

Cae Mor Farm Free Range Egg Laying Unit

Landscape and Visual Summary

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Landscape and Visual Summary

This section of the Design and Access Statement (DAS) presents the summary landscape and visual findings relating to the proposed free range egg laying unit at Cae Mor Farm.

Proposed Development

A full description of the proposed development is contained within Section 2 of the DAS but can be broadly summarised for landscape and visual purposes as one proposed building 19.8m wide by 76m long and 6.03m high at the highest ridge point of the roof. Four vents are located along the ridge of the roof, each 1.14m high. Two silos would be located adjacent to the southwestern corner of the building and would be of a height of up to 6m. An access track and associated turning circle would provide access to the site from the nearest local road; the B4579. The approximate length of the access track would be 90m.

Security lights would be associated with the development and these would be motion activated, shutting off again after a short period of time has elapsed. No other lighting would be used within the development.

Drawing No RJC–MZ-1845-01B indicates the landscape enhancements proposed as part of the application. These include increasing the height of the existing hedgerow along the B4579 as well as adding additional hedgerow trees to the hedge. Within the site, an additional belt of trees is proposed along the northwest boundary to complement the existing mature tree belt, and an area of planting around the turning circle area is proposed to further filter any potential views of the proposed development from the west. The full details of the planting would be agreed with the Council so as to maximise the biodiversity and visual screening benefits of these measures whilst fitting with the existing character of local vegetation.

Landscape and Visual Context

These proposed buildings would be situated within 150m of the existing Cae Mor farm buildings. Cae Mor Farm currently consists of the original farm (which is listed, Grade II) and some further modern extensions as well as an outbuilding (which is located to the west on the other side of the local road). The field within which the proposed development would be located is separated from Cae Mor Farm by an agricultural field and woodland block. Each of the fields is bounded by hedgerows, with the hedge line immediately north of the proposed built development formed by a mature treeline of hazel, hawthorn, willow, birch and mountain ash at a height of approximately 6m (**Photo 1**). Just beyond this to the north is a mature block of deciduous woodland of similar height. The eastern field boundary contains a number of mature deciduous trees of heights exceeding 7m (**Photo 2**). The field boundary adjoining with the B4579 typically contains hazel, holly, rose, hawthorn and some bracken, with mountain ash hedgerow trees. (**Photo 3**). The hedge on the northern side of the B road is currently maintained to a height of approximately 2m. However, the hedge

bounding the southern side of the road (the side closest to Cae Mor Ucha) is currently much taller than this, at a height of between 4m and 5m.

The proposed agricultural building would be broadly orientated northwest to southeast and set within the open countryside at approximately 300m AOD, outside of the defined settlement limits of Llwynmawr, which is situated approximately 1.2km to the northwest at approximately 145m AOD. The proposed development would be set into the slope of the landform as indicated on Drawing No RJC-MZ-1845-04. In this way, the building would be less discernible from the south and from the nearby B4579 due to its position in relation to the existing slope of the land, as indicated by the cross sections.

The proposed agricultural buildings are not situated within any national landscape designation (being 3.9km distance from the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), although the site is located within a local landscape designation, Special Landscape Area (SLA). Policy EC5 within the Wrexham UDP (WCBC 2005) states:

Within Special Landscape Areas, priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape. Development, other than for agriculture, small-scale farm-based and other rural enterprises, and essential operational development by utility service providers, will be strictly controlled. Development will be required to conform to a high standard of design and landscaping, and special attention will be paid to minimising its visual impact both from nearby and distant viewpoints.

Within the LANDMAP character areas refined by Wrexham County Borough Council as part of the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG, adopted March 2007), the site is located within Landscape Character Area 4 (LCA4) Ceiriog Valley. The Planning Guidance Note associated with LCA 4 sets out the key characteristics of this LCA and these include:

Visual character:

- Upland pastoral valley with small scale mosaic of fields with hedgerows and woods,
- Steep open slopes give an upland feel even at lower elevations,
- Constantly changing views due to zig zag shape of valley,
- Scattered stone built farms reached by steep winding lanes,
- High quality of the landscape, the result of the sense of peace and tranquillity as well as the scenery.

Geological character:

- Quarries and spoil tips are evident around Glyn Ceiriog,
- Soils vary but are usually well drained loams.

Ecological character:

- Farmland is mainly improved grassland of low biodiversity interest but the high density of hedges and hedgerow trees is valuable for wildlife,
- Valley is rich in woodland habitats – broadleaved, conifer or mixed. Semi natural broadleaved woodland is usually associated with steep slopes and deeper tributary valleys.

Historical character:

- Older evolved/irregular small field patterns of the lower valley survive, giving way to more recently enclosed larger regular fields on upper or steeper slopes.

Cultural character:

- Sheep farming is the dominant land use, with some pheasant rearing, but there is increasing diversification to include rural crafts, woodland management, low key tourism and recreational facilities and activities including fishing and walking,
- The Ceiriog Valley is recognised as a distinct cultural area within Wales. Welsh is widely spoken.

Potential Impacts

Visibility

Being located within a valley on the higher valley slopes, the proposed development has the potential to be visible from a number of locations. The access track would be constructed of materials typically used within the locality and would integrate well. The main building within the proposed development is the main element of the proposal to have a potential impact in visual terms. However, fieldwork has confirmed that due to the high levels of vegetation within the valley (as noted above within the LCA 4 key characteristics), potential visibility of the proposed development would be limited. Due to the nature of the slope in combination with woodland blocks and hedgelines close to the proposed building, no potential views of the development are expected from sections of the slope to the northeast. To the northwest, Llwynmawr is located approximately 150m lower than the proposed site, and fieldwork was unable to locate any open views of the site from public areas within the village due to the varying shape of the valley topography in combination with the well vegetated field boundaries.

However, some more distant views of the proposed site are available from the opposite valley slopes further to the north, above Dolywern, as illustrated by Viewpoints A and B at distances of approximately 2km away. Within these views, the small field pattern on the lower slopes and the larger fields on the higher slopes is evident, as noted within the key characteristics for LCA 4. However, as the blue tone denotes, from these distances the field within which the proposed development would be situated is a very small proportion of the

overall view and is largely screened by the boundary vegetation of hedgerows and woodland blocks. This would also be the case in winter months. The viewpoints also illustrate how views to the higher southern slopes from the settlement areas are screened by the combination of topography and vegetation.

Within Viewpoints A and B, the proposed built form would be located to the bottom left section of the site field (the field highlighted by the blue tone). Existing vegetation screens some parts of this field currently and once the proposed landscaping measures establish, further screening would be evident. The roof of the proposed development would be partially evident in Viewpoints A and B, but would not be seen occupying the whole or even half the field in either view. It would be partially visible, becoming further screened over time and would not be a noticeably large building within either of these views. It is worth noting that existing buildings located on the southern slopes within these views are of a similar height to the proposed development and are all partially screened and seen 'dotted' throughout the view. This would be the case for the proposed development given its location adjacent to areas of existing mature vegetation.

In terms of proximate views of the site from the north and from the footpath nearby to the north, Viewpoints C, D and **Photo 4** illustrate the nature of these potential views. **Photo 4** indicates the well vegetated nature of the footpath on lower slopes to the north, being bounded by mature vegetation with an area of intervening woodland as well. Viewpoint C is located between Cae Mor Farm and the site and illustrates the mature woodland and vegetation along the boundary of the site field as well as the extremely limited part of the site field which is visible above intervening vegetation. Viewpoint D illustrates the view from immediately north of Cae Mor Farmhouse, from slightly lower ground, indicating that the site field is entirely screened from view by intervening vegetation. Each view illustrates the mature and dense nature of local vegetation. It is acknowledged that very limited parts of the roof of the proposed development may initially be visible, mainly in winter months, but this limited visibility would not be intrusive or prominent. Furthermore, the proposed landscaping measures are expected to provide further screening once established.

Nearby views from the west and south are illustrated by Viewpoints E and F. Viewpoint E is located immediately west of the site field, looking east and illustrates the vegetation along the eastern boundary of the site field, against which the proposed development would be seen as a backdrop. The viewpoint also illustrates the slope of the site field and the height of the roadside hedgerows along the B4579, particularly to the south. Viewpoint F illustrates the depth of vegetation along parts of the footpath closest to the proposed site, including a relatively recently planted swathe of trees. From this location, the field within which the site would be located is not visible due to the screening from this vegetation.

Landscape character

The main key characteristics of landscape character are set out above from the Wrexham SPG. For the proposed development to have a significant impact on landscape character, it would need to alter character to such a degree that it became a key characteristic of the

landscape. However, the viewpoints (A to F) have illustrated in combination with the text above that the proposed development would not be so visible, intrusive or prominent so as to become a key characteristic of landscape character. The nature of views in the area are open over long distance, but characteristically interrupted and filtered over short to medium distances by the layering of vegetation and the slope of local landforms. As a result, any visibility of the proposed development across short and medium distances would be partial and largely screened, even in winter months, much in the same way as existing built form is irregularly and partially visible in this landscape. In this way, the key characteristics of the landscape would remain intact as the proposal would fit suitably within the surroundings; the small scale mosaic of fields with hedgerows and woods would not be significantly altered by the introduction of the proposal, nor would the steep slopes or the constantly changing views. In addition, the sense of peace and tranquillity would also remain intact (key characteristics set out above).

The proposed development would be additional built form within a rural landscape and this would result in some limited alteration of landscape character, particularly to the field within which the site is proposed. However, built form – particularly agricultural built form – is not necessarily out of character with the rural landscape, especially when it is sited with consideration to local vegetation and natural screening, as is the case in this location.

Landscape designations

As noted above, the site is located within the SLA local landscape designation. Policy EC5 relating to this designation is also set out above. This proposed development is considered to be for '*agriculture, small-scale farm-based and other rural enterprises*' and has considered carefully the location of the development so as to limit the potential visual impacts. Evidence of the limited visual impacts is illustrated in Viewpoints A to F and within the photographs in this section of the DAS. To further ensure the minimisation of potential visual impacts, the proposal has also provided a range of landscape and biodiversity enhancement. As such, it is considered that the proposal conforms with Policy EC5.

Listed Buildings

We note that Cae Mor Farmhouse (and adjoining farm building) is a listed building (UID 80884, Grade II). Viewpoints C and D illustrate the lower elevation of the farmhouse in relation to the site and the well vegetated nature of the intervening landscape, with a mature woodland block and mature tree belt along the field boundary between the site and the listed building. As these viewpoints also note, the site field is entirely screened from view from the farmhouse, with the potential for only limited parts of the roof of the proposed development to be visible from the farmhouse. Once the proposed landscape enhancement measures have established it is envisaged that the roof would be screened further. Therefore it is considered that the proposed development would have a very limited effect on views to and from the farmhouse.

Conclusions

In June 2015 a similar proposal was permitted at appeal within Wrexham County Borough (APP/H6955/A/14/2228984). The appeal site was within open countryside and within the SLA. In many ways, this appeal site is a useful comparison. The size and height of the building is similar to this application. The Inspector notes that glimpsed views of the building would be available, but these would be limited and dependent upon the time of the year. More distant views would also be available, some from the AONB 1km away and the use of appropriate colour and finish to the building would help assimilate it into the wider landscape which would “minimise the visual impact of the building from both nearby and distant viewpoints” (para 15). Paragraph 16 also notes “although the building would be larger than most others in the locality, overall I am satisfied that in the majority of views, the building would be effectively screened by the existing vegetation to the boundaries of the field.” In landscape and visual terms the Inspector also notes (in para 22) “I am satisfied that whilst the proposed development would be set apart from the existing farm buildings it would not appear isolated from built development in the wider landscape. The proposed location takes advantage of existing landscape features for screening the building, minimising the effect it would have on the character of the area”.

This application has carefully considered the siting and location of the development and has included additional landscape and biodiversity enhancement measures so as to further integrate the development into its surroundings. As a result, the visibility of the proposed development would be extremely limited and the effects on landscape character have been minimised.



Photo 1: Northern field boundary.



Photo 2: Eastern field boundary.



Photo 3: Field boundary along B4579.

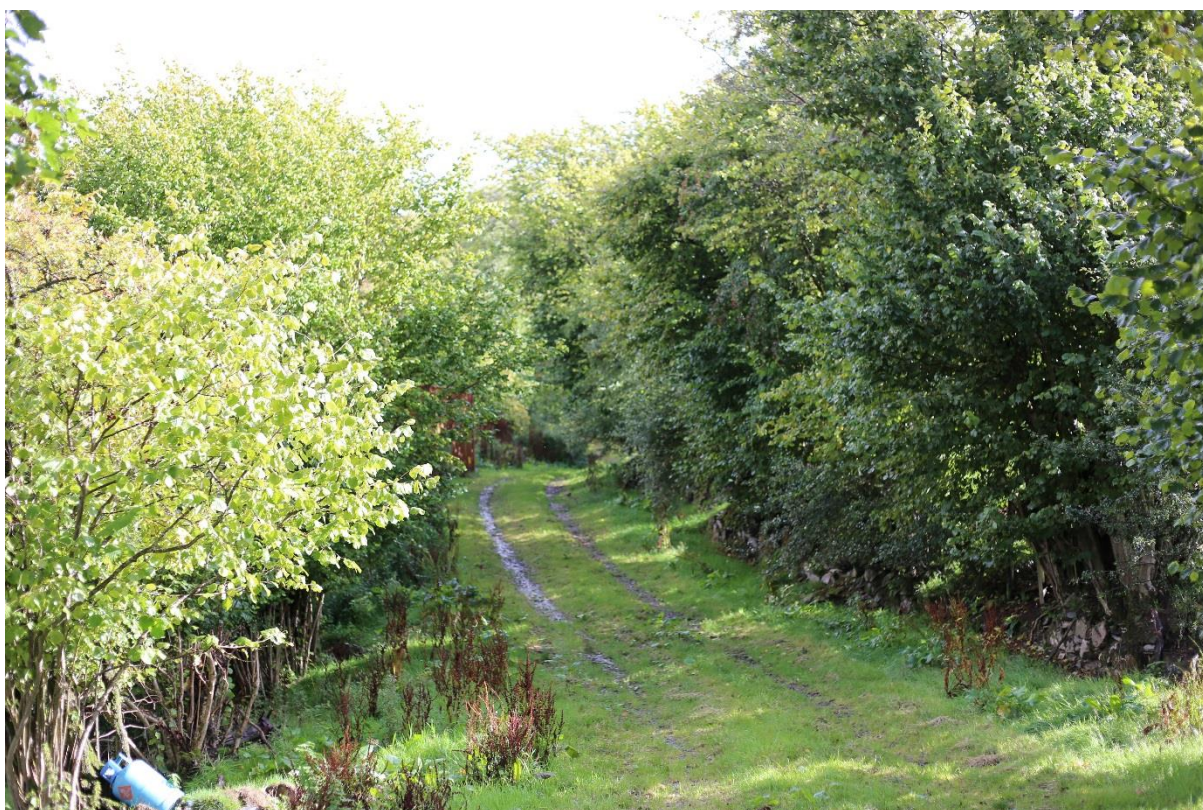


Photo 4: View along footpath immediately east of Cae Mor Farm showing well vegetated nature of boundaries to footpath.