

MOUNTFIELD FIRST TIME SEWERAGE SCHEME

Southern Water Services Ltd

Planning application for a change of use of land on which to construct & operate a wastewater pumping station & a treatment works:

Clarification on Landscape Character & Visual Appraisal

Introduction

1. The scheme to provide Mountfield with a much needed first time public sewerage system includes proposals for a new pumping station compound on agricultural land adjacent to New Cut and a new Wastewater Treatment Works (WTW) on land adjacent to playing fields, to the south of Solomon's Lane.

Landscape Character

2. Over 80% of Rother, including the village of Mountfield, is in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Weald means wilderness or forest. The area is characterised by ancient woods, dispersed settlements and small irregularly shaped fields. The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. The secondary aims include meeting the need for quiet enjoyment of the countryside and having regard for the interests of those who live and work there.
3. The High Weald AONB Management Plan states, in pursuing the designated purpose of the AONB, *"account should be taken...of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment"*. Further to this, Policy WMP7A advises, *"small scale [waste management] facilities should not be precluded from the... High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the development is for local needs and where it would not compromise the objectives of the designation..."*
4. Mountfield is between the Darwell Valley and Brede Valley landscape character areas. The East Sussex County Landscape Assessment identifies the Darwell Valley as one of the most densely wooded areas of the High Weald. The County Council's vision for the area is for *"a quiet and remote part of the High Weald, with a mysterious character, offering informal recreation in the context of closed woodland environments alternating with open views, and with opportunities for solitude"*.

5. The County Landscape Character Assessment notes that the Brede Valley is characterised by well wooded sides contrasted by long open views across the valley floor.
6. The Rother District Market Towns and Villages Landscape Assessment (August 2009) notes:

“The area of Mountfield around Hoath Hill has grown as a settlement historically due to the need for housing to accommodate the workers in the Gypsum mines and factory. The ribbon development settlement pattern along country lanes would not allow for any significant new development. There may be some capacity in a limited area to the rear of Mountfield Villas if there was a particular local demand. This would need to be in a strong new landscape framework of trees and woodland”, paragraph 5.8.6, page 25.
7. Land to the south of Solomon’s Lane is described as follows:

“This is a low lying meadow area which is enclosed by woodland on the valley slope to the south. The area is a stream valley and part flood plain as well as a recreation ground. A key detractor – is noise from the A2100. A key feature is the group of pine trees and some vernacular buildings”.
8. The landscape character was evaluated as being of moderate sensitivity.

Visual Appraisal

9. Views of the proposed site of the WTW are local only, as the landform and woodland to the south, and houses to the north, create visual barriers to longer distance views. Within this area the visual receptors include: recreational users of the adjacent playing field; houses on Solomon’s Lane (80 metres north of the proposed site), and people travelling along Solomon’s Lane who will get glimpsed views through the existing hedgerow.
10. The Rother District Market Towns and Villages Landscape Assessment evaluated the visual sensitivity of this area as moderate/high.

The Pumping Station

11. The proposed pumping station and compound have been sensitively designed to minimise visual impact on the AONB. The proposed site is located in the corner of a field, immediately to the south of New Cut (refer to Planning Application Drawings 121874-C-800010 and 5105602-WA-503). The proposed pumping station is small, with the majority of the equipment below ground, including a below ground valve chamber and wet well containing duty/standby submersible pumps.
12. At surface level, there will be areas of hard-standing and covered hatches which will provide secure access to the below ground chambers and pipes.

13. Above ground, there will be a vehicle lay-by on New Cut. Within the securely fenced pumping station compound there will be a small kiosk/cabinet, which will provide secure, weatherproof housing for the pumping station electrical controls. The above ground components at the pumping station are small, low level and discrete in design. The proposed kiosk/cabinet is only 0.6m x 2.5m and 1.9m in height (refer to Planning Application Drawing 5105602/WA/118).
14. The chain-link fence around the boundary of the pumping station is 1.8m in height. Locally appropriate hedgerow species, including hazel, will be planted behind the field/highway fence to help integrate the development into the surrounding landscape context and screen views from New Cut (refer to Planning Application Drawing 5105601-WA-502).
15. Overall it is considered that the proposed pumping station is small scale and unobtrusive. The design is sympathetic to its location within the countryside and High Weald AONB.

The Wastewater Treatment Works (WTW)

16. The site of the proposed WTW is adjacent to a playing field, to the south of Solomon's Lane; north of a tributary of the River Line, and east of the A2100 London Road (refer to Planning Application Drawing 121874-C-800011). This location is relatively low lying and it is screened from views from the A2100 London Road, and from the south, by mature woodland, which also provides a backdrop to views of the site from Solomon's Lane (refer to planning application photographs 1 and 2).
17. The WTW treatment plant is modest and utilitarian in design. Drawings 121874-C-800010 and 121874-C-800013 illustrate the relationship between the WTW proposals and surrounding context. Drawing 121874-C-80014 illustrates the above ground components as viewed from inside the site boundary and Drawing 121874-C-800013 illustrates the WTW as viewed from outside the site boundary.
18. Consideration of landscape and visual appraisal was an integral part of the iterative design process. Successive iterations in the design process have reduced the landscape and visual effects of the proposals.
19. The design was adapted and amended to enable plant and structures to be lowered. The proposed MCC and SAFF blower kiosk is 8m x 3.15m and the stand-by generator kiosk is only 4.5m x 3.15m in footprint. Both kiosks, which will be the highest structures, are only 3.4m tall. The proposed equipment kiosks will be dark green in colour, which will help to visually integrate them with the hedgerows in the foreground and woodland in the background.
20. The hand-railing for the various tanks and chambers and task lighting, which are a health and safety requirement, will be partially screened by the hedgerow planting. The simple design benefits from a high degree of transparency, which will enable the woodland vegetation, south of the WTW, to be seen. Therefore it is considered that these necessary safety measures will not add mass, or be visually intrusive, when viewed from Solomon's Lane.
21. The proposed design incorporates sympathetic treatment of external areas, which respect the local landscape character. The proposed hedgerow planting of locally

appropriate species around the site boundary will screen views of the WTW and help to visually integrate it with the woodland to the south, which provides a backdrop to views from Solomon's Lane. As will the use of dark green colours for new plant and buildings.

22. In accordance with Southern Water and national security guidelines, chain link boundary fencing is proposed. This will enable vegetation to grow through it and locally appropriate native hedgerow species will be planted at both the pumping station and the WTW, and at the entrance to the playing field car park (refer to Drawings 5105602-WA-502, 121874-C-800011 and 121874-C-800013). The hedgerow planting proposals are designed to enable the WTW to integrate/fit in the landscape. In time this will help screen operational activities, provide an attractive change through the seasons, and wildlife habitat. The planting will be on the operational side of the fence both for reasons of security; to avoid creating a climbing aid, and to support easy maintenance access.
23. Access to the WTW will be via a new track from Solomon's Lane. The junction with Solomon's Lane is designed to meet the County Council's highways (development control) requirements. A modular grass paved type vehicular access track from Solomon's Lane to the WTW is proposed. This type of paving system is designed to allow rainwater to permeate the surface and vegetation to grow within it, which will soften the appearance of the access. The proposed field gate across the access and use of stock-proof fencing reflect the rural character of the area. Also hedgerow planting is proposed on either side of the entrance to the car park from Solomon's Lane. This will provide an additional layer of natural screening.
24. As the proposed landscaping matures and the WTW is increasingly screened, the development will integrate into the surrounding landscape. Please refer to the attached visualisation.

Conclusions

25. Much of the Mountfield first time public sewerage scheme is below ground. The location and design of the proposed pumping station is discrete, and the design of the WTW is modest, incorporating appropriate landscaping.
26. Above ground, the treatment plant and structures have been lowered as far as is reasonably practicable and are modest in design; reinstatement and additional hedgerow planting, the use of dark green colours, and 'grasscrete' type road surfacing will further reduce visual impact. These design features will enable the proposals to integrate with the backdrop of existing mature vegetation. Woodland screens the site from views from the south and east. The visualisation illustrates the partial views of plant and equipment from the playing field, which is south of Solomon's Lane. Views from Solomon's Lane will be more distant and further screened by existing hedgerow planting, the proposed additional hedgerow planting at the access point to the public highway and the gates across the access.
27. The proposals represent a well-considered development, which responds positively to the landscape context and relevant planning policies.