20brochure.pdf>.

8.4.37 Visitor attractions in the study area comprise the North East Aircraft Museum on Washington Road, 800 m east of the site. The Penshaw Monument is some 4 km to the south of the site, but is included as a viewpoint location and, therefore, also referenced here.

Landscape features

8.4.38 The main landscape feature of the area surrounding the site is the high voltage overhead electricity transmission lines. The perimeter tree belt on the southern boundary of the A1290 is notable given the generally open nature of this landscape. Mature and semi-mature trees present within the site, on the lines of the existing field boundary hedgerows, are notable landscape features at the local level only.

Landscape value

8.4.39 The landscape is not ascribed any value from formal designations and does not provide the backdrop to settlements, though the majority of the site is within the Green Belt and contributes to the separation of the settlement areas of Washington and north-west Sunderland. Green Belt is a planning designation and does not necessarily provide any indication of landscape quality or condition.

8.4.40 The condition of the landscape can be considered to be moderate, with some well-maintained farmland (albeit gappy hedges in places). There are few opportunities for recreational access, though there are some visitor attractions in the area.

8.4.41 The presence of extensive industry (i.e. existing industrial units at IAMP ONE, the Nissan site and associated industrial areas), wind turbines and overhead transmission lines detract from the perception of this landscape, though the agricultural land provides visual contrast and a degree of relief from this.

8.4.42 The overall value of this landscape is considered to be medium-low.

Visual baseline

8.4.43 The visual baseline relates to the presence of visual receptors (i.e. people) and the scope for views into and out from / across the site and surrounding area. The visual baseline is influenced by the topography and vegetation cover of the area, in addition to the extensive areas of built development to the west, south and east.

8.4.44 Views of the existing site are possible from near-distance locations (e.g. the adjacent A1290) and from more elevated positions within the wider landscape (such as from the Penshaw Monument to the south). From elsewhere, in many instances the

combination of undulating landform and tree / hedgerow field boundaries limits the scope for views of the existing site.

8.4.45 With the introduction of two, large-scale buildings up to 33 m in height, along with the smaller office building, the scope for visibility increases, though intervening built development will provide screening from within settlement areas.

8.4.46 Views out from the site are limited in a southwards direction due to the roadside (A1290) planting screening the northern boundary of the Nissan site. In other directions, views north extend to the ridge line north of Follingsby Lane. Views west extend to the eastern edge of the housing and industrial development in the Sulgrave / Usworth Hall areas of Washington; views east are restricted by existing industrial units at IAMP ONE.

8.4.47 From within the general area of the site, visual detractors present in the landscape include the tall lattice steel towers, typically 40-50 m high. The wind turbines to the south of the Nissan site are in excess of 100 m high and are also prominent visually. Existing buildings on the Nissan site are also of a large scale, including the Paint Shop building on its northern edge, adjacent to the A1290, which is approximately 26 m tall and, therefore, of a similar size to the proposed building.

8.4.48 ES Figure 8.1 indicates the extent of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) of the site with two buildings up to 33m in height, along with the smaller office building.

8.4.49 Within the adopted Sunderland Core Strategy and Development Plan 2015-2033 (adopted January 2020), Policy NE11 Creating and Protecting Views, includes the objective of ensuring that new developments do not impact on existing public views. The supporting text to this Policy refers to the Council's Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Green Infrastructure Strategy, in identifying important viewpoints. The Penshaw Monument is identified in the LCA as a location from where extensive panoramic views can be obtained. The Policy also states that consideration should be given to views of significant buildings.

Visual amenity receptors

8.4.50 Visual amenity receptors (the people within the 2 km study area whose views would be affected by the proposed development) are separated into three main categories:

- The residents of settlements, groups of properties and individual properties;
- Users of roads and PRow; and
- Users of recreation areas (formal and informal).

8.4.51 Information on these various receptors, located within the 2 km study area and the ZTV (ES Figure 8.1), is set out below.

Settlements, Groups of Properties and Individual Properties

8.4.52 The north-eastern edge of Washington (Usworth Hall and Sulgrave districts) is 1 km to the west of the site. Two-storey properties on the eastern edge of Sulgrave face east, with the trees lining the embankment sides of the dismantled railway line providing some visual screening for views towards the site. Within the Usworth Hall area, industry occupies much of the eastern edge of the district. Where housing is located in the north-eastern corner, this is similarly set down below the level of the former railway line, with a wider belt of trees to the east of these houses providing screening for views eastwards.

8.4.53 The Town End Farm and Hylton Castle areas of Sunderland are 1 km to the east of the site, east of the A19, with a dense belt of tree planting providing the western edge of the settlement. There is, therefore, no scope for views towards the site from these areas.

8.4.54 Within the north of the site is North Moor Farm, which will be demolished in advance of the development and, therefore, not considered a visual receptor.

8.4.55 South-west of the site, a row of terraced houses (Severn Houses) lies to the east of the entrance to the Elm Tree Nursery. These two-storey properties face north-north-west and are backed by an extensive area of broadleaved woodland that wraps around the eastern side of the terrace. There are no views of the site from these properties due to the intervening screening provided by tree / scrub cover separating the Seven Houses Nature Reserve from the Nissan site, in addition to the tree cover immediately east of the terrace of houses.

8.4.56 North-east of the site are Hylton Bridge Farm (c. 300 m distance, house and bungalow) and Hylton Grove Farm (c. 460 m distance). East of Hylton Grove Farm are two, two-storey roadside properties, facing south (c. 500 m distance). Views towards the existing site are partially screened by intervening hedges and tree cover from these properties, see Viewpoints 4 to 6 in which AESC Plant 2 is visible and prominent.

8.4.57 To the north and north-west are the groups of properties, Strother House Farm (0.7km to the north) and East House (0.65km to the north-west). Intervening trees and field boundary hedging interrupt views towards the existing site from these properties.

AESC Plant 2 is visible, as are the wind turbines within the Nissan site (see Viewpoints 1 and 2).

Transport routes and rights of way

- 8.4.58 Near views of the existing site are possible from the section of the A1290 as it approaches and then passes the site. Some screening is provided by roadside hedging and trees, though there are open views from the west when passing beneath the overhead transmission lines and in areas where there are gaps in the roadside hedging.
- 8.4.59 There are no views of the site from the A19(T) due to intervening development and tree cover. From the elevated overbridge at the Downhill Lane junction of the A19(T) and the A1290, there are views west towards the site, but this is difficult to distinguish within the relatively level topography and intervening tree cover and ongoing built development.
- 8.4.60 Views towards the site are possible from sections of Follingsby Lane, including from the more elevated area to the east of the dismantled railway line, north-north-west of the site. Views are interrupted by intervening hedging and tree cover, with AESC Plant 2 is visible. Views are oblique and transient.
- 8.4.61 From the elevated sections of Downhill Lane, to the north-east of the site and on the edge of the 2 km study area, there are distant views across the A19(T) towards the site, but as noted above this sits beyond existing, ongoing development and the level topography and intervening tree cover makes this difficult to distinguish from its surroundings.
- 8.4.62 From the BOAT between Follingsby Lane and East House, the existing site is seen in the foreground to AESC Plant 2. Intervening hedging and trees provide some screening.
- 8.4.63 Any views towards the existing site from the footpath to the east and north-east of Strother House Farm are similarly interrupted by intervening tree cover and hedgerows.
- 8.4.64 The dismantled railway line to the east of the Sulgrave and Usworth Hall areas of Washington may, at some point, be brought back into service as part of improvements to the local network although no proposals or funding have currently been identified. Views towards the site, in the event this does come forward, will largely occur from the section of track between the A1290 and Follingsby Lane, seen obliquely and at a

distance of between 1 and 2 km through gaps in the tree cover / hedging along the eastern edge of the track, similar to Viewpoint 3.

8.4.65 There are no or negligible views from other roads in the study area and in the ZTV, including the A19.

Users of formal and informal recreation areas

8.4.66 No views of the existing site are possible from within the Barmston Pond nature reserve, given the presence of boundary tree planting and intervening buildings within the Nissan site. Similarly, there are no views of the site from the play area within the Elm Tree Nursery, due to screening from intervening tree cover.

8.4.67 Visitors to the North East Aircraft Museum have limited scope for views of the existing site as the intervening buildings and trees provide some screening. For visitors to the Penshaw Monument, the existing site is visible in views to the north, seen in the distance as part of the agricultural landscape located beyond the existing Nissan site and alongside AESC 2 and the rest of IAMP.

8.5 Assessment of landscape effects

Introduction

8.5.1 Effects of construction and during operation (i.e. once the development is completed and occupied) on the landscape character and landscape resource of the area are set out, below.

8.5.2 These can be summarised as:

- The temporary effects associated with the construction of the development, including the presence of temporary compounds and materials storage areas, in addition to the removal of existing features (such as the hedgerows within the site, in part or in full); and
- The permanent change in nature of the site from arable fields to a development containing two large industrial buildings, access roads and routes for pedestrians and cyclists, car parking areas, HGV access, loading and unloading areas, lighting, and perimeter and internal landscaping.

8.5.3 The assessment is based on the masterplan and the proposed landscape plan for the development (RPS Drawings 201 and 205), including a maximum height of the large-scale buildings within the site of 33 m and 18 m above existing ground levels.

Landscape susceptibility to the proposed development

8.5.4 Appendix 8.1 sets out the criteria against which susceptibility to the proposed development can be judged. In respect of the proposed development, this can be summarised as:

- Landform - the site is relatively level and, as such, susceptibility to the development is low. Major changes to the topography of the site is not proposed.
- Skylines - within the general area of the site, much of the skyline is developed. To the north, the skyline is more open but includes 'clutter', such as electricity towers and clumps of trees. As such, the susceptibility to the proposed development is medium. The skyline of the site will be expected to change with the development of buildings that may be up to 33 m high. In this regard, it is relevant to note that the currently under construction AESC Plant 2 building, immediately to the south and east, will have a maximum height of 30 m and other existing large industrial buildings in the area are similar in scale, such as the paint shop building at Nissan (on the northern edge of the Nissan factory site adjacent to the A1290) that is approximately 26 m high. Therefore, there is a precedent for buildings of this size situated within the local landscape. Whilst the proposed buildings would have a notable influence on the skyline, particularly for near-distance views, the effect is likely to be similar to that already experienced in relation to the other large scale industrial buildings already present mentioned above.
- Landcover - the trees and hedgerows within the site provide some limited land cover (i.e. vegetation), but their contribution to the local character of the landscape is limited. The susceptibility to the development in relation to this aspect is assessed as medium. Some of this existing vegetation, particularly within the internal site area, is likely to be removed to accommodate the proposed development.
- Scale - this is considered to be a medium to large-scale landscape given the relatively level nature of the topography and limited scope for outward views, primarily to the north. Human-scale elements are present in the form of existing farm buildings at North Moor Farm (though these are to be demolished, with demolition to be completed April 2024). The existing larger-scale buildings in the area have an influence on landscape scale and the current and future development of the AESC site will add to this (as described for skylines, above). The susceptibility of the site to the proposed development is assessed as low-medium

for this aspect, having regard for the greater scale, massing and height of the buildings proposed. The proposed development will form part of the wider AESC and IAMP development area, creating a large-scale industrial development that has strong commercial ties with the existing Nissan development area northwards.

- Enclosure - enclosure of the site is provided in part by the existing roadside planting on the A1290. The existing large-scale industrial buildings also create enclosure within the immediate area of the site. The susceptibility of the site to the proposed development is assessed as low for this aspect. Enclosure will increase further with the development of the site for industry and creation of perimeter planting.
- Intervisibility - there is some intervisibility with surrounding areas, but this is generally limited to the edges of these and is restricted in places by intervening tree cover and built development. The susceptibility of the site to the proposed development is assessed as low-medium for this aspect. Perimeter planting to the boundaries of the site will, however, be unlikely to screen a building of up to 30 m in height.
- Condition - the condition of the site is assessed as moderate (as noted above). The susceptibility of the site to the proposed development is assessed as low-medium for this aspect. Development of the site for industry will have the potential to enhance this aspect.
- Typicality and rareness - the site contains no features that could be considered to be rare. It exhibits a high degree of typicality in terms of urban fringe agricultural land. The susceptibility of the site to the proposed development is assessed as low for this aspect. Development of the site for industry will be in keeping with the character of adjacent areas.
- Views and landmarks - the site contains no landmark features and is not a highly noticeable feature in local views. The susceptibility of the site to the proposed development is assessed as low-medium for this aspect. The development of a building of up to 33 m in height would result in this being a highly noticeable feature within the immediate area.
- Tranquillity - the site has low levels of tranquillity given the nearby presence of the A19 and adjacent A1290, and the existing Nissan development and previous phases of the AESC and IAMP development. The susceptibility of the site to the proposed development is assessed as low for this aspect. This aspect is unlikely to change given the proposed development for industry.

- Remoteness - the site is not remote and, as such, any susceptibility in relation to this aspect is considered to be low / negligible. There will be no change to this aspect.
- Visual receptors - the extent to which the site is visible from within surrounding areas is limited (as discussed below). As such, susceptibility to the development is low-medium. The extent to which this would change as a result of the proposed development is indicated (theoretically) on ES Figure 8.1 and discussed further in Section 8.6 of this chapter.

8.5.5 Taking the above analysis into account, the susceptibility of this landscape to the change proposed from the development of large-scale industrial buildings is assessed as low-medium. This reflects the potential for a noticeably taller and larger-scale building to be developed within the site, compared with the existing baseline of development.

8.5.6 The landscape is considered able to accommodate the proposed development, but there would be some loss of localised character. This is considered further in Section 8.5 of this chapter. The maintenance of the baseline environment would be limited to the area proposed for ecological and landscape mitigation (i.e. the ELMA area).

8.5.7 Guidance from landscape character assessments can be complied with in that there remains scope for enhancement of the landscape through the provision of tree and hedgerow planting (where practicable), enhanced habitat for wildlife and the creation of an improved access network.

Landscape sensitivity to the proposed development

8.5.8 Given the low-medium susceptibility of the landscape, combined with low-medium value, the sensitivity of this landscape to the proposed development is assessed as low-medium.

Construction effects on the landscape resource and landscape character

Effects on site elements and perceptual aspects

8.5.9 Construction operations are likely to result in the loss of the existing internal trees and internal field boundary hedgerows in order to accommodate the proposed development. Roadside boundary planting would be retained, other than where access is proposed. This change to the landscape resource would have a local effect on landscape character and would be compensated for in the longer-term with the planting of replacement trees and hedgerows.

8.5.10 Changes to landform as a result of construction operations are expected to be minimal given the relatively level nature of the site. Topsoil will be stripped from built development areas to a depth approximating to some 300 mm and may be used to create perimeter (or other) mounding. However, the change to the character of the landscape from such changes to the landform will be barely perceptible from within the wider areas.

8.5.11 Lighting is present within the adjacent residential and industrial areas. During construction, some lighting can be expected where works are taking place during the winter months and may be required for security reasons, but this would be short-term and temporary.

8.5.12 The magnitude of impacts during construction is assessed as no greater than medium adverse on a low-medium sensitivity receptor and the effects would be **Not Significant**.

Landscape character

8.5.13 The proposed construction operations would give rise to direct, temporary effects on the Coalfield Lowland Terraces (Usworth Lowland) LCT / LCA. The susceptibility of this LCA to the proposed development is assessed as low, given that the LCA extends across various areas of existing industrial development (including the existing AESC plants, existing buildings within IAMP and that at Nissan and Follingsby). The value of this LCT is assessed as low-medium, reflecting its mix of industry and some farmland. The sensitivity of this LCA is therefore considered to be low-medium. The magnitude of impacts associated with demolition and construction operations is assessed as short-term and temporary high adverse. The effects on the landscape character of the site and its immediate surroundings would be **Not Significant**.

8.5.14 Effects on the landscape character of the wider area of the Usworth Lowland LCA and the Urban Fringe, Boldon Fell LCT, to the north, from construction operations would be indirect and limited to changes associated with the noise of construction plant and perception of construction operations.

8.5.15 The susceptibility of the Boldon Fell LCA to the proposed development is assessed as low as the LCA is separated from the site by the remainder of the AESC area. The value of this LCA is assessed as medium, reflecting the greater extent of farmland and associated tree cover and hedging. The sensitivity of this LCA to the proposed development is, therefore, considered to be low-medium. The magnitude of impacts

during construction would be of low adverse (reducing with distance from the site) and the effects would be **Not Significant**.

Operational effects on landscape character and the landscape resource

Effects on site elements and perceptual aspects

8.5.16 Changes to the scale of the site will result from its development as a part of the wider AESC and IAMP development. The generally medium scale of the existing landscape (within a wider area of medium to large scale) is likely to increase to large scale with the development of two large buildings, up to 33 m in height. The scale of the wider landscape is influenced by the presence of the existing and under-construction large and medium size buildings within the previous phases; AESC Plant 2 is 30 m high at its tallest point. The magnitude of impact is assessed as medium-high adverse on a low-medium sensitivity receptor and, as such, the effect (change in landscape scale) would be **Significant**.

8.5.17 Enclosure within the area will alter as a result of the proposed development. Existing hedgerows within the site would be removed, but this will be partially offset by gapping up retained boundary hedgerows and planting within the site (RPS Drawing 205). Additional enclosure will be provided by the development of the proposed industrial buildings. The magnitude of impact is assessed as medium-high adverse (having regard for the adjacent area of industrial development immediately to the east-north-east) on the low-medium sensitivity receptor and the effect would be **Significant**.

8.5.18 Lighting will form part of the site development and will accord with the principles of the approved IAMP Design Code. As such, this would maintain a consistency of appearance and effect on the character of this landscape. It is intended that the northern and western boundaries of the site, including any building facades facing towards these directions, be kept as dark as practicable so as to minimise adverse effects on species and habitats. The provision of lighting within the majority of the developed site area is assessed as a low-medium adverse magnitude of impact on a low-medium sensitivity receptor and the effect would be **Not Significant**.

8.5.19 As noted above, the loss of some of the existing trees and hedgerows within the site will be compensated for through the planting of replacement native trees and scrub, and hedgerows / hedgerow trees. Once this planting is established, it will contribute positively to the landscape character of the local area.

8.5.20 Overall, effects of the developed site on the landscape resource of the local area are assessed as resulting in a medium-high adverse magnitude of impact on a low-medium sensitivity receptor and would be **Significant**. Effects would reduce with time to become **Not Significant** as proposed planting within the development, as well as that being brought forward as part of the wider masterplan (i.e. the IAMP TWO ELMA), which is being brought forward as part of the Early Infrastructure and Northern Employment Area application (the 'IAMP TWO ELMA') establishes and matures helping to integrate the development into the surrounding landscape in the long-term. Planning permission was granted for IAMP TWO in August 2023 for up to 168,000 m² of floorspace for automotive and advanced manufacturing uses with around 35.08ha of land for development, with associated infrastructure works and a central area of land for ecological and landscape mitigation of 75.82ha. The ELMA grassland, wetland and woodland (planning application references Sunderland: 21/02807/HE and South Tyneside: ST/11722/FUL).

Effects on landscape character

8.5.21 The proposed development would result in permanent, direct effects on this part of the Coalfield Lowland Terraces (Usworth Lowland) LCT / LCA. The susceptibility of this LCA to the proposed development has been assessed as low and the value of the LCA is assessed as low-medium. The magnitude of impact associated with the development of the site is assessed as medium-high adverse on a low-medium sensitivity receptor and **Significant**. Effects would reduce with time to become **Not Significant** as proposed planting within the development and wider masterplan (i.e. the IAMP TWO ELMA) establishes and matures helping to integrate the development into the surrounding landscape.

8.5.22 Effects on the landscape character of the wider area of the Usworth Lowland LCA and the Urban Fringe, Boldon Fell LCT, to the north, from the permanent development of the site would be indirect and limited to changes to the skyline, associated with the presence of a tall, large-scale building on the horizon to the south. The magnitude of impact is assessed as medium adverse, reducing to low with increased distance from the site, and the effect would be **Not Significant**.

8.6 Assessment of effects on visual amenity

Introduction

- 8.6.1 The ZTV (see ES Figure 8.1) is based on theoretical visibility using the LiDAR DSM data, including buildings, trees and other above ground features, and assumes an eye height of 2 m. It is based on maximum building heights of 18 m and 33 m.
- 8.6.2 The ZTV indicates that the main areas within the 2 km study area from which there would be views of the proposed buildings lie to the immediate west, north and east of the site, with more limited visibility to the south and south-west. The ZTV also shows visibility from the wider areas, however in reality this would be more limited than the ZTV shows.
- 8.6.3 Given the nature of the site and limited presence of near-distance receptors, the assessment of effects on visual amenity has been limited to operational effects. Any effects of construction operations on visual amenity for receptors in the area of the site would in any case be adverse but also short-term and temporary. As such, it is considered that this would **not give rise to significant effects**.

Effects on visual receptors – during operation

Residential receptors (settlements, groups of properties, individual properties)

- 8.6.4 Residential receptors with scope for views of the site include the north-eastern settlement edge of Washington, situated 1 km to the west of the site. Views from properties on the edge facing east are partially screened by existing tree cover on the edges of the disused railway line; this line is elevated above the ground floor levels of the houses on Sulgrave Road. Any views towards the site would be seen primarily from less sensitive upper floor windows. Where visible, the proposed development within the site would be seen in front of and blocking views of the AESC Plant 2, similar to Viewpoint 3. Residential receptors are considered as highly susceptible to changes in the views from their properties (GLVIA paras. 6.33 and 6.36), though views from upper floor windows, where rooms are not typically occupied during daylight hours, are less sensitive (medium susceptibility). The value ascribed to the view from this area is assessed as medium and the sensitivity of the receptors is assessed as medium and medium-high. The magnitude of impact is assessed as medium-low (balancing the distance to the site, intervening vegetation and the presence of AESC Plant 2) adverse and any effects on visual amenity for residential receptors in this general area are assessed as **Not Significant**.

- 8.6.5 For the properties at Hylton Bridge Farm, there is limited visibility towards the site due to intervening farm buildings and vegetation. Any views towards the site from within the general area of these properties would (at present) look across existing farmland and would include the existing, under construction buildings within AESC Plant 2, similar to Viewpoint 6. The factory building of the proposed development would be some 600 m distance and seen alongside Plant 2; its overall extent would be a noticeable difference, within this general view. The magnitude of impact from the presence of the proposed 33 m high building within the site is assessed as medium-high adverse on receptors of medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) and the effect would be **Significant**.
- 8.6.6 From the two, two-storey properties on the roadside at Hylton Grove Farm, there are views south towards the current development at AESC Plant 2, similar to Viewpoint 5. There are also views south-west towards the site. The proposed development would be visible, seen alongside Plant 2. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity from the proposed development at the site are assessed as medium-high adverse on receptors of medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) and the effect would be **Significant**.
- 8.6.7 From the properties of East House and Strother House Farm, views of the development are illustrated by Viewpoints 1 and 2. Plant 2 is visible partially screened by intervening vegetation. The proposed buildings would be seen in front of Plant 2 and would be larger. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity from the proposed development at the site are assessed as of medium-high adverse on receptors of medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) and the effect would be **Significant**.
- 8.6.8 For the properties in the Down Hill Farm area, views of the completed development would form part of the wider view of the surrounding developments, located beyond and marginally taller than these. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity would be low adverse on medium-high sensitivity receptors (high susceptibility, medium value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**.

Users of transport routes and rights of way

- 8.6.9 From the immediately adjacent sections of the A1290, as it approaches and passes the site, there would be near-distance views of the completed development (Viewpoint 3). These would be of short duration, transient and varying from more distant, direct

views to near-distance and oblique views of the site, seen in the context of Plant 2 and surrounding existing industrial development.

- 8.6.10 For eastbound road users within sections of the road east of the IAMP ONE access road, the proposed buildings within the site would be the first elements of the development to be seen; occupying part of the forward view, albeit intermittently screened by roadside trees but increasing in prominence as the road users get closer to the site. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity for users of this section of road, when considered in their totality, are assessed as up to medium-high adverse (having regard for the presence of the completed / under construction developments and the limited duration of the view) on receptors of low and low-medium sensitivity, varying with proximity to the site (low susceptibility and low, or low-medium value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**.
- 8.6.11 There would be no views of the proposed development from the A19(T).
- 8.6.12 From the overbridge at the Downhill Lane Junction with the A19(T) and from elevated sections of Downhill Lane to the north-east of the site, any views of the proposed development would be difficult to discern beyond the built development within the existing and under construction developments. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity would be low adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (low susceptibility and low-medium value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**.
- 8.6.13 From sections of Follingsby Lane to the north-north-west, north and north-east of the site, there would be oblique views, interrupted in places by roadside hedging and tree cover, as illustrated by Viewpoints 1, 4 and 5. The site would be seen in conjunction with the wider developments. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity would be up to medium adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (low-medium susceptibility and low-medium value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**.
- 8.6.14 From the BOAT / footpath between Follingsby Lane and East House, there would be views of the completed development, as illustrated by Viewpoint 2, seen in closer proximity than, and in conjunction with the wider development. The proposed building within the site would break the skyline to a noticeably greater extent than the existing buildings. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity would be medium-high adverse on medium sensitivity receptors (medium susceptibility and low-medium value) and the effect would be **Significant**.
- 8.6.15 Distant views from the footpath to the east and north-east of Strother House Farm towards the proposed development would be interrupted by intervening trees and

hedgerows. The proposed buildings within the site would break the skyline, sitting in front of and alongside existing development. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity would be medium adverse on medium sensitivity receptors (medium susceptibility and medium value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**.

8.6.16 From the dismantled railway line to the east of Sulgrave and Usworth Hall, if this were to be brought back into service, there would be transient and oblique views of the completed development, seen in the context of the wider developments. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity would be low-medium adverse on medium sensitivity receptors (medium susceptibility and low-medium value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**.

8.6.17 For other roads and rights of way within the study area, any views of the proposed development would typically be distant and interrupted by intervening tree cover and development and would be **Not Significant**.

Users of formal and informal open space and recreation areas

8.6.18 For visitors to the Penshaw Monument, there would be distant views northwards of the completed development. However, this would be seen in the context of the wider industrial development areas. The magnitude of impact on visual amenity would be low adverse on medium-high sensitivity receptors (medium-high susceptibility and medium-high value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**.

8.6.19 From the North East Aircraft Museum, views towards the site are well screened by intervening tree cover (in the area of the junction with the A1290) in addition to the buildings being constructed within the consented IAMP ONE Phase One site, and there would be **no effect** on visual amenity for visitors to this location.

Assessment of key views

8.6.20 Viewpoints used in this assessment have been selected to represent locations from where the site is most visible for the greatest numbers of visual receptors, and including views from locations to the north of the site in which Penshaw Monument is visible looking southwards.

8.6.21 The following analysis of these viewpoints is supported by panoramic photography and visualisations (ES Figures 8.6 – 8.14) and considers the existing view, the view with the proposed development (during the construction and operational phases) and predictions of the potential effects on the visual amenity of the relevant receptors.

Viewpoint 1: view from Follingsby Lane at Stroher House Farm (ES Figures 8.6 and 8.7)

- 8.6.22 The existing view is representative of the views from the properties and for users of Follingsby Lane. The view looks south-south-east between roadside vegetation towards Plant 2, which is a prominent large building. The wind turbines and electricity transmission towers are also prominent features in the view.
- 8.6.23 During construction, there would be middle-distance views of construction operations that would be short-term. The magnitude of impacts on the visual amenity of the residents are assessed as medium adverse on receptors of medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) and the effect would be **Not Significant**. Effects on road users would also be **Not Significant**.
- 8.6.24 Upon completion of the construction works, there would be middle distance views of the completed development in front of Plant 2, appearing as a noticeably larger development. The mass and height of the buildings within the site would block views towards the horizon and would be seen against the skyline from this location. The magnitude of impacts on visual amenity from the proposed development at the site are assessed as of medium-high adverse on receptors of medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) and the effect would be **Significant**. Effects on road users would be **Not Significant** as they are of lower sensitivity to the development.
- 8.6.25 Significant effects may reduce to **Not Significant** in the long-term with the assimilation of the development into the general area. The establishment of intervening planting within the IAMP TWO ELMA will assist in softening views into the site but will not fully screen the building from view.

Viewpoint 2: view from the BOAT/footpath at East House (ES Figures 8.8 and 8.9)

- 8.6.26 The existing view is representative of the views from the properties and for users of the BOAT / footpath. The view looks south-east over intervening vegetation towards Plant 2, which is a prominent large building. The wind turbines and pylons are also prominent features in the view.
- 8.6.27 During construction, there would be middle-distance views of construction operations, which would be short term. The magnitude of impacts on the visual amenity of the residents and footpath users are assessed as medium adverse on receptors of medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) and the effects are **Not Significant**.

8.6.28 On completion of the construction works, there would be middle distance views of the completed development in front of Plant 2, appearing as a noticeably larger development. The mass and height of the buildings within the site would block views towards the horizon and would be seen against the skyline from this location. The magnitude of impacts on visual amenity from the proposed development at the site are assessed as of medium-high adverse on receptors of medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) and the effects are **Significant**.

Viewpoint 3: view from the A1290 to the west of the site (ES Figure 8.10 and 8.11)

8.6.29 The existing view is representative of the view for eastbound users of the A1290. The view looks east along the A1290 at the start of a straight section of road leading towards the entrance to the Nissan site and, further east, to parts of the local road network and to the A19(T). Scrubby vegetation limits views along the road to Plant 2. The major buildings within the Nissan site are screened by the tree planting on the south side of the A1290.

8.6.30 During construction, there would be middle-distance views of construction operations taking place on site, limited by the roadside vegetation. The magnitude of impacts on the visual amenity of road users are assessed as low-medium adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (low susceptibility, low-medium value) and the effects are **Not Significant**.

8.6.31 On completion of the construction works, once the development plot is operational, there would be views similar to existing, but with built development in closer proximity, limited by roadside vegetation. In the longer-term, the native tree and scrub planting proposed along the site boundaries would provide more screening. The magnitude of impacts on visual amenity are assessed as medium adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (as above) and the effects are **Not Significant**.

Viewpoint 4: view from Follingsby Lane to the north-east of the site (ES Figure 8.12)

8.6.32 The existing view is representative of the view for users of Follingsby Lane. The view looks south-west across open farmland towards the site, with Plant 2 visible and prominent. Fields are bounded in places by gappy hedgerows with occasional groups of trees which break up the vista. Energy infrastructure is a prominent feature in the view, including a high voltage overhead line and transmission towers traversing the landscape in the middle ground.

8.6.33 During construction, there would be middle-distance views of construction operations taking place on site, seen above and beyond intervening vegetation. The magnitude of impacts on the visual amenity of road users are assessed as low-medium adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (low susceptibility, low-medium value) and the effects are **Not Significant**.

8.6.34 Upon completion of the construction works, once the development plot is operational, there would be views of the buildings developed on the site (similar to existing, but with built development in slightly closer proximity and with the taller part of the building breaking the skyline). The viewpoint would be separated from the site by the proposed ELMA area. In the longer-term, the native planting proposed on the northern boundary of the site (i.e. IAMP TWO ELMA) would establish and provide some softening of the built development. The magnitude of impacts on visual amenity are assessed as medium-high adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (as above) and the effects are **Not Significant**.

Viewpoint 5: view from Follingsby Lane to the north-east of the site (ES Figure 8.13)

8.6.35 The existing view is representative of the view for users of Follingsby Lane and nearby residents at Hylton Grove Farm. This is very similar to Viewpoint 4, looking across open farmland towards the site with Plant 2 visible and prominent. Energy infrastructure is also a prominent feature in the view.

8.6.36 During construction, there would be middle-distance views of construction operations taking place onsite, seen above and beyond intervening vegetation. The magnitude of impacts on the visual amenity of road users are assessed as low-medium adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (low susceptibility, low-medium value) and medium-high sensitivity receptors (nearby residents - high susceptibility and medium value), therefore the effects are **Not Significant**.

8.6.37 Upon completion of the construction works, once the development plot is operational, there would be views of the buildings developed on the site similar to existing, but with built development in slightly closer proximity and with the taller part of the building breaking the skyline. The magnitude of impacts on visual amenity are assessed as medium-high adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (as above) and the effects are **Not Significant**. For the residents of the nearby Hylton Grove Farm the effects would be **Significant** due to the medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) of the receptors.

Viewpoint 6: view from Follingsby Lane to the north-east of the site (ES Figure 8.14)

- 8.6.38 The existing view is representative of the view for users of Follingsby Lane and the nearby residents of Hylton Bridge Farm. This view looks south-west towards the site from the junction with the private access road leading to North Moor Farm. Plant 2 is visible and prominent. Energy infrastructure is a prominent feature in the view including a high voltage overhead line crossing the landscape in the foreground, with the wind turbines on the Nissan site seen in the background. Penshaw Monument is seen distantly on the skyline.
- 8.6.39 During construction, there would be close and middle-distance views of construction operations taking place onsite, seen above and beyond intervening vegetation. The magnitude of impacts on the visual amenity of road users are assessed as low-medium adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (low susceptibility, low-medium value) and medium-high sensitivity receptors (nearby residents - high susceptibility and medium value), therefore the effects are **Not Significant**.
- 8.6.40 Upon completion of the construction works, once the development plot is operational, there would be views of the buildings developed on the site similar to existing, but with built development in slightly closer proximity, occupying more of the horizontal field of view and with the taller parts of the buildings breaking the skyline to a noticeable degree although not screening the existing view of Penshaw Monument. The magnitude of impacts on visual amenity are assessed as medium-high adverse on low-medium sensitivity receptors (as above) and the effects are **Not Significant**. For the residents of the nearby Hylton Bridge Farm the effects would be **Significant** due to the medium-high sensitivity (high susceptibility and medium value) of the receptors.

Nighttime views

- 8.6.41 Lighting is present within the adjacent industrial areas to the east and south and within the wider residential areas along with street lighting along the main roads. Therefore, the impact of additional lighting of the development would not result in significant adverse effects on views of the development from surrounding visual receptors.

8.7 The Green Belt

- 8.7.1 The Green Belt is principally a planning designation to restrict urban sprawl and encroachment of the countryside, prevent coalescence, preserve the setting and special character of historic towns and to assist with urban regeneration, as defined

in Section 13 of the NPPF. The key characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The impacts on the Green Belt are considered further within the Green Belt: Very Special Circumstances Report that accompanies the planning application.

8.7.2 The Government has published some National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) with advice on the role of the Green Belt in the planning system (published 22nd July 2019). This includes the factors to be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt. These include, but are not limited to:

- *“openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;*
- *the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and*
- *the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.”*

8.7.3 The effects of the proposed development on the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt and the permanence are, therefore, considered here.

8.7.4 The main aspects of the proposed development that would affect the openness of the Green Belt are the large scale of the proposed buildings themselves. The LVIA has demonstrated that the proposed development would result in **Significant adverse** landscape and visual effects within approximately 1 km of the proposed development, some of which would reduce in time to become **Not Significant** as the proposed planting to the IAMP TWO ELMA land to the north establishes and matures softening the development and helping to integrate it into the surrounding area.

8.7.5 It is also considered that the proposed development would initially result in some localised **Significant adverse** effects on the visual and spatial openness of this part of the Green Belt, but as the Green Belt to the north would remain and would be enhanced through the extensive area of ecology and landscape mitigation (the IAMP TWO ELMA), it is considered that the long-term and permanent effects would be **Not Significant**. The IAMP TWO ELMA land would create a strong but soft boundary to what would become the new Green Belt boundary to the north of the site, in accordance with paragraphs 147 and 148 of the NPPF. The new boundary would follow the River Don tributary that forms the northern site boundary, which is considered a *“physical feature that is readily recognisable and likely to be permanent”*

(NPPF paragraph 148 point f). The current south-eastern Green Belt boundary within the site is defined by the overhead electricity transmission line on steel towers that previously ran through the eastern area of the site and has recently been diverted round the eastern and northern boundaries of the site.

8.8 Mitigation measures

8.8.1 As noted above, an area of ecological and landscape mitigation is proposed (i.e. the IAMP TWO ELMA) within land to the north and north-east of the site. In time, this would provide important landscape features to what would become the new Green Belt boundary to the north of the site and would soften the appearance of the development in some views. Some open and Significant views would however remain, such as those from the north-west at East House Farm and the north-east at Hylton Bridge and Hylton Grove Farms.

8.9 Residual effects

8.9.1 With these mitigation measures in place, it is anticipated that longer-term effects of the proposed development on the landscape character of the local area would be **Not Significant** as proposed planting establishes and matures, helping to soften and integrate the development into the surrounding area. As stated above, some open and **Significant** views would however remain, such as those from the north-west at East House Farm and the north-east at Hylton Bridge and Hylton Grove Farms.

8.10 Cumulative effects

8.10.1 The existing development at IAMP ONE and the AESC Plant 2 are now part of the baseline and have been considered throughout the main assessment, along with the A19 Downhill Lane junction improvements and other developments previously considered in the wider area. The following assessment, therefore, focuses on IAMP TWO and the Early Infrastructure.

Cumulative landscape effects

8.10.2 Inter-cumulative effects on landscape are assessed in relation to the combination of the proposed development of the site together with IAMP TWO and the Early Infrastructure. The cumulative assessment is limited to the operational stage of the proposed development as any effects of construction would be short-term and temporary and **Not Significant**.

Cumulative effects on the landscape resource

8.10.3 Inter-cumulative effects on the landscape resource of the local area would result from the overall development of the site in combination with the development of the IAMP TWO areas. There would be some loss of hedgerows and individual trees within these development areas that would result in a significant effect on the landscape resource, reducing over time with the establishment of the landscaping within the site and within the adjacent IAMP TWO ELMA area. The assessment of effects (above) has identified a significant effect on landscape scale and enclosure as a result of the proposed development. However, the inter-cumulative effect on landscape scale and enclosure from the combination of the proposed development with the wider IAMP development is **not considered to result in any significant inter-cumulative effects** on the landscape resource (medium-high adverse magnitude of impact on low-medium sensitivity receptor) due to the intervening IAMP TWO ELMA area.

Cumulative effects on landscape character

8.10.4 Inter-cumulative effects on landscape character can also result from the combination of the proposed development with other developments in the local area. In respect of the proposed development of IAMP TWO, this lies within both the Coalfield Lowland Terraces LCT and the Urban Fringe, Boldon Fell LCA. Direct effects on the character of these landscapes would result from the installation of the industrial units within the development and the IAMP TWO sites; these effects have been identified as **Not Significant**.

8.10.5 The inter-cumulative effect on landscape character from the combination of the site with the wider IAMP development areas is assessed as a medium-high adverse magnitude of impact on low-medium sensitivity receptors and **Not Significant**.

Cumulative visual effects

Residential receptors

8.10.6 For residential receptors on the north-eastern settlement edge of Washington (Sulgrave Road which is over 1km away), there may be partial views (seen through the intervening tree cover) of the development with IAMP TWO. Inter-cumulative effects on visual amenity are assessed as a medium-low adverse magnitude of impact on medium-high sensitivity receptors and **Not Significant**.

8.10.7 From properties at Hylton Bridge Farm and the two roadside properties at Hylton Grove Farm, there would be near distance views of the development and the IAMP

TWO areas, seen in different fields of view. The combination would be **Significant** (medium adverse magnitude of impact on medium-high sensitivity receptors) as the properties would be surrounded by large built developments, softened in places by proposed planting within IAMP TWO / IAMP TWO ELMA.

8.10.8 The properties at Strother Farm are situated to the immediate west of the IAMP TWO northern development area, with scope for near distance views of this, albeit oblique and from areas surrounding the properties rather than from within the dwellings. Inter-cumulative effects from the combination of the development with IAMP TWO are assessed as having a medium adverse magnitude of impact on medium-high sensitivity receptors and **Significant**. Effects may reduce with time to become **Not Significant** as proposed planting within the ELMA land and IAMP TWO establishes.

8.10.9 Views from East House of IAMP TWO would reduce with time as proposed planting within the ELMA land and IAMP TWO establishes. Therefore effects would also be **Significant** initially, reducing to **Not Significant** in the medium to long term.

8.10.10 Inter-cumulative effects on the visual amenity of properties in the Down Hill Farm area to the north-east of the site from the combination of the proposed development with IAMP TWO would be distant and, therefore, **Not Significant** (assessed as a negligible-low adverse magnitude of impact on medium-high sensitivity receptors).

Users of transport routes and rights of way

8.10.11 In assessing inter-cumulative visual effects on users of transport routes and rights of way, it is relevant to consider sequential visual effects (views experienced over the duration of a route, or part of a route) as these are the most likely effects to be incurred.

8.10.12 For users of the A1290, there would be scope for combined and sequential views for road users travelling in either direction. The overall effect on road users would be one of extensive industrial development set within a landscape framework that would establish over time. The inter-cumulative effects on visual amenity is assessed as a low-medium adverse magnitude of impact on low-medium sensitivity receptors and **Not Significant**.

8.10.13 There would be no views of the site from the A19(T) and, therefore, no inter-cumulative visual assessment is required for this route.

8.10.14 From the elevated overbridge at the Downhill Lane junction and from Downhill Lane, there would be scope for views of the development and IAMP TWO. Inter-cumulative

effects on visual amenity would be **Not Significant**, notwithstanding that the proposed 33 m building would be more noticeable than the remainder of the development due to its greater height. This is assessed as a low-medium adverse magnitude of impact on low-medium sensitivity receptors.

8.10.15 From Follingsby Lane and from the BOAT / footpath between Follingsby Lane and East House, there would be near-distance views of the IAMP TWO northern development area, seen in a different field of view to the development, which would occupy the middle distance. The inter-cumulative effects on visual amenity is assessed as a low-medium adverse magnitude of impact on low-medium and medium sensitivity receptors and **Not Significant**.

8.10.16 Any views from the footpath east and north-east of Strother House Farm would be dominated more by the development within the IAMP TWO site, which would lie immediately to the south of this route. Development within the IAMP TWO site is likely to obstruct the majority of views south towards the development. Any inter-cumulative effects on visual amenity would be **Not Significant** (low adverse magnitude of impact on medium sensitivity receptors).

8.10.17 From the dismantled railway line to the east of Sulgrave and Usworth Hall (if brought back into service), any views of the development and IAMP TWO would be intermittent views. Any inter-cumulative effects on visual amenity are assessed as **Not Significant** (low-medium adverse magnitude of impact on medium sensitivity receptors).

Users of formal and informal open space and recreation areas

8.10.18 For visitors to the Penshaw Monument the distant views northwards would include the development and IAMP TWO. However, given the nature of this view, which includes extensive areas of industry, inter-cumulative effects are assessed as **Not Significant** (negligible-low adverse magnitude of impact on medium-high sensitivity receptors).

8.10.19 From the North East Aircraft Museum, there are no effects on visual amenity from the site and, as such, there are **no inter-cumulative visual effects** to assess for receptors at this location.

8.11 Limitations of study

8.11.1 it is not possible to enter the curtilage of private properties without residents' agreement and, therefore, the assessments were made from the nearby roads and footpaths. There were no other limitations of the study.

8.12 Conclusion

Summary and overview of potential landscape effects

8.12.1 During the construction phase, there would be changes to the character of the landscape from the presence of plant and machinery within the site, as well as from the permanent loss of internal lengths of hedgerow and some hedgerow trees. Minimal changes to the landform are anticipated. Lighting would be required during construction, more particularly in winter months, or for security, but would be short term and temporary. Effects would be adverse, but **Not Significant**.

8.12.2 The operational effects of the proposed development would be permanent.

8.12.3 There would be changes to the scale and enclosure of the site from the presence of the large-scale buildings and from its association with the wider AESC Plant 2 and IAMP ONE development area. The generally medium scale of the existing landscape (within a wider area of medium to large scale) is likely to increase to large scale. The scale of the wider landscape is influenced by the presence of the existing and under-construction buildings within IAMP ONE. AESC Plant 2 will be the tallest at 30 m; Plant 3 would have a maximum height of 33 m. The magnitude of impact is assessed as medium-high adverse on a low-medium sensitivity receptor and **the effect of the change in landscape scale would be Significant**.

8.12.4 There would also be changes due to the presence of lighting associated with the development plots and spine road. Loss of existing hedgerows and trees would be compensated by the provision of replacement tree and scrub planting, as well as the infilling of gaps within the retained hedging. This will in the longer-term make a positive contribution to the landscape character of the local area. Overall, the effects of the developed site on the landscape resource of the local area are assessed as **Not Significant**, other than from the change in landscape scale and enclosure.

8.12.5 Changes from the development of the site will result in changes within the Coalfield Lowland Terraces (Usworth Lowland) LCA. This is assessed as **Significant adverse**. However, indirect effects on the wider landscape character areas from the presence of the developed site are assessed as **Not Significant**.

Effects on visual amenity

- 8.12.6 There is relatively limited visibility of the existing site from within the surrounding area. This is mainly limited to locations close to the site or more distant, elevated positions to the north-west and south of the site. Effects have been assessed for the operational stage of the development, only, as it is considered that the short-term nature of construction works would **not give rise to significant adverse effects** on visual amenity.
- 8.12.7 **Significant adverse** effects on visual amenity have been identified for the occupants of properties at **Hylton Bridge Farm, Hylton Grove Farm, Strother House Farm and East House**. No other significant visual effects have been identified for residential receptors.
- 8.12.8 Users of the BOAT / footpath from Follingsby Lane to East House would experience **Significant adverse** effects. Notwithstanding the close proximity of visual receptors using the A1290, **no significant effects** on visual amenity have been identified for users of this or other roads or rights of way (including the dismantled railway line on the eastern edge of Washington, west of the site).

The Green Belt

- 8.12.9 The proposed development would initially result in some localised **Significant adverse** effects on the visual and spatial openness of this part of the Green Belt, but as the Green Belt to the north would remain and would be enhanced through the extensive area of ecology and landscape mitigation, it is considered that the long-term and permanent effects would be **Not Significant**. The IAMP TWO EMLA would create a strong but soft boundary to what would become the new Green Belt boundary to the north of the site.

Cumulative effects

- 8.12.10 Inter-cumulative effects on the landscape resource, landscape character and visual amenity of the area from the presence of the operational site in combination with the development of the IAMP TWO areas, would be **Not Significant** in the long-term due to the intervening extensive area of ecology and landscape mitigation (IAMP TWO EMLA), with the exception of cumulative visual effects on the properties at Hylton Bridge and Hylton Grove Farms, for which cumulative effects would remain **Significant** as they would be surrounded by large industrial development.

Proposed mitigation and residual effects

8.12.11 Mitigation is proposed, along similar lines to that of the previous phases, in respect of the landscaping of the site perimeter and that within the IAMP TWO ELMA land to the north. Significant effects on the landscape character would reduce with time as the proposed planting establishes and matures, helping to soften the buildings and integrate them into the surrounding area. Significant visual effects on Hylton Bridge and Hylton Grove Farms, East House and the right of way that passes here would remain.

Overall conclusion

8.12.12 It can be concluded from the above that the proposed development of the site would result in limited significant effects on the landscape character and landscape resource of the area, restricted to the operational phase of the site, and limited significant effects on visual amenity, also during the operational stage, for properties close to the site. In the longer-term, with the assimilation of the proposed development into the general area and the implementation of the proposed mitigation within the IAMP TWO ELMA land, it is considered that there would, overall, be scope for some positive effects on the landscape character, landscape resource and visual amenity of the local area.