

Landscape and Visual Statement Addendum
Biomass Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Plant and associated Ash Landfill
College Road, Nobber, Co. Meath
for College Proteins
September 2010/Project No 3547/AB/MJ



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P a r k - H o o d

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Park Hood Chartered Landscape Architects have been appointed by TPA on behalf of College Proteins to conduct an addendum to the Landscape and Visual Statement for the Biomass Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Plant and associated Ash Landfill at College Road, Nobber, Co. Meath in light of the correspondence received from An Bord Pleanála.
- 1.2 Park Hood is a member of the Irish Landscape Institute and The Landscape Institute (UK) with extensive experience in landscape character and visual amenity assessment, planning application processes and landscape construction techniques for large scale developments of this scale and nature.
- 1.3 Park Hood prepared the Landscape and Visual Statement that was included in the wider Environmental Impact Statement submitted with the application in May 2009. The information submitted included the following:
- Landscape and Visual Assessment including baseline landscape assessment, proposed landscape and mitigation measures, photomontages and impact statement;
 - Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan;
 - Drawing No. 3547 L201 Landscape Mitigation Proposals;
 - Drawing No. 3547 L202 Landscape Proposals - Ground Works Phase 2;
 - Drawing No. 3547 L203 Landscape Proposals - Ground Works Phase 4;
 - Drawing No. 3547 L204 Landscape Restoration – On completion of Landfill Operations
- 1.4 An Bord Pleanála wrote to Tom Phillips and Associates on 18th June 2010 seeking additional information in relation to the effects on the environment of the proposed development. A number of these specifically relate to the landscape and visual assessment.

2.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL STATEMENT ADDENDUM

2.1 Whitewood House and Lough– Baseline Assessment

- 2.1.1 In terms of Visual Impact, the main consideration by An Bord Pleanála in their letter is contained within Item 4 concerning the potential impact on Whitewood House and Lough. Herein, An Bord Pleanála request *“A full and detailed visual impact assessment shall be carried out demonstrating the impact of the proposed development, its stack and plume on the setting of Whitewood House (protected structure) and its parkland setting and particularly the tree lined approach to that protected structure and also an assessment of the impact from the “key viewpoint” shown on Map 05 (Visual Amenity) of Appendix 6 to the Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 described as “Short Range Views of Whitewood Lough from road corridor and parking area including estate house above lough”.*
- 2.1.2 In the original Landscape and Visual Statement, the “Views and Prospects” as identified in the Meath County Development Plan 2001 and the subsequent 2007-2011 Plan were addressed in Chapter 14.5.8 “Designated Viewpoints” and corresponded to Figure 14.3. The views as identified on Map 06 (Visual Amenity) of the Meath Landscape Character Assessment (See Figure 1) were considered but effects on these views were considered to be negligible though the original Statement included 18 viewpoints around the application site that were deemed appropriate to describe and evaluate the predicted effects of the proposal.

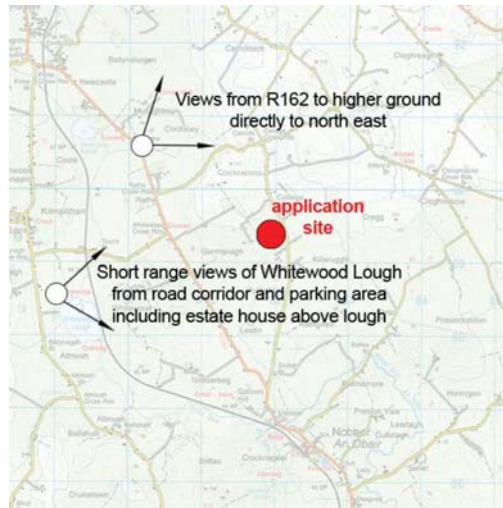


Figure 1: Views as identified on Map 05 (Visual Amenity) of Meath Landscape Character Assessment

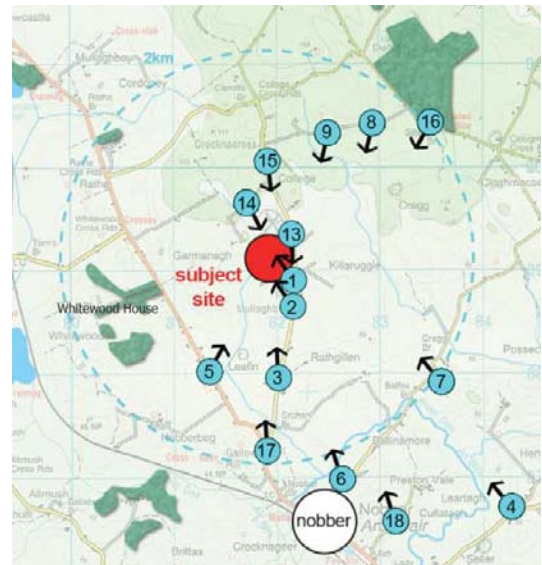


Figure 2: Visual Reference Points as selected in the Landscape and Visual Assessment (2009)

- 2.1.3 A viewpoint (Viewpoint 5) was selected to the south of Whitewood on the R162 Road and College Road junction near Leafin where it was considered there would be potential glimpse views of the proposed chimney stack and associated plume. Chapter 14.7.3 of the original statement stated "This is an important transient view, due to the number of receptors on this main route and the sensitive nature of the designated 'key view'. This view is representative of glimpsed views experienced from short sections of the R162, west of the site. The top of the stack and its plume are barely visible in the background against the skyline. The topography and existing vegetation screen the existing plant from the majority of viewpoints along this stretch of road". It was considered that this viewpoint was representative of where the proposal would be subject to the highest number of *public* visual receptors in the area to the south-west of the site.
- 2.1.4 Following the receipt of the letter from An Bord Pleanála, the design team sought access to Whitewood House (private grounds) to allow a detailed analysis of the potential impacts deriving from the proposal on the landscape character and visual amenity of the demesne. This access was not granted. As such, the assessment that follows is based on the best professional judgement that can be made based on topographical information, analysis of intervening vegetation and the likely magnitude of any adverse effects arising from the proposal at College Proteins site.
- 2.1.5 Whitewood House is a small demesne that is listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (Reference ME-35-N-801886). House lands are severed from Whitewood Lough to the west by the disused Navan - Kingscourt railway line. The house (built 1735 by Richard Castle) is listed as a protected structure (Reference H136) in the County Development Plan 2001 that also describes the property as "An important early 18th Century house built for the Preston family with 3 bays and 2-storeys over a very high basement". The property possesses an historic parkland landscape (indicated on historical OSI maps) though the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage states "Much of woodland no longer present". Irrespective, the vista along the entrance avenue towards the R162 (east) is a notable and strong landscape design feature of historic note. The key consideration in terms of this application is that the proposed Plant and Chimney stack are located to the east albeit at a slight angle off this avenue (See Figures 3 and 4 below).



Figure 3: View of Whitewood House from entrance onto R162 Road showing the tree lined vista that lies to the east of the property.

2.1.7 The landscape in and around Nobber is characterized by low rolling drumlins in mixed farming uses with fields bound by well established hedgerows. Woodland is not extensive though there are numerous pockets and belts dotted across the landscape that combine with the well treed hedgerows to give this area a much more wooded characteristic. Whitewood House is located near the top of a drumlin (+105.9m ASL) and the ground drops away to all sides. While it falls quite steeply to the west towards Whitewood Lough (+49.60m ASL), it falls and undulates more gradually towards the application site (c. +85 to 95m ASL).

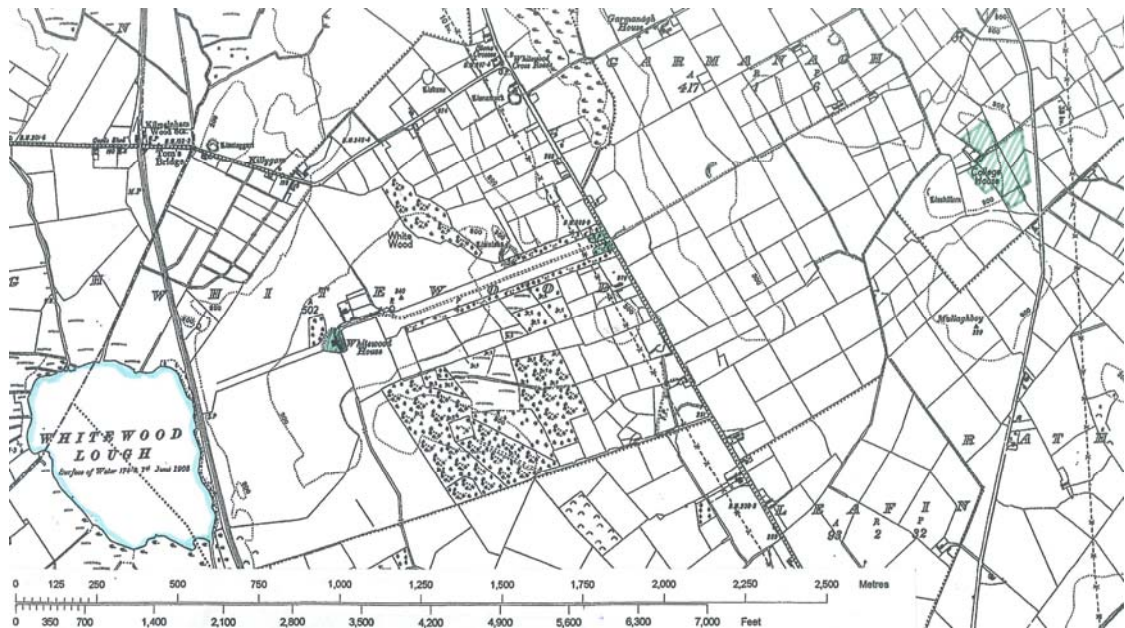


Figure 4: OSI Map showing relationship between application site (hatched in green to the right) and Whitewood House and Lough to the centre and left respectively.

Distances Summary

Application Site to Whitewood House : 2.0km
 Application Site to Whitewood Lough : 2.5km
 Application Site to Avenue Entrance to Whitewood House : 1.1km

2.2 Key viewpoint as per Meath County Development Plan Map 05 – Assessment of Effects on Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

- 2.2.1 In terms of the effects on the “*Short Range Views of Whitewood Lough from road corridor and parking area including estate house above lough*”, the proposal is at such a distance across undulating topography that the only element that is potentially visible will be the plume from the stack. The ridgeline and associated hedgerows and woodland in and around Whitewood House ensure there are no views of the plant itself or a 46m high chimney stack. This is clearly illustrated in the section line shown in Fig. LV03 and the photomontage images produced by TPA. The photomontages show that the existing plume generated by the plant is more visible from the road corridor than the plume from the proposed stack. As the existing plume provides the baseline from which to assess the proposed impacts, the extent of plume visible from the proposed stack can be considered to have a negligible impact on the existing view across Whitewood Lough from the road corridor and car park area.



Figure 5: View from public parking area aside Whitewood Lough looking east towards the Whitewood demesne. The application site is located 2.5km to the east of the lakeshore in the midground behind Whitewood demesne.

2.3 Whitewood House and Demesne – Assessment of Effects on Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

- 2.3.1 In terms of effects on Whitewood House, it is difficult to objectively ascertain this to any exact degree on account of being refused access to the property. There are noted “existing effects” deriving from the existing stack and plume in the submission by Mark Rave Associates (item 3.3 in Submission dated 22nd October 2009) on behalf of the owners of Whitewood House. The key issue is how much this view will change from this existing situation and Mr Rave suggests that this will have a “significant increase in the visibility of the stack and associated plume”.
- 2.3.2 The most obvious consideration in terms of views at Whitewood are those views from the house itself and those enjoyed along the vista to the east which is the main access avenue to the property. Mr Horgan in his Submission from October 2009 included photos from the property towards the application site though it is not possible to make a judgement on these as they appear to have been cropped, zoomed and enlarged and would appear to not represent what the human eye would see. Given the lack of access, a Line of Sight section has been prepared to give an indication of the likely degree of visibility of the Plant, Chimney Stack and plume from the house. This is based on survey information that provided the ground floor level of the house and the top of canopy level for trees within the belt that flanks the southern side of the avenue (Fig. LV04).



Figure 6: Views from the area around the avenue entrance to Whitewood House are filtered and obscured by the extent of existing trees and hedgerows aligning both sides of the R162 Road.



Figure 7: Views in hedgerow gaps from the R162 Road to the east are obscured and filtered by the extent of mature hedgerows and trees as well as an intervening ridgeline.

- 2.3.3 The main vista from the front of the house is along the tree lined driveway. This avenue is not aligned towards the College Proteins site and is flanked on both sides by mature trees that merge into a clump of woodland towards the gate onto the R162 Road. The direct line of sight towards the new stack breaks through the belt of trees along the southern side of the avenue. Given the size of these trees together with the block of woodland and associated hedgerows in the intervening fields, it is assumed that the only element of the proposal that will be visible will be the plume though this will be over 1 kilometre distant. Where visible, the plume will be a very small part of a wider panoramic view or will be a glimpse view through gaps in vegetation. At such a distance, it cannot be considered that it will ever be the focus of a view. The photomontages from Whitewood Lough illustrate that the existing plume from the plant is more visible than the proposed plume will be. Given this baseline the change from the existing situation would be *slight adverse* in the worst case scenario.
- 2.3.4 It is unreasonable – as stated by Mr Rave – to consider that this proposal will have a “significant” impact in terms of the magnitude or scale of effects when measured against recognised terminology such as the “Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2nd Edition) by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2002” (See Appendix A). The term “significant” completely exaggerates the likely effects that will derive on Whitewood House and demesne. In summary, it is acknowledged there will be an effect but it cannot be considered anything other than “slight adverse” to those areas from which views can be afforded through gaps in the trees and woodland.

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 It is the professional opinion of Park Hood that there will be a slight adverse effect deriving on some views from elevated, east facing and open positions within the Whitewood House property *at worst*. Given the distance from the proposal, intervening screening elements and the nature of existing effects deriving from the College Protein Plant, the change cannot be considered to be of a significant magnitude in terms of visual amenity or landscape character.
- 3.2 From the designated viewpoints aside Whitewood Lough and the adjacent road corridor, there will be very limited implications deriving from the proposal and none that will affect the enjoyment or visual amenity of the lake area. The only element that will be occasionally evident will be the plume (over 2.5km distant) and the impact of this would be *negligible* on the existing conditions.

APPENDIX A: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT – THRESHOLD CRITERIA & TERMINOLOGY

The terminology used in this section is based on threshold criteria examples in Appendix 9 of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2nd Edition) by The Landscape Institute and The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2002.

Significance Criteria for Landscape Character and Visual Amenity Effects	
Negligible	No discernible deterioration or improvement in the scale, land-form or pattern of the landscape / townscape quality over the existing situation
Substantial Positive	A change that results in a major improvement in the quality of the landscape character and visual amenity.
Moderate Positive	A change that would cause a noticeable improvement in the existing view or view and fits very well with the existing character. The change has the potential to improve the landscape through removal of land-uses that are detrimental to the existing landscape setting.
Slight Positive	A change that is barely perceptible in terms of effects on existing views or the landscape setting but would improve their quality or character and fits in well with the scale and pattern of the landscape. This includes the restoration of key landscape features or characteristics partially lost through other land uses.
Slight Adverse	A change that is barely perceptible in terms of effects on existing views or the landscape setting but results in a minor change to the existing landscape form or scale and may effect the a recognised landscape character.
Moderate Adverse	A change that would cause a noticeable deterioration in the landscape character and visual amenity and would be out of scale with local patterns, land-forms and landscape setting resulting in an adverse effect on a landscape of recognised quality that will be difficult to fully mitigate.
Substantial Adverse	A change which, by its magnitude, duration or intensity causes a major deterioration in the landscape pattern, landforms and views. The changes permanently degrade, diminish or destroy the integrity of valued landscape characteristics, features, elements in the existing landscape setting and can not be fully mitigated.

Determination of Landscape Quality	
High	Areas that exhibit a strong landscape structure and character with valued features that combine to give the experience of unity, richness and harmony. These are distinct landscapes that may be considered to be of particular importance to conserve and maybe sensitive or very sensitive to change.
Medium	Areas that exhibit positive character but may have evidence of degradation or alteration to features resulting in areas of more mixed character. In general, areas that are potentially sensitive to change but have features worthy of conservation.
Low	Landscape structure has been disturbed, damaged or degraded with few, if any, valued features. Detracting features dominate. Remedial works and landscape management required.

Determination of Landscape Value	
High	High importance and rare landscapes of designated nature e.g. internationally or nationally recognised landscapes such as National Parks, AONB's, World Heritage Sites. No or limited potential for substitution.
Medium	Medium importance and rarity with limited potential for substitution. While the landscapes may not carry designations, they may be valued locally which is expressed through non-official publications or demonstrable use.
Low	Low importance and rarity with few redeeming features. Areas possibly identified for recovery or improvement.

Glossary of Other Terminology used in Landscape and Visual Assessment	
Temporary	Effect lasting for one year or less.
Short-term	Effect lasting one to seven years.
Medium-term	Effect lasting seven to twenty years.
Long-term	Effect lasting twenty to fifty years
Permanent Effect	Effect lasting over fifty years.
Cumulative Effect	The addition of many small impacts to create one larger, more significant, effect.
Synergistic Effect	Where the resultant effect is of greater significance than the sum of its constituents.
Worse case" scenario	Principle applied where the environmental effects may vary (e.g. seasonally) to ensure the most severe potential effect is assessed.
Do nothing Effect	Continued change/evolution of a landscape in the absence of the proposed development.