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## **WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL**

PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 08/02287

### **AWE BURGHEFIELD, BURGHEFIELD, READING PROJECT MENSA INCLUDING A MAIN PROCESS FACILITY, 16 LIGHTNING TOWERS AND ASSOCIATED FACILITIES AND STRUCTURES**

#### **Introduction**

The proposals were reviewed in January 2009. Site visits were undertaken during 2006 to 2008.

Key features of the development are:

- The main process facility (MPF) 112.9m x 130.7m and 12.6m high (58.3m AOD) and 4 ventilation stacks 18.8m high. Brick cladding to 3m with silver grey metal cladding above and to the roof
- 14 lattice tapered catenary towers 44.6m high
- Support building as front extension to MPF to same external cladding; 8.5m high
- Energy building
- Plant building 36 x 58m x 6.7m high with 4 stacks 10.9m high with an open compound and 2 catenaries 13m high; silver grey metal cladding and roof
- 2 sub stations 12 x 22.6m x 8.05m high
- 2 gatehouses; 16.4 x 10.1m x 4.2m high and 12 x 6.2m x 4m high
- 2 vehicle inspection bays 8.8 x 17.7m x 6.5m high
- Primary Intake Sub-station 22.3m by 20.9m with maximum height of 6m
- 2 balancing ponds
- 3m high double security fence
- Construction parking and facilities
- Perimeter fence lighting, access road lighting, operational vehicle waiting area lighting and lighting of building perimeters
- Lighting to Pingewood Gate
- Landscape treatment

#### **Submissions**

RPS

AWE                                      Design and Access Statement Dec 2008  
    Planning Support Statement Dec 2008  
    Environmental Statement Dec 2008

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## Site Description

The site lies within the AWE complex and is well integrated into the fabric of AWE Burghfield. AWE Burghfield itself is self contained but sits within an agricultural landscape which provides a valuable contrast to the urban area of Reading to the north.

The relevant adopted landscape character descriptions are to be found in the Landscape and Visual section 13 of the ES. In addition guidelines as follows.

*Newbury District-wide Landscape Character Assessment 1993*

LCT 12 London Clay: This is an essentially rural area which needs protection from large scale development. LCT 9 Kennet Valley - Degraded: again any large scale development is considered likely to be intrusive.

*Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003*

LCA H5 Burghfield: The study identifies the need to explore opportunities to enhance the boundaries of the military institutions such as AWE Burghfield. LCA L4 Grazeley Open Clay: development should be sensitive to the rural character.

The ES LVIA sub divides the area into local landscape character areas. I am broadly happy with the categorisation and classification. I do not agree entirely with some of the description but as this does not matter too much.

The LVIA refers to the local 'urbanising' influences. The site and the AWE is not only unique but also a discrete feature in the landscape. There is intervisibility to some extent between the elements referred to in para 13.4.2.1 but the predominant character of the surrounding landscape is rural and agricultural. I do not think that the presence of the M4, power lines etc can be used to support the introduction of development on the site. Other factors are more important. Similarly the night-time character, although affected by the proximity of Reading, is of a dark setting with high levels of lighting on the site.

The LVIA assesses the condition and value, and hence the sensitivity of the on site landscape character areas but does not carry out the same exercise for the adjacent areas. This is a serious omission as it is the landscape impact on the rural setting of the the AWE site that is of the greatest concern. The LVIA does not assess the impact on their local landscape character areas at all, but does assess the impact on the Newbury District-wide character areas. The District character areas have not been assessed for their sensitivity to change and therefore the LVIA does not show how the significance of the impact on these areas was derived in Table 13.9.

The existing AWE is essentially a large scale development in the rural landscape but its presence has, up to now, been mitigated by the lack of buildings of a significant mass, open swathes through the buildings and structures, giving a high degree of visual permeability, and the screening benefits of local woodlands and some mature hedgerows. It is important that the development of the AWE does not undo this

balance which currently conserves the agricultural rural character of the surrounding area, south of the M4.

Views into the site are limited but do include some from outside of the AWE complex. These include property to the west both private, west of the Mearings, and in AWE's ownership east of Mearings. There are views across the AWE complex from the Mearings and from the end of the footpath leading west from the Mearings. However these views benefit from some tree planting some of which are proposed to be removed (49 in the vegetation appraisal report) or could be removed (48 in the vegetation appraisal report), thus relying on off site planting around the private farmhouses.

The site lies opposite an area of open space with new tree planting. This space may be retained as a key open area south of the proposed restaurant, flanked by an avenue of tree planting which will link the main north-western entrance with the north-eastern entrance. The frontage treatment to the SSCMF should therefore contribute to the landscape quality of this space. To the south of the site, the land is open with remnant tree planting some of which may have once been a part of a hedgerow across the site.

### Key Landscape Issues

- Increase in built form in the rural area
- Visual impact on receptors to the west
- Contribution to the landscape strategy for AWE Burghfield

### Relevant Policy

<i>National:</i>	PPS1; PPS7
<i>Berkshire Structure Plan:</i>	EN1
<i>West Berkshire Local Plan</i>	OVS.2; ENV.1;

### Assessment of the Scheme

#### *General*

There is a discrepancy between the tree protection plans and the Figure 6-3.

#### *Direct Impacts*

The ES sets out the effects on the existing features of the site. A number of trees are to be removed but these have been kept to a minimum and are to be replaced nearby where the trees are not in conflict with security on the site. The avenue will be reinforced and new planting introduced around the site and the wider AWE to replace lost trees. I am happy with this.

Overall the landscape proposals are well designed and presented – a few minor changes as set out below.

**Strategy:** The structure of the planting on site was not strong and the proposed landscape strategy is a great improvement. I am happy with the proposed landscape

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strategy which achieves as much as physically possible on the site and around the AWE complex, given the many constraints on planting.

**Phasing:** I am also very pleased to see that the MENSA scheme will deliver a good part of the wider landscape strategy. In general I am happy with the phasing plan RPS 102/D but I would like to see the planting up of areas which are not affected by temporary construction works brought forward. Specifically these are the hedgerow south of Burnthouse Bridge Farm and 3 woodlands west of Riders Lane (both in Phase 2) and 3 groups of parkland trees in the north east (in Phase 3).

**Balancing ponds to MENSA:** Suggest that the seed mix in the areas which will seasonally flooded as seeded with BSH's mix MG9.

**Surface water attenuation in north-east:** AWE dwg. SW028/P2 does not match with RPS 503A and specifications. Amend AWE dwg. to match RPS plan. Proposed Emorsgate EP1 seed mix needs to be confirmed as suitable for areas which are seasonally flooded on a regular basis – use BSH MG8?

**MENSA planting:** Swale under catenary towers not shown on RPS drawing 504/A. Atkins dwg. 006800/P2 does not show shrub planting in the north-west corner, tree planting around the ponds or the energy building, on the island at the entrance or the existing trees retained.

**Construction compound planting:** Amend species in small patches of 'amenity shrub' planting to native species on the boundary. Mix 1.6 fine for the internal areas.

**Schedule 550/A:** use native hedgerow trees only in mix 1.3b except *Acer campestre* 'Streetwise' is fine in the parking area on 505/A; mixes 1.4d and 1.7; specify alternative species to *Pyrus c. Chanticleer* – too suburban; where woodland areas are adjacent to public areas increase planting density to 1 per sq.m; consider substituting *Quercus r. Koster* as this is slow growing – fastigiated species is fine but prefer tall growing such as *Tilia e 'Greenspire'*; include specification to deal with potential waterlogging in clay soils.

**Landscape management plan:** add planting to the island at the entrance to the MENSA site to dwg. 611; specify seed mix, weed control, mulching and management for areas to become 'meadow' under the tree/shrub canopy of the proposed woodlands. The specification requires weed free areas and mulching which is right but prevents establishment of a sward. Specify timing of change in management to allow sward to develop.

**Lighting:** The site obviously needs to be lit to suit the use but the applicant should specify that the lighting will be designed to meet the requirements of ILE's Environmental Zone E2 as a minimum to avoid unnecessary light pollution into the surrounding landscape. The proximity of the glow from Reading and the motorway does not mean that light pollution can be aggravated by the AWE development.

**Catenary towers:** The latticed and tapered towers are a vast improvement on earlier designs. However they are very high – 40m and are the

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## *Indirect Impacts*

### **Impact on surrounding landscape**

The proposed development does not adversely affect the landscape character of the site but does have an impact on the rural character of the surrounding agricultural landscape. It will result in significant intensification of the mass and scale of the built form at AWE visible from these areas. Up to now AWE Burghfield has been well integrated into its surroundings, belying its presence. The guidelines for the surrounding areas is to avoid large scale development which might impact on the rural character. MENSA is a very large development which will have an adverse impact and be contrary to these guidelines. The cumulative effect with CMR increases the impact – see photomontage view 1.

The existing intrusive features of the visual setting of the rural landscape – the M4, lighting, pylons and views to Reading – do not justify further erosion of the visual qualities of the rural area.

### **Impact on local sensitive receptors**

**Traffic:** There are considerable numbers of HGV movements required to access the site via the Pingewood Gate during the construction period. The road network is substandard I believe for this traffic and there is mention of highway improvements but these are not specified. The road network survives as semi-rural in character, despite the proximity of the M4 and Reading and is an asset to the rural character of the area. I am concerned that highway improvements for a temporary period of use will result in permanent damage to the character of the road network to be used by the HGVs.

**HGV marshalling yard:** this will have an adverse visual impact on Riders Lane, and views to the west, in its own right. The planting proposed to the north-east will not have time to mature and screen the yard activities but will help better if it is planted up this autumn in advance of site construction.

### **Removal of buildings south of Pingewood Gate:**

**Accuracy of planting in year 10 montages:** These seem a little over optimistic. For example to trees along the north of the CMR are shown as quite a bit taller than CMR. View 7 shows maturing planting on the mound in year 10. As suggested above this is much more likely to be affective if planted in Phase 1.

## **Conclusion**

## **Recommendation**

Suggested further mitigation:

- Advance planting this autumn of perimeter planting and any internal planting not affected by development works

- Muted colour to MENSA elevations to reduce visual impact