PROPOSED MEAFORD ENERGY CENTRE

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS TECHNICAL NOTE

INTRODUCTION

1. Meaford Energy Limited (MEL) is promoting the development of the Meaford Energy Centre and Connections (MEC) which is a new combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) power station at Meaford Business Park, Staffordshire. The CCGT power station will have an electrical capacity of up to 299 megawatts (MW). The development will comprise the power station and the integral gas pipeline between the MEC and the existing gas network.

2. The proposal constitutes a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the terms of the Planning Act 2008, as its capacity is greater than 50MW, and therefore, an application for a development consent order (DCO) is to be made to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), who will examine the DCO application on behalf of the Secretary of State.

3. MEL's proposed application to PINS for a DCO will be supported by landscape and visual assessment undertaken as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that will consider landscape and visual effects.

4. These studies will take into account the direct effects on landscape and visual impacts of the CCGT power station.

5. This technical note is to support the preliminary non-statutory consultation stage on the MEC proposals. It provides an overview of the landscape and visual aspects of the proposed MEC site and the area in which the gas connection will be made, and explains how these will be considered as the proposals are developed.

SITE SETTING

6. The proposed CCGT power station site is located in a low lying position between the River Trent and the Trent and Mersey Canal. The surrounding landscape is predominantly a rising landform of agricultural land use, with localised woodland blocks, small scale settlements and crossed by a number of transport corridors. A golf course lies to the west of the site, as well as the River Trent.

7. The site accommodated two former coal fired power stations, Meaford A and B, which have now been demolished. There remain a number of electrical pylons and connecting overhead lines within the site and electricity substations on the western boundary and northern boundaries of the site.

8. The potential gas connection area lies to the east and north of the site and as such would potentially cross agricultural land or pockets of woodland, as well as the Stone Branch railway and Trent and Mersey Canal.

LANDSCAPE POLICY

9. The Stafford Borough Local Plan was adopted in October 1998, with the review conducted in 2001. A number of its policies have been 'saved' and will therefore remain in force until being replaced by the emerging Stafford Borough New Local Plan. Therefore, the following landscape policies and designations will be relevant to the current development proposals.

POLICY E & D1 - GENERAL REQUIREMENTS *– Proposals for the development of buildings should ensure that they are designed, sited and grouped, so as to:*

(i) be of a high quality, providing an interesting and attractive environment;

(ii) respect, and integrate with the character and appearance of the locality in terms of scale, materials, layout and siting, both in itself and in relation to adjoining buildings;

(iii) be in sympathy with, and enhance the character and appearance of the locality;

(iv) incorporate effective amenity safeguards including where appropriate landscaping and screening;

(v) help prevent crime;

(vi) be in accordance with standards and policies expressed in this plan;

(vii) provide access throughout the Borough for all individuals, including wheelchair users and people with physical or sensory disabilities, elderly people, and those with toddlers or infants in pushchairs.

POLICY E & D2 CONSIDERATION OF LANDSCAPE OR TOWNSCAPE SETTING *– Proposals for new development will, subject to other policies, be acceptable where the proposal pays due regard to the existing landscape and/or townscape framework and the individual elements of the landscape. These would include:-*

(i) trees and hedgerows;

(ii) skylines and views;

(iii) open areas, especially those important to the landscape or which form a setting;

(iv) historic features.

***POLICY E & D7 DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE** – The need to protect the countryside for its own sake from unnecessary and incongruous development will be an important consideration in the assessment of proposals for development in the countryside. Any development proposed in the countryside will only be permitted where it is well designed and if appropriate screened to reduce its impact on the landscape. Development will be permitted unless the proposal would demonstrably harm:*

(i) an area of special control such as the Green Belt, AONB (area of outstanding natural beauty), SLA (special landscape area) or other designation of special value;

(ii) the rural economy;

(iii) the landscape, wildlife habitats and historic features;

(iv) the quality of land for use in agriculture, forestry and other rural enterprises;

(v) the need to protect other non-renewable resources such as minerals;

(vi) other considerations such as traffic, water, sewerage and sewage disposal, noise and pollution.

***POLICY E & D13 – INFILL DEVELOPMENT OF MAJOR DEVELOPED SITES** – Within the defined boundaries of the identified major development sites in the Green Belt, limited infill development related to the continuing use of the site will be acceptable provided that the development:-*

(i) has no greater impact than the existing development on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it, and where possible have less;

(ii) Contributes to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts;

(iii) Does not exceed the height of the existing buildings;

(iv) Does not occupy a larger area of the site than the existing buildings (unless this would achieve a reduction in height which would benefit visual amenity.

10. There are two major developed sites within the north Staffordshire Green Belt which the Borough Council consider suitable for redevelopment. These are identified as the former Meaford Power Station site, now known as Meaford Business Park, and Stallington Hospital site.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

11. A preliminary landscape and visual impact assessment is to be undertaken in accordance with *"Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition 2013, Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment"* to understand the issues that would arise from the proposed Meaford Energy Centre and how these might be addressed. This will inform the design of the CCGT power station and gas connection, and provide a foundation for a full landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA).

12. In considering the potential landscape and visual effects, the following points will be considered:

- Features and elements of the physical landscape;
- The landscape character, including designated landscapes;
- Views and visual amenity experienced by residents, recreational users (including visitors and tourists) and road users.

13. A number of initial typical and critical locations have been identified as the basis of the preliminary assessment of the landscape and visual effects. These are selected as being representative of the type of viewpoints in the locality and the landscape character of the area and also representative of a range of visual receptors. The final location of viewpoints will also be agreed with the appropriate local authority prior to completion of the detailed assessment. The visual receptors subject to potential effects of the development are likely to include the following.

- Residential properties in north Stone, south Barlaston, adjacent to the A34 and within the surrounding landscape.
- Recreational users of PRoW within the study area including Barlaston Golf Course, the River Trent and Trent and Mersey Canal.
- Transport users of the road networks, including the A34 and Meaford Road and Stone Branch railway.
- Business or employment locations within the study area.

14. A selection of views within the study will be recorded during the winter so to understand the landscape and visual effects when hedgerows, trees and woodland provide less screening. Further, more extensive, field surveys will continue to inform the on-going assessment and design process.

POTENTIAL LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

15. The potential gas connection area lies to the east and north of the site and the proposed gas pipeline potentially crosses agricultural land or pockets of woodland as well as the Stone Branch railway and the Trent and Mersey Canal. The potential effects on landscape and visual receptors that could occur during the construction of the CCGT power station and the grid connections include the following:

    - Site clearance and removal of vegetation in accordance with the proposed layout and footprint of the scheme;
    - Presence of construction plant, including high level features such as cranes;
    - Vegetation clearance, soil stripping and excavation along the linear corridors for the gas connection.

16. Such effects during the construction stage are temporary and are usually short term as vegetation becomes re-established. As the gas connection will be placed underground, there will be no long term impacts associated with the connection.

17. At this stage the existing WPD electrical infrastructure within Meaford Business Park has been identified as being capable of accommodating the connection of the CCGT power station without the need for new 132kV lines or significant network reinforcement, so there is no requirement for new overhead lines or pylons outside of the site boundary, limiting the permanent landscape and visual impacts to be those only located within the site itself – i.e. the CCGT power station itself.

18. Once constructed, the main landscape and visual aspects of the development are likely to include:

    - The permanent presence of the building elements which would include turbine buildings, heat recovery steam generator buildings, cooling system and vent stacks;
    - The permanent presence of other smaller ancillary buildings and infrastructure, for example the station control room, offices, stores and water treatment plant;
    - Limited residual effects arising from the ground reinstatement of the construction corridors for the gas connections.

ADDRESSING LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

19. Further technical and environmental studies will be undertaken, which combined with feedback received from key stakeholders and the community, will be important considerations in developing the detailed landscape proposals. These proposals will also be developed by working closely with the ecologists to maximise the ecological value of the landscaping elements.

20. In general, MEL will ensure that:

- Options for the layout of the power station will seek to minimise the loss of existing trees, hedgerows and other elements of the current landscape structure of the site that may provide visual screening or landscape value;
- The design of the CCGT power station will consider appropriate architectural styles, heights, materials, finishes and lighting of the built development;
- The development should, within technical and operation requirements, be sympathetic to the surrounding area;
- Selection of the route for the gas connection will seek to minimise vegetation loss to minimise change in the landscape;

21. These measures will be drawn up in consultation with appropriate stakeholders and statutory bodies.