The site, located off M1 junction 24a, was part of a Local Plan allocation for employment and was subject to a hybrid planning application seeking full permission for a new regional distribution centre (RDC) and outline permission for a further storage facility.

In terms of landscape and visual issues, several matters were required to be addressed in the ES chapter and were set out at the scoping stage:

- Potential impacts on visual receptors at adjacent residential properties, including from the grounds of a Grade II listed building to the north of the site;
- Potential impacts on visual receptors using the public right of way network across Daleacre Hill, an elevated area of ground approximately 1km to the south of the site; and
- Notwithstanding the context of the site, influenced by existing transport infrastructure, the potential mitigation measures required to help assimilate a large-scale proposal such as an RDC with the local landscape character.

Pegasus Group was appointed to undertake the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and prepare an ES chapter in support of a full planning application for a new regional distribution centre (RDC), including warehousing, a regional office, car parking and associated landscape proposals; and outline permission for a further storage and distribution facility at land off M1 junction 24a, Sawley on behalf of ALDI Stores Ltd.

The site is located between the A50, B6540 Tamworth Road and Netherfield Lane, off J24a of the M1. The site was greenfield in nature at the time of the planning application and comprised agricultural land with some large ponds and tree cover. The site was historically subject to commercial sand and gravel extraction and the quarried areas had subsequently been filled with pulverised fuel ash (PFA). The detailed and outline elements were included as part of a hybrid planning application and the EIA covered all aspects of the application. The assessments (including landscape and visual impact assessment) were based on the detailed plans and parameters plans as appropriate for each part of the application.
Lessons learnt

The project benefitted from several internal meetings with the wider design team from the outset. Early site survey work undertaken by Pegasus Group Landscape Architects, in combination with discussions with the local authority during the EIA process about particular concerns, revealed that the key issues in relation to landscape and visual matters included potential impacts on visual receptors at more elevated locations to the south and those on receptors with close views from the Grade II listed property to the north.

These constraints were fed into the design of the eventual set back of the main warehouse building from the northern site boundary and resulted in a proposal for a tree planted earth mound along the length of the northern and north-eastern extent of the site.

Balancing the likely landscape and visual effects with the detailed requirements of ALDI Stores Ltd required careful collaborative working with all relevant disciplines, including overcoming complex geotechnical factors in relation to the deliverability of the proposed landscape and drainage strategy.

To test the iterative design as it progressed, Pegasus Group produced several visualisations. These included detailed landscape section drawings, showing the relationship between potential visual receptors and the proposal, which demonstrated the amount views would be deflected by the proposed earth bunding and associated tree planting.

Image credits:
Top: STOAS Architects
Bottom: Pegasus Group

The mitigation proposals therefore became an inherent part of the proposed development such that it reduced visual impact during the EIA process. The internal and external communication process that took place was essential in ensuring the local authorities’ needs were met and environmental impact was reduced.

The scheme was granted planning permission in August 2015. Some minor design changes resulted in an ES Addendum being submitted in March 2017.

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