PROPOSED HDF ESIA RENEWSTABLE BOKAMOSO PROJECT SITE LOCATED IN DR PIXLEY KA SEME LOCAL MUNICIPALITY WARD 7, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nsovo Environmental Consulting was appointed by Hydrogene de France (HDF) Energy, as the independent environmental consultant to undertake the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for the proposed HDF Renewstable Bokamoso Project Site located in Dr Pixley Ka Seme Local Municipality Ward 7, Mpumalanga Province.

Outline Landscape Architects was requested to compile a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for the project. This VIA is a specialist study that addresses the visual effects of the proposed power plant project.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Hydrogene de France (HDF) has been awarded 1782 ha of Eskom's land to develop 6 Renewstable® power plants in the province of Mpumalanga, South Africa. Distributed over six different plots within Tutuka and Majuba Coal Power Stations, HDF is part of a cluster made up of different project developers, also awarded with land in the area for the development of infrastructure related to renewable energy production. The Bokamoso site is one of four projects that HDF are undertaking to develop and implement in the Majuba Area.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

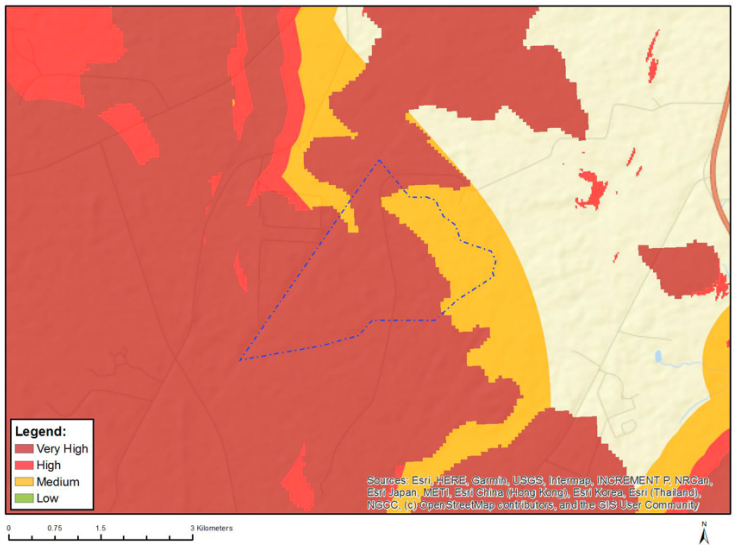
The study area is within Ward 7 of the Gert Sibande District Municipality and Dr Pixley Ka Seme Local Municipality in the Mpumalanga Province. The site is southwest of the small town of Amersfoort.

The site is located in the vicinity of Eskom's Majuba Coal Power Station. The Bokamoso project is settled on an amount of approximatively 250 ha.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SITE SENSITIVITY VERIFICATION

The national screening tool report was generated on 26/06/2024 12:52:52 and the landscape theme for the Bokamoso site was rated with a "very high" sensitivity relating to mountains and ridges in the landscape being of concern. The elevation map (Figure 5) indicates a fall of 50m across the entire site and the site being gently undulating. The site is in near proximity to the Bokamoso Nature Reserve.



VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Within the receiving environment, specific viewers (visual receptors) experience different views of the visual resource and value it differently. They will be affected because of alterations to their views due to the proposed project. The visual receptors included in this study are:

- Residents
- Tourists
- Air and Road Travel

SIGNIFICANCE OF VISUAL IMPACTS

VISUAL IMPACT ON RESIDENTS

The study area is sparsely populated, with a higher population in the small town of Amersfoort. There are commercial farms and homesteads near the site. The towns and surrounding areas are generally degraded and not very scenic.

Farm residents will experience intrusion on their views due to the presence of the proposed new power plant. It can be concluded that the study area has a low density of residents that will be affected viewers.

VISUAL IMPACT ON TOURISTS

The entire study area is considered to have low tourism potential, mostly because of the environmental degradation caused by mining developments and human settlements. There is also no direct major thoroughfare to prominent tourist destinations.

The temporary exposure to possible unsightly views of the construction camps and the associated activity will be minimal and localised.

The severity of the visual impact of the power plant on tourists will be improbable, causing a *low* visual impact.

VISUAL IMPACT ON AIR AND ROAD TRAVEL

The major route in the study area is the N11 but does not directly pass the proposed power plant. The smaller regional roads, the R35 and R23 connect the towns, mines and farms. The secondary road network in the study area carries a much lower volume of motorists.

Motorists' visual exposure to the proposed power plant will be brief and the severity of the visual impact will be *low*.

The Majuba Power Station Airport is approximately 2km away, to the west of the site. A small airfield is located approximately 10km away from the site to the north.

Glint and glare of the solar panels could be a potential visual distraction and a possible air travel hazard. Due to the tracker-oriented structures of the solar panels, the glint and glare will change during the course of the day. It is expected to be a momentary exposure with a short duration of solar reflection at certain times of the day. The significance of the potential visual impact is expected to be moderately *low.*

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

In most cases, the landscape and visual impacts occurring during the construction phase can be mitigated effectively. Rehabilitation of the disturbed areas may cause a reduction in the negative visual impact of the study area. Screening of the sites can be done by vegetation (trees and shrubs) to minimise the impact by visual receptors. The solar panel should have an anti-reflective coating to minimise glint and glare.

Therefore, the proposed development has an anticipated low significance of visual impact.

CONCLUSION

The proposed activities for the power plant have been evaluated against internationally accepted criteria to determine the impact they will have on the landscape character and the viewers that have been identified in the study area.

The construction and operation of the proposed power plant may have a visual impact on users within a close proximity to the site. After mitigation, the visual impact for most users is expected to range between moderate and low.

An advantage for the power plant is that it utilises a renewable energy source to generate electricity. It does not emit any harmful by-products or pollutants that may pose health risks to users or observers.

If mitigation is undertaken as recommended it can be concluded that the significance can be managed to acceptable levels.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment.
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration of the United States Department of Transportation. The publishers of the guide "*Visual Impact Assessment for High Projects*" 1981.
LCA	Landscape Character Assessment.
LT	Landscape Type
VAC	Visual Absorption Capacity
VIA	Visual Impact Assessment.
ZVI	Zone of Visual Influence

1. INTRODUCTION

Nsovo Environmental Consulting was appointed by Hydrogene de France (HDF) Energy, as the independent environmental consultant to undertake the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for the proposed HDF Renewstable Bokamoso Project Site located in Dr Pixley Ka Seme Local Municipality Ward 7, Mpumalanga Province.

Outline Landscape Architects was requested to compile a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for the project. This VIA is a specialist study that addresses the visual effects of the proposed power plant. Kathrin Hammel, the principal Landscape Architect and Visual Specialist from Outline Landscape Architects undertook this Visual Impact Assessment. She is a registered Professional Landscape Architect at the South African Council of Landscape Architects, SACLAP no 20162. Kathrin has been involved as Visual Impact Specialist since 2009

Outline Landscape Architects is an independent sub-consultant and neither the author, nor Outline Landscape Architects will benefit from the outcome of the project decision-making.

As part of the Eskom lander tender MWP1247GX, Hydrogene de France (HDF) has been awarded 1782 ha of Eskom's land to develop 6 Renewstable® power plants in the province of Mpumalanga, South Africa. Distributed over six different plots within Tutuka and Majuba Coal Power Stations, HDF is part of a cluster made up of different project developers, also awarded with land in the area for the development of infrastructure related to renewable energy production. HDF under its Special Purpose Company (SPC) "Renewstable Mpumalanga (Pty) Ltd" is undertaking the development and implementation of 4 projects in the Majuba Area named as follows:

• Renewstable® Qhakaza

• Renewstable® Bokamoso

• Renewstable® Sivutse

• Renewstable® Ntokozo

1.1. BACKGROUND AND BRIEF

This VIA will conform to the requirements of a Level Three assessment which requires the realisation of the following objectives (Adapted from Oberholzer (2005)):

- Determination of the extent of the study area.
- Description of the proposed project and the receiving environment.
- Identification and description of the landscape character of the study area.
- Identification of the elements of particular visual value and -quality that could be affected by the proposed project.
- Identification of landscape- and visual receptors in the study area that will be affected by the proposed project and assess their sensitivity.
- Indication of potential landscape- and visual impacts.
- Assessment of the significance of the landscape- and visual impacts.
- Recommendations of mitigation measures to reduce and/or alleviate the potential adverse landscape- and visual impacts.

1.2. STUDY AREA

The study area is within Ward 7 of the Gert Sibande District Municipality and Dr Pixley Ka Seme Local Municipality in the Mpumalanga Province (Figure 1). The site is southwest of the small town of Amersfoort.

The site is located in the vicinity of Eskom's Majuba Coal Power Station. The Bokamoso project is settled on an amount of approximatively 450 ha shared with Renewstable® Sivutse.

The respective parcel is on Portion 5 of the Farm Rietfontein 66-HS and is corresponding to the "Renewstable® Bokamoso project" delimitation in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Locality Map

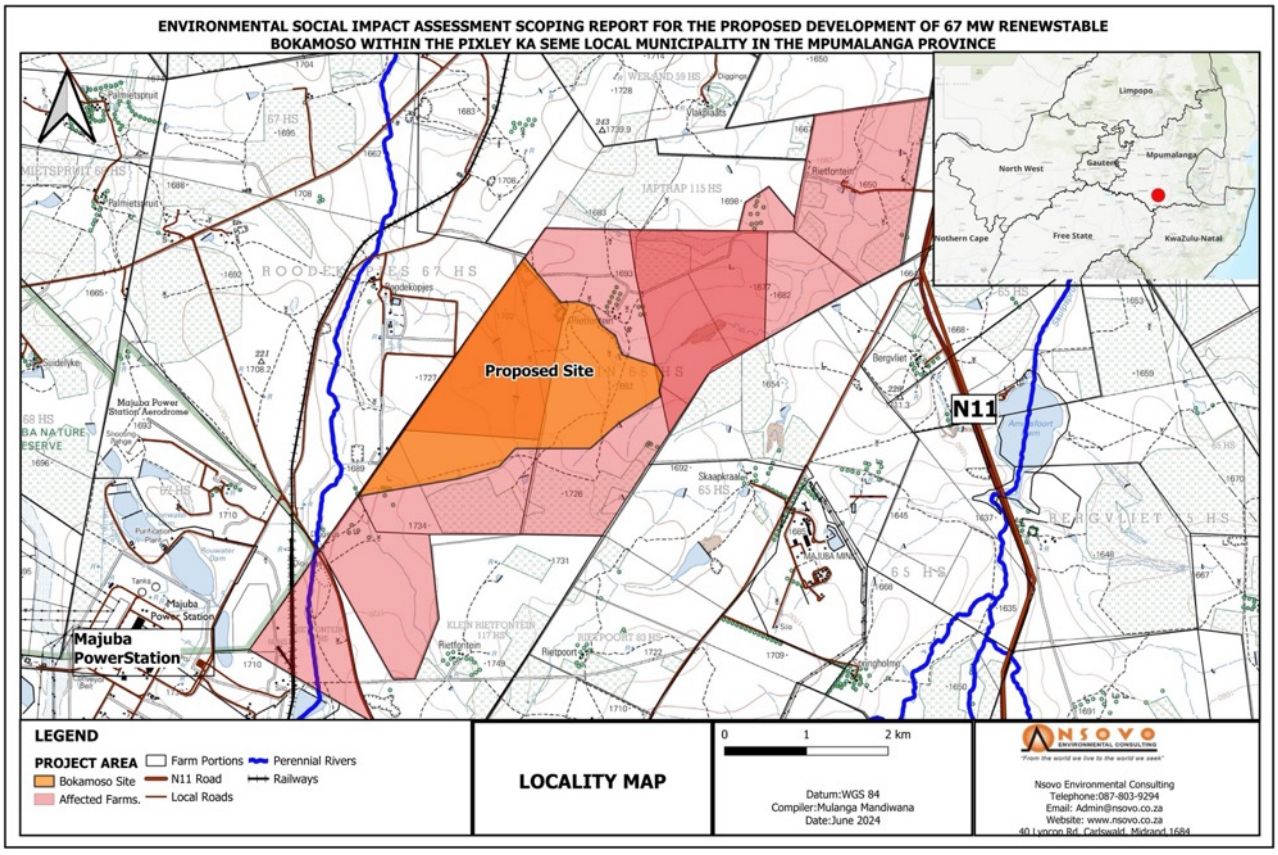


Figure 2: 3D view of HDF similar project located in Swakopmund, Namibia

2. STUDY APPROACH

2.1. INFORMATION BASE

This assessment was based on information from the following sources:

- Topographical maps and GIS generated data were sourced from the Surveyor General, and EcoGIS (2023) respectively.
- Observations made and photographs taken during site visits.
- Professional judgement based on experience gained from similar projects.
- Literature research on similar projects.

2.2. ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This assessment was undertaken during the conceptual stage of the project and is based on information available at the time.

- This level of assessment excludes surveys to establish viewer preference and thereby their sensitivity. Viewer sensitivity is determined by means of a commonly used rating system (Table 3).
- The site visit was conducted on the 30th of October 2023 and the photographs used in this report illustrate the character of the landscape in the summer on a rainy day.

2.3. LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE

The level of confidence assigned to the findings of this assessment is based on:

- The level of information available and/or understanding of the study area (rated 2); and
- The information available and/or knowledge and experience of the project (rated 3).

This visual impact assessment is rated with a general confidence level of 6. This rating indicates that the author's general confidence in the accuracy of the findings is *high* (Table 2). Where the confidence level of specific findings is not regarded as high, it is noted in the last column of each impact assessment table.

2.4. METHOD

A broad overview of the approach and methodology used in this assessment is provided below:

- The extent of the study area is determined and indicated in Figure 1.
- The site is visited to establish a photographic record of the site, views and areas of particular visual quality and or -value.
- The project components and activities are described and assessed as potential elements of visual and landscape impacts.
- The receiving environment is described in terms of its prevailing landscape- and visual character.
- Landscape- and visual receptors that may be affected by the proposed project are identified and described.
- Mitigation measures are proposed to reduce adverse impacts; and
- The findings of the study are documented in this Visual Impact Assessment.

3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

3.1. OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT

This project is a high-capacity renewable power plant based on hydrogen energy storage technology.

The Renewstable® power plant converts the electricity from the photovoltaic park into hydrogen through an electrolyser system, then stores this hydrogen in compressed gas form, and conveys the electricity to the grid through a fuel cell system, when the photovoltaic park no longer produces a sufficient amount of energy. Hydrogen technologies rely on the electrochemical properties of water by decomposing and then recomposing a water molecule (H2O) thanks to electrical energy, without emitting greenhouse gases. Thus, the Mass Storage Energy (MSE) system does not generate any harmful atmospheric emissions: oxygen, with traces of water (as vapor), hydrogen and nitrogen during the maintenance phase. The site also includes battery power storage to maximize plant performance and improve customer service.

The table below indicates the description of the proposed activities that may have a visual impact.

Table 1: Description of Activities

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Power Plant Main Components	Consists of an Electrolyser, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), Photovoltaic Plant, Hydrogen Storage Tanks and Fuel Cells.
Supporting Infrastructure	Buildings, Site and Access Roads, Site Lighting

3.2. PROJECT COMPONENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Each project component and activity will affect the receiving environment differently and is therefore discussed separately. The following project components will occur during the construction and operational phases of the project and are identified as elements that may cause a potential landscape and/or visual impact:

3.2.1. CONSTRUCTION CAMPS AND LAY-DOWN YARDS

Temporary construction camps will be present for the duration of the construction period. The appointed contractor will set up a construction camp where practical for each activity. The material lay-down yards are expected to be located adjacent to the construction camps and will serve as storage areas for the construction material and equipment.

3.2.2. ACCESS ROADS

An access road will be developed during construction but will remain for the lifetime of the project as a maintenance route. Existing roads can be used as far as possible, and the visual impact can be kept to a minimum.

3.3. VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PROJECT COMPONENTS

The proposed development includes a solar field of solar arrays.

Photovoltaic (PV) panels are designed to generate electricity by absorbing the rays of the sun and are constructed of dark-coloured materials and are covered by anti-reflective coatings. The orientation and tilt of the PV panels can be designed to mitigate the visual impact of the solar farm.

The chosen PV system for this project is the tracker-oriented structure which follows the sunlight, as it maximizes the power generated by the PV plant all day. This implies that the orientation of the solar panel changes throughout the day and does not affect viewers from one permanent angle.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Landscape and visual impacts may result from changes to the landscape. A distinction should be made between impacts on the visual resource (landscape) and on the viewers. The former are impacts on the physical landscape that may result in changes to landscape character while the latter are impacts on the viewers themselves and the views they experience.

4.1. VISUAL RESOURCE

Visual resource is an encompassing term relating to the visible landscape and its recognisable elements, which through their co-existence, result in a particular landscape character.

4.1.1. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The study area consists primarily of human settlements and agricultural land. The natural landscape is generally degraded, with some pristine grassland landscape remaining. There is some vacant undeveloped land that was previously cultivated, as well as land used for subsistence farming (Figure 4). The Majuba Power Station is a prominent feature in the landscape. Coal mining in the area is widespread and is one of the key land-uses and contributes significantly to the visual degradation of the study area.

The Majuba Power Station Airport is approximately 2km away, to the west of the site. A small airfield is located approximately 10km away from the site, to the north-west.

The landscape character changes through the study area and there is change in elevation and topographical features. Landscape types are distinguished by differences in topographical features, vegetation communities and patterns, land use and human settlement patterns (Swanwick; 2002).

The broad scale vegetation type that has been identified in the study area is the Amersfoort Highveld Clay Grassland (Figure 3).

4.1.2. VISUAL CHARACTER

Visual character is based on human perception and the observer's response to the relationships between and composition of the landscape, the land uses and identifiable elements in the landscape. The description of the visual character includes an assessment of the scenic attractiveness regarding those landscape attributes that have aesthetic value and contribute significantly to the visual quality of the views, vistas and/or viewpoints of the study area.

The overall landscape varies between agricultural landscape, which is undulating to flat, to degraded, polluted landscapes around homesteads and towns. Majuba Power Station is south of the site and large mines present a negative effect on the visual character of the landscape. The proposed study area has historically been used for agriculture.

4.1.2.1 Visual Value

Visual value relates to those attributes of the landscape or elements in the landscape to which people attach values that though not visually perceivable, still contribute to the value of the visual resource. These visual values are derived from ecological, historical, social and/or cultural importance and are described in terms of their uniqueness, scarcity, and naturalness and/or conservation status. The importance of visual value of a landscape or element in the landscape is measured against its value on an international, national and local level.

Very few parts of the study area have been left undisturbed and there is very little to no unspoilt pristine grassland landscape remaining. These areas however remain under pressure and are vulnerable due to human settlement expansion and mining activities.

4.1.2.2 Visual Quality

Visual quality is a qualitative evaluation of the composition of landscape components and their excellence in scenic attractiveness. Many factors contribute to the visual quality of the landscape and are grouped under the following main categories (Table 2) that are internationally accepted indicators of visual quality (FHWA, 1981):

Table 2: Criteria of Visual Quality (FHWA, 1981)

INDICATOR	CRITERIA
Vividness	The memorability of the visual impression received from contrasting landscape elements as they combine to form a striking and distinctive visual pattern.
Intactness	The integrity of visual order in the natural and man-built landscape, and the extent to which the landscape is free from visual encroachment.
Unity	The degree to which the visual resources of the landscape join together to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern. Unity refers to the compositional harmony of inter-compatibility between landscape elements.

The landscape is allocated a rating from an evaluation scale of 1 to 7 and divided by 3 to get an average. The evaluation scale is as follows: Very Low =1; Low =2; Moderately Low =3; Moderate =4; Moderately High =5; High =6; Very High =7;

The regional landscape is assessed against each indicator separately. All three indicators should be *high* to obtain a *high* visual quality. The evaluation is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Visual Quality of the regional landscape

VIVIDNESS	INTACTNESS	UNITY	VISUAL QUALITY
3	2	2	Low

The visual quality of the landscape is Low and can be attributed to the mining developments, environmental degradation and scattered towns and settlements.

4.1.2.3 Visual absorption capacity

Visual Absorption Capacity (VAC) signifies the ability of the landscape to accept additional human intervention without serious loss of character and visual quality or value. VAC is founded on the characteristics of the physical environment such as:

- Degree of visual screening:
  A degree of visual screening is provided by landforms, vegetation cover and/or structures such as buildings. For example, a high degree of visual screening is present in an area that is mountainous and is covered with a forest compared to an undulating and mundane landscape covered in grass.
- Terrain variability:
  Terrain variability reflects the magnitude of topographic elevation and diversity in slope variation. A highly variable terrain will be recognised as one with great elevation differences and a diversity of slope variation creating talus slopes, cliffs and valleys. An undulating landscape with a monotonous and repetitive landform will be an example of a low terrain variability.
- Land cover:
  Land cover refers to the perceivable surface of the landscape and the diversity of patterns, colours and textures that are presented by the particular land cover (i.e., urbanised, cultivated, forested, etc.)

A basic rating system is used to evaluate the three VAC parameters. The values are relative and relate to the type of project that is proposed and how it may be absorbed in the landscape (Table 4). A three-value range is used; three (3) being the highest potential to absorb an element in the landscape and one (1) being the lowest potential. The values are counted together and categorised in a *high*, *medium* or *low* VAC rating.

Table 4: Regional Visual Absorption Capacity evaluation

ACTIVITY	VISUAL SCREENING	TERRAIN VARIABILITY	LAND COVER	VAC
Power Plant Main Components	2	2	1	Moderately low
Supporting Infrastructure	2	2	1	Moderately low

The VAC of the study area is considered moderately low for the development of the proposed activities and a moderately-low overall screening capacity is expected for this project.

The moderately-low VAC relates to the slightly undulating topography (Figure 5) and agricultural landscape with mostly monotonous vegetation. The new power plant is expected to only partially be absorbed into the landscape and topography.

Figure 3: Vegetation Map

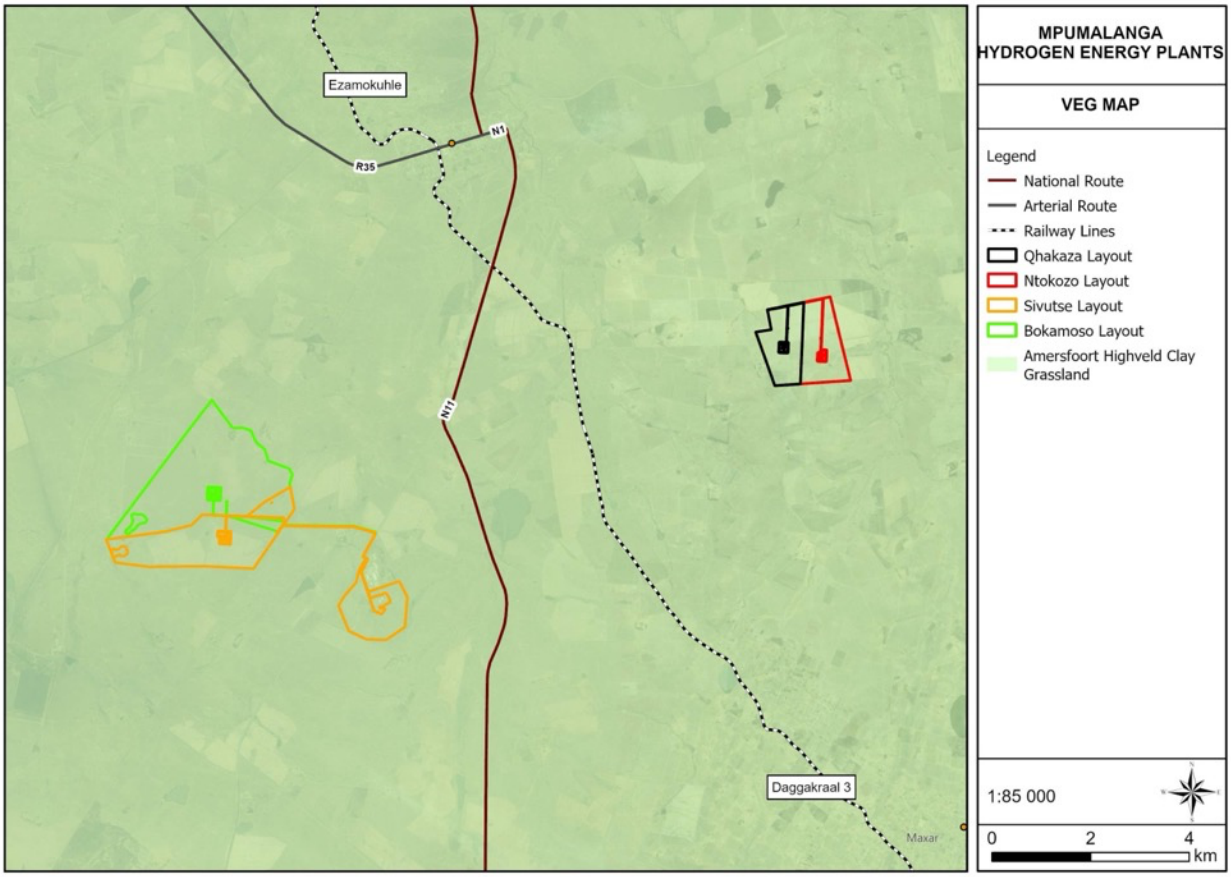


Figure 4: Land Cover Map

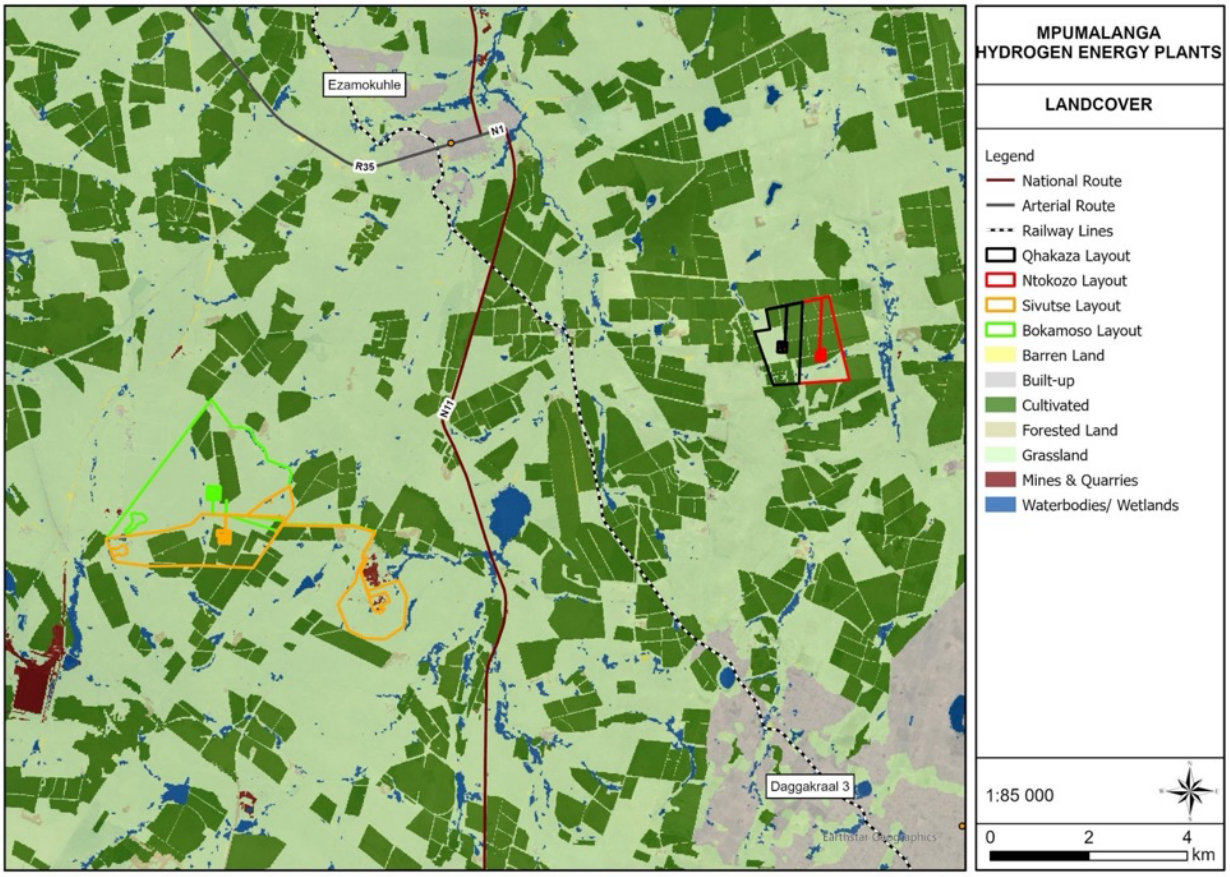


Figure 5: Landscape Elevation

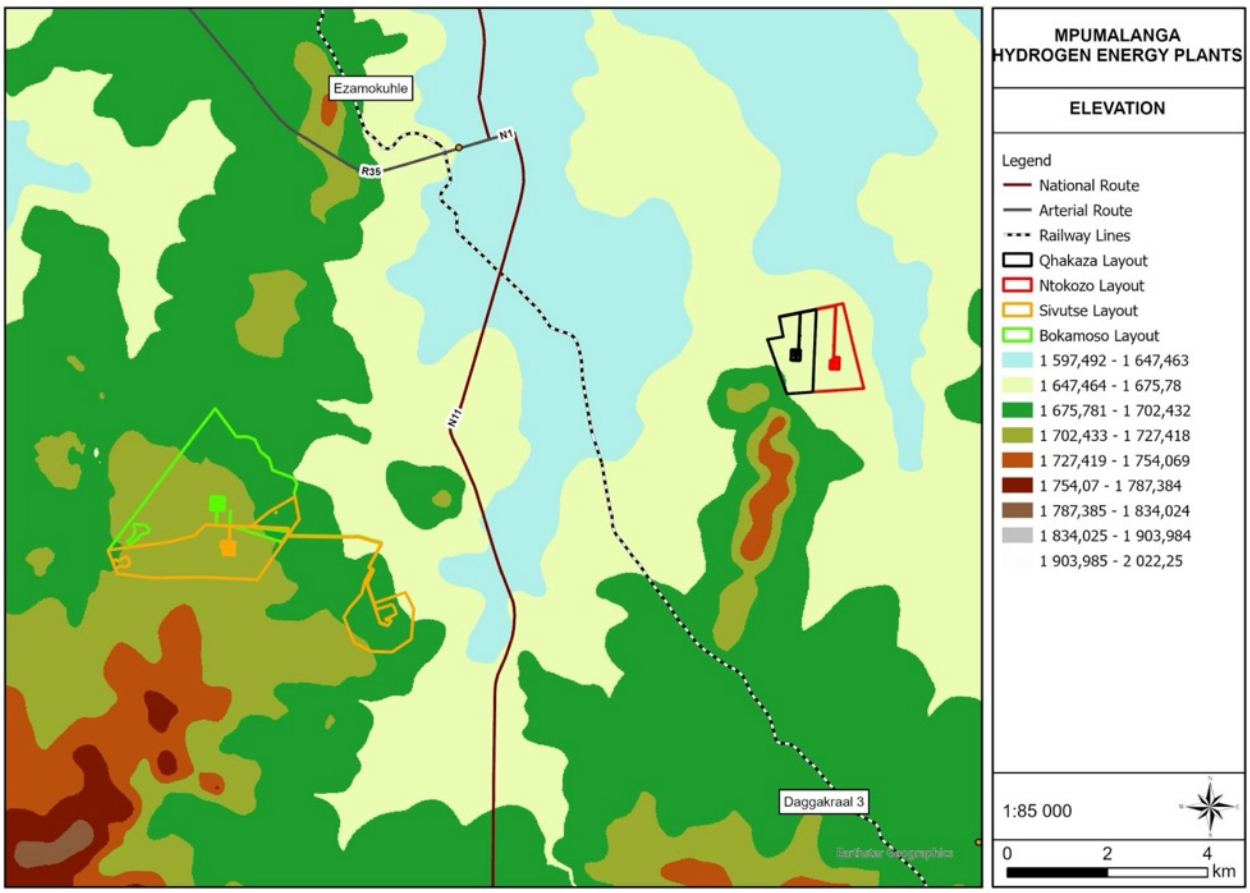


Figure 6: Landscape character of study area

Figure 7: Majuba Power Station

Figure 8: Agricultural Landscapes on R23

Figure 9: Farmstead in slightly undulating landscapes

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The significance of impacts is a comparative function relating to the severity of the identified impacts on the respective receptors. The significance of an impact is considered *high* should a *highly* sensitive receptor be exposed to a *highly* severe impact as indicated on Table 5 below.

Table 5: Significance of impacts

RECEPTOR SENSITIVITY	IMPACT SEVERITY		
	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
LOW	No significance	Low	Low
MEDIUM	Low	Medium	Medium
HIGH	Low	Medium	High

5.1. SIGNIFICANCE OF LANDSCAPE IMPACT

5.1.1. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER SENSITIVITY

The sensitivity of the landscape character is an indication of "…the degree to which a particular landscape can accommodate change from a particular development, without detrimental effects on its character" (GLVIA, 2002). A landscape with a *high* sensitivity would be one that is greatly valued for its aesthetic attractiveness and/or have ecological, cultural or social importance through which it contributes to the inherent character of the visual resource.

The majority of the study area is considered to have moderate landscape character sensitivity due to the mostly agricultural landscape, environmental degradation and the minimal pristine condition of the landscape, the moderate visual quality and minimal tourism value. The site falls within the summer rainfall zone, and during the winter months plants are dormant and low growing.

Previous human activities and interventions have impacted significantly on the original landscape character. In this case, mining related activities, existing infrastructure, including power lines, power plants, roads, etc., can be classified as landscape disturbances and elements that cause a reduction in the condition of the affected landscape type and negatively affect the quality of the visual resource.

The assessment of the landscape is substantiated through professional judgement and informed reasoning which is based on the landscape character assessment in Section 4 above. A landscape sensitivity rating was adapted from GOSW (2006) (Table 6) and applied in the classification of the study area into different sensitivity zones.

Table 6: Landscape character sensitivity rating (Adapted from GOSW, 2006)

	DESCRIPTION
Low sensitivity	These landscapes are likely to: ◦ Have distinct and well-defined landforms. ◦ Have a strong sense of enclosure. ◦ Provide a high degree of screening. ◦ Have been affected by extensive development or man-made features. ◦ Have reduced tranquillity. ◦ Are likely to have little inter-visibility with adjacent landscapes. ◦ Exhibit no or a low density of sensitive landscape features that bare visual value.
Moderate sensitivity	These landscapes are likely to: ◦ Have a moderately elevated topography with reasonably distinct landforms that provides some sense of enclosure. ◦ Have been affected by several man-made features. ◦ Have limited inter-visibility with adjacent landscapes. ◦ Exhibit a moderate density of sensitive landscape features that bare visual value.
High sensitivity	These landscapes are likely to: ◦ Consist mainly of undulating plains and poorly defined landforms. ◦ Be open or exposed with a remote character and an absence of man-made features. ◦ Are often highly visible from adjacent landscapes. ◦ Exhibit a high density of sensitive landscape features that bare visual value.

5.1.2. SEVERITY OF POTENTIAL LANDSCAPE IMPACTS

Landscape impacts are alterations to the fabric, character, visual quality and/or visual value which will either positively or negatively affect the landscape character. During the construction and operational phases, the project components are expected to impact on the landscape character of the landscape types it traverses. The magnitude/severity of this intrusion is measured against the scale of the project, the permanence of the intrusion and the loss in visual quality, -value and/or VAC.

Table 7: Landscape impact – Altering the landscape character.

LANDSCAPE IMPACT								
Activity	**Nature of Impact**	**Extent of Impact**	**Duration of Impact**	**Severity of Impact**	**Probability of Impact**	**Significance without Mitigation**	**Significance with Mitigation**	**Level of Confidence**
Construction phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative Impacting on the visual quality of the landscape due to the presence of foreign elements and a loss of vegetation cover.	Localised impacts over an extensive area	Permanent if not mitigated	Moderate	Definite	Moderate	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Moderate	Definite	Moderate	Low	High
Operational phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative Impacting on the visual quality of the landscape.	Localised impact	Permanent if not mitigated	Moderate	Definite	Moderate	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Moderate	Definite	Moderate	Low	High

Construction phase

The activities that are expected to cause landscape impacts are the establishment of construction camps, clearing for the photovoltaic solar plant, and the construction of access roads. These activities will create surface disturbances which will result in the removal of vegetation and the exposure of the underlying soil. The exposed soil and change in texture will contrast severely with the intact vegetation around the disturbance footprint. The extent of the disturbances will affect a large footprint area.

The construction camps and lay-down yards are anticipated to disturb a much larger area. The size and location of the construction camps will play a major role in the severity of the landscape impact. Accurate technical information is not available for the construction camps but due to the site being remote and away from most visual receptors, it is not highly visible. This mitigates the impact considerably.

Considering the moderately low VAC throughout most of the study area, the developed condition of great parts of the landscape and the relatively high recovery rate of the endemic vegetation, the *severity of landscape impact* during the construction stage is expected to be *moderate* for the proposed power plant project. Surface disturbances can be minimised through, for example, utilising existing roads.

The *severity of the landscape impact* can be mitigated to a low severity for all the proposed items. Sensitive placement of the construction camps, limited surface disturbance and prompt rehabilitation are prerequisite conditions if the severity of impact is to be reduced.

There may be a noticeable increase in heavy vehicles utilising the roads to the development site that may cause a visual nuisance to road users and landowners in the area.

Operational phase

Once the power plant has been established, operational activities are minimal.

The main components of the power plant and associated infrastructure will be seen as one development. Solar glint and glare create the highest visual impact during the operational phase. It will pose a visual impact to rural residents that look onto the site. Motorists and pilots may also be affected, but it is anticipated to be a momentary exposure with a short duration of solar reflection.

Surface disturbances that occur during construction may remain for an extended period during the operational phase. These are seen as residual effects carried forward from the construction phase and can be substantially mitigated if treated appropriately during the construction phase.

Closure phase

Upon closure, rehabilitation of affected areas will take place and visual aesthetics will be improved. Minimal negative residual impact is expected on visual aspects.

5.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF VISUAL IMPACTS

5.2.1. VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Within the receiving environment, specific viewers (visual receptors) experience different views of the visual resource and value it differently. They will be affected because of alterations to their views due to the proposed project. The visual receptors are grouped according to their similarities. The visual receptors included in this study are:

- Residents.
- Air and Road Travel.
- Tourists.

To determine visual receptor sensitivity a commonly used rating system is utilised. This is a generic classification of visual receptors and enables the visual impact specialist to establish a logical and consistent visual receptor sensitivity rating for viewers who are involved in different activities without engaging in extensive public surveys.

5.2.1.1 Residents

Residents of the affected environment are classified as visual receptors of *high* sensitivity owing to their sustained visual exposure to the proposed development as well as their attentive interest towards their living environment.

5.2.1.2 Tourists

These are regarded as visual receptors of exceptional *high* sensitivity. Their attention is focused on the landscape which they essentially utilise for enjoyment purposes and appreciation of the quality of the landscape.

5.2.1.3 Air and Road Travel

Motorists are generally classified as visual receptors of *low* sensitivity due to their momentary view and experience of the proposed development. As a motorist's speed increases, the sharpness of lateral vision declines, and the motorist tends to focus on the line of travel (USDOT, 1981). This adds weight to the assumption that under normal conditions, motorists will show *low* levels of sensitivity as their attention is focused on the road and their exposure to roadside objects is brief.

The potential visual impact of solar glint and glare could be a visual distraction and possible air travel hazard. Glint and glare occur when the sun reflects on surfaces with specular properties.

The chosen PV system for this project is the tracker-oriented structure which follows the sunlight, as it maximizes the power generated by the PV plant all day. This implies that the orientation of the solar panel changes throughout the day and does not affect viewers from one permanent angle.

5.2.2. SEVERITY OF POTENTIAL VISUAL IMPACTS

Severity of visual impact refers to the magnitude of change to specific visual receptor's views and/or experience of the landscape. Severity of visual impact is influenced by the following factors:

- The **viewer's exposure** to the project:
  - Distance of observers from the proposed project.
  - The visibility of the proposed project (ZVI).
  - Number of affected viewers.
  - Duration of views to development experienced by affected viewers.
- Degree of **visual intrusion** created by the project.

Empirical research indicates that the visibility of the proposed power plant and hence the severity of visual impact, decreases as the distance between the observer and the power plant increases. The landscape type, within which the power plant exists, can mitigate the severity of visual impact through topographical or vegetative screening. Bishop *et al* (1988) noted that in some cases the power plant may dominate the view for example, silhouetted against the skyline, or in some cases be absorbed in the landscape. A complex landscape setting with a diverse land cover and topographical variation has the ability to decrease the severity of visual impact more than a mundane landscape (Bishop *et al*, 1985).

The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) is determined through a Geographical Information System (GIS). The result reflects a shaded pattern which identifies the areas that are expected to experience views of the proposed power plant developments. The ZVI is limited to 5 km from the proposed power plant.

A visibility analysis and viewer sensitivity has been completed for the proposed power plant. According to Bishop *et al* (1988), visual receptors within 1 km from the structures are most likely to experience the highest degree of visual intrusion, hence contributing to the severity of the visual impact. This is considered as the zone of highest visibility after which the degree of visual intrusion decreases rapidly at distances further away.

In order to assess the extent and degree of visibility in the visual envelope, a Geographical Information System (GIS) was utilized. A visibility analysis was performed which provides the following information on Figure 10 below:

- The areas within the visual envelope that may experience views of the proposed project; and
- The degree of visibility in terms of the percentage of the proposed project that will be visible from a specific location.

The GIS performs an analysis for a series of elevated observer points which represents the height of the proposed new structures and the proposed solar arrays in a digital elevation model (DEM). This results in a visibility map with the degree of visibility illustrated by a colour.

The visibility analysis considers worst-case scenarios, using line-of-sight, based on topography alone. The screening capability of vegetation is not captured in the base model of the DEM and is therefore not considered in these results.

5.2.2.1 Potential visual impacts on Residents

Table 8: Potential visual impacts on residents

VISUAL IMPACT ON RESIDENTS								
Activity	**Nature of Impact**	**Extent of Impact**	**Duration of Impact**	**Severity of Impact**	**Probability of Impact**	**Significance without Mitigation**	**Significance with Mitigation**	**Level of Confidence**
Construction phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative – Construction camp and lay-down yard may cause unsightly views	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Moderate	Probable	Low	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Moderate	Probable	Low	Low	High
Operational phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative – The presence of the proposed power plant and associated infrastructure that intrude on existing views and spoil the views of the landscape.	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Moderate	Definite	Moderate	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Moderate	Definite	Moderate	Low	High
Closure phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Upon closure of power plant and after rehabilitation	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Low	Definite	Low	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Low	Definite	Low	Low	High

The study area is sparsely populated, with a higher population in the small town of Amersfoort. There are commercial farms and homesteads near the site. The towns and surrounding areas are generally degraded and not very scenic.

Farm residents will experience intrusion on their views due to the presence of the proposed new power plant. It is unpractical to discuss all, but they are recognised as the general population of the study area and are identified as affected visual receptors.

It can be concluded that the study area has a low density of residents that will be affected viewers.

Construction phase

During the construction phase, unsightly views may be created by the presence of the construction camp and the lay-down yards. The duration of the potential visual impact will be temporary which will result in an anticipated *low* significance of visual impact for all the alternatives. The visual exposure to the construction activity will be limited.

The cleared site, construction camp and material lay-down yards will appear unsightly and out of character. The visual intrusion caused during the construction stage will be moderate but will be temporary in nature.

Operational phase

The residents of the settlements and farming communities near the power plant may experience a low degree of visual intrusion.

A viewer sensitivity map (Figure 10) has been generated and indicates the residents on farms that will be affected by the proposed development. Amersfoort is more than 5km from the site and the residents should not be visually affected.

The Visual Absorption Capacity (VAC) of the landscape plays a role in the visibility of the proposed power plant. The landscape is gently undulating with low growing grasses and monoculture agricultural fields. Small areas of exotic tree forests are found on the site and surrounding areas. In summer when vegetation is higher, the VAC is higher than dry winter months when vegetation will be scarce.

Mitigation measures can be put in place to reduce the visual impact of the power plant and associated infrastructure, such as screening with vegetation. The region is associated with existing mining activities and the Majuba Power Station, which reduces the significance of the overall visual impact and can be regarded as moderately low.

Closure phase

The duration of the impact will only be as long as the power plant is operational. Upon closure, rehabilitation of all areas is anticipated, and the visual aesthetics will be improved. No negative residual impacts are expected on visual aspects.

5.2.2.2 Potential visual impacts on tourists

Table 9: Potential visual impacts on tourists

VISUAL IMPACT ON TOURISTS								
Activity	**Nature of Impact**	**Extent of Impact**	**Duration of Impact**	**Severity of Impact**	**Probability of Impact**	**Significance without Mitigation**	**Significance with Mitigation**	**Level of Confidence**
Construction phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative – Construction camp and lay-down yard may cause unsightly views	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Operational phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative – The presence of the proposed power plant and associated infrastructure that intrude on existing views and spoil the views of the landscape.	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Closure phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Upon closure of Power Plant and after rehabilitation	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High

The study area has very little tourist activity with interspersed pockets with natural landscapes. The localized area is considered to have low tourism potential, mostly because of the agricultural landscape, large scale mining developments and overall environmental degradation. The N11 passes to the east of the site and can be used as a thoroughfare road to the Kwa-Zulu Natal coastal destinations. The secondary roads passing the site directly are not main thoroughfare roads.

Construction phase

The temporary duration of the construction phase is not expected to cause major visual impacts. The location, number and size of the construction camps and lay-down yards will be crucial in regulating the impact. Detail information is not available, and it is anticipated that the visual impact will occur localised and that a very small number of tourists will be adversely affected by these project components during construction.

Their exposure to possible unsightly views of the construction camps and the associated activity will however be minimal and localised.

No visual impact is anticipated on tourists during the construction phase as the site is far away from the main road.

Operational phase

Very few tourists will be affected by the proposed power plant and the associated infrastructure, considering the low numbers of tourists that visit the study area or pass through the study area.

The viewer sensitivity indicates a high visibility from the Bokamoso Nature Reserve which was identified around the Majuba Power Plant.

Closure phase

Upon closure, rehabilitation of all areas is anticipated, and the visual aesthetics will be improved. No negative residual impacts are expected on visual aspects.

5.2.2.3 Potential visual impacts on air and road travel

Table 10: Potential visual impacts on air and road travel

VISUAL IMPACT ON AIR AND ROAD TRAVEL								
Activity	**Nature of Impact**	**Extent of Impact**	**Duration of Impact**	**Severity of Impact**	**Probability of Impact**	**Significance without Mitigation**	**Significance with Mitigation**	**Level of Confidence**
Construction phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative – Construction camp and lay-down yard may cause unsightly views	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Moderate	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Moderate	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Operational phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Negative – The presence of the proposed power plant and associated infrastructure that intrude on existing views and spoil the views of the landscape.	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Moderate	Probable	Moderate	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Moderate	Probable	Moderate	Low	High
Closure phase								
Power Plant Main Components	Upon closure of power plant and after rehabilitation	Local	Lifetime of Power Plant	Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High
Supporting Infrastructure				Low	Low Probability	Low	Low	High

The major route within the study area is the N11 connecting the towns, mines and farms. The secondary road network in the study area carries a much lower volume of motorists. Many of the roads are gravel roads which are utilized by the local residents. Their duration of views will be temporary, and it is expected that the visual intrusion that they will experience will be low. The Majuba Power Station Airport is approximately 2km away, to the west of the site. A small airfield is located approximately 10km away from the site to the north.

Construction phase

The potential visual impact that may be experienced by motorists during the construction phase is considered to be minimal. The severity of visual impact will be *low*.

Operational phase

The road passing the site directly connects settlements locally and is no major thoroughfare. The speed at which motorists travel and the association of the regional area with mines, also has a moderating effect on the severity of the visual impact and further reduces visual exposure.

Glint and glare of the solar panels could be a potential visual distraction and a possible air travel hazard. The proposed solar farm is in near proximity to the Majuba Power Station Airport and about 10km from a smaller airfield. Due to the tracker-oriented structures of the solar panels, the glint and glare will change during the course of the day. The significance of the potential visual impact is expected to be *moderately-low.*

Closure phase

The duration of the impact will only be as long as the power plant is operational. Upon closure, rehabilitation of all areas is anticipated, and the visual aesthetics will be improved. No negative residual impacts are expected on visual aspects.

6. RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

The aim of mitigation is to reduce or alleviate the intrusive contrast between the proposed project components and activities, and the receiving landscape to a point where it is acceptable to visual and landscape receptors.

6.1. GENERAL

- Where areas are going to be disturbed through the destruction of vegetation, for example the establishment of the construction camp, the vegetation occurring in the area to be disturbed must be replanted with endemic, indigenous species, especially veld-grass and trees. A hydroseeding application is recommended in the disturbed areas as a measure of rehabilitation.
- Retain existing vegetation adjacent to the development footprint to minimise the visual impact caused by clearing vegetation and exposing soil areas.
- Plant fast-growing endemic trees along the boundaries of the power plant. The trees will with time create a screen and increase the biodiversity of the area.

6.2. ACCESS ROUTES

- Make use of existing access roads where possible.
- Where new access roads are required, the disturbance area should be kept to a minimum. A two-track dirt road will be the most preferred option.

- Locate access routes so as to limit modification to the topography and to avoid the removal of established vegetation.
- Avoid crossing over or through ridges, rivers, pans or any natural features that have visual value. This also includes centres of floral endemism and areas where vegetation is not resilient and takes extended periods to recover.
- Road verges that need to be cleared should be kept to a minimum.
- Access routes should be located on the perimeter of disturbed areas such as cultivated/fallow lands as not to fragment intact vegetated areas.
- If it is necessary to clear vegetation for a road, avoid doing so in a continuous straight line. Alternatively, curve the road in order to reduce the visible extent of the cleared corridor.

6.3. CLEARED SERVITUDES

- Avoid a continuous linear path of cleared vegetation that would strongly contrast with the surrounding landscape character. Feather the edges of the cleared corridor to avoid a clearly defined line through the landscape.

6.4. CONSTRUCTION CAMPS AND LAY DOWN YARDS

- If practically possible, locate construction camps in areas that are already disturbed or where it isn't necessary to remove established vegetation like for example naturally bare areas.
- Utilise existing screening features such as dense vegetation stands or topographical features to place the construction camps and lay-down yards out of the view of sensitivity visual receptors.
- Keep the construction sites and camps neat, clean and organised in order to portray a tidy appearance.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposed activities for the power plant have been evaluated against internationally accepted criteria to determine the impact they will have on the landscape character and the viewers that have been identified in the study area.

The construction and operation of the proposed power plant may have a visual impact to users within a close proximity of the site. After mitigation, the visual impact for most users is expected to range between moderate and low.

An advantage for the power plant is that it utilises a renewable energy source to generate electricity. It does not emit any harmful by-products or pollutants that may pose health risks to users or observers.

If mitigation is undertaken as recommended it can be concluded that the significance can be managed to acceptable levels.

Table 11: Evaluation of activities for the proposed Power Plant during the Construction Phase

Visual Impact of Activities	Corrective Measures	Impact Rating Criteria					
		Nature	Extent	Duration	Magnitude	Probability	Significance
Power Plant Main Components	No	Negative	2	2	6	3	30 low
	Yes	Negative	2	2	4	3	24 low
Supporting Infrastructure	No	Negative	2	2	6	3	30 low
	Yes	Negative	2	2	4	3	24 low

Table 12: Evaluation of activities for the proposed Power Plant during the Operation Phase

Visual Impact of Activities	Corrective Measures	Impact Rating Criteria					
		Nature	Extent	Duration	Magnitude	Probability	Significance
Power Plant Main Components	No	Negative	2	4	6	3	36 medium
	Yes	Negative	2	4	4	3	30 low
Supporting Infrastructure	No	Negative	2	4	6	3	36 medium
	Yes	Negative	2	4	4	3	30 low

Table 13: Evaluation of activities for the proposed Power Plant during the Closure Phase

Visual Impact of Activities	Corrective Measures	Impact Rating Criteria					
		Nature	Extent	Duration	Magnitude	Probability	Significance
Power Plant Main Components	No	Negative	2	2	4	3	24 low
	Yes	Negative	2	2	4	2	16 low
Supporting Infrastructure	No	Negative	2	2	4	3	24 low
	Yes	Negative	2	2	4	2	16 low

The activities for the Visual Impact Assessment Criteria for all impacts as indicated in Table 11-13 applies are rated as per below:

Status of Impact:
The visual impact is assessed as either having a:

- Negative effect (i.e. at a cost to the environment),

- Positive effect (i.e. a benefit to the environment), or
- Neutral effect on the environment.

Extent of the Impact:
(1) Site (site only),
(2) Local (site boundary and immediate surrounds),
(3) Regional,
(4) National, or
(5) International.

Duration of the Impact:
The length that the impact will last for is described as either:
(1) Immediate (<1 year)
(2) Short term (1-5 years),
(3) Medium term (5-15 years),
(4) Long term (ceases after the operational life span of the project),
(5) Permanent.

Magnitude of the Impact:
The intensity or severity of the impacts is indicated as either:
(0) None,
(2) Minor,
(4) Low,
(6) Moderate (environmental functions altered but continue),
(8) High (environmental functions temporarily cease), or
(10) Very high / unsure (environmental functions permanently cease).

Probability of Occurrence:
The likelihood of the impact actually occurring is indicated as either:
(0) None (the impact will not occur),
(1) Improbable (probability very low due to design or experience)
(2) Low probability (unlikely to occur),
(3) Medium probability (distinct probability that the impact will occur),
(4) High probability (most likely to occur), or
(5) Definite.

Significance of the Impact:
Based on the information contained in the points above, the potential impacts are assigned a significance rating (S). This rating is formulated by adding the sum of the numbers assigned to extent (E), duration (D) and magnitude (M) and multiplying this sum by the probability (P) of the impact.
S= (E+D+M) P

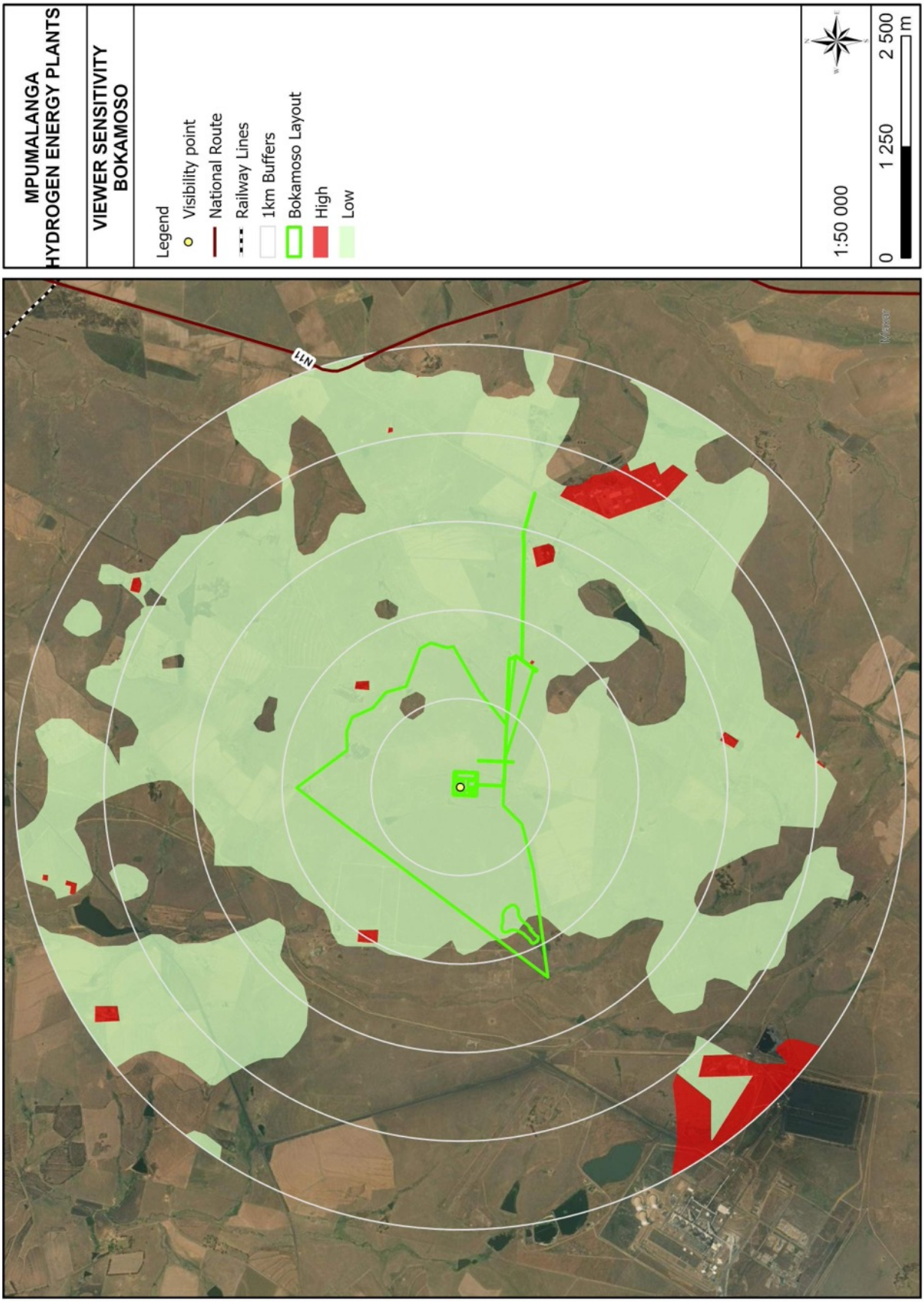
The significance ratings are given below:

- (<30) low (i.e. where this impact would not have a direct influence on the decision to develop in the area),
- (30-60) medium (i.e. where the impact could influence the decision to develop in the area unless it is effectively mitigated),
- (>60) high (i.e. where the impact must have an influence on the decision process to develop in the area).

APPENDIX 1

Figure 10 reflects the results of a viewer sensitivity visibility assessment, carried out using GIS software. The results provide a clear interpretation of the extent of the visual influence and also provide an indication of the land use that can be expected in the affected areas.

Figure 10: Viewer Sensitivity Bokamoso Site



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aesthetics	The science or philosophy concerned with the quality of sensory experience. (ULI, 1980)
Horizon contour	A line that encircles a development site and that follows ridgelines where the sky forms the backdrop and no landform is visible as a background. This is essentially the skyline that when followed through the full 360-degree arc as viewed from a representative point on the site defines the visual envelope of the development. This defines the boundary outside which the development would not be visible.
Landscape characterisation/ character	This covers the gathering of information during the desktop study and field survey work relating to the existing elements, features, and extent of the landscape (character). It includes the analysis and evaluation of the above and the supporting illustration and documentary evidence.
Landscape condition	Refers to the state of the landscape of the area making up the site and that of the study area in general. Factors affecting the condition of the landscape can include the level maintenance and management of individual landscape elements such as buildings, woodlands etc and the degree of disturbance of landscape elements by non-characteristics elements such as invasive tree species in grassland or car wrecks in a field.
Landscape impact	Changes to the physical landscape resulting from the development that include; the removal of existing landscape elements and features, the addition of new elements associated with the development and altering of existing landscape elements or features in such as way as to have a detrimental effect on the value of the landscape.
Landscape unit	A landscape unit can be interpreted as an “outdoor room” which are enclosed by clearly defined landforms or vegetation. Views within a landscape unit are contained and face inward.
Sense of place	That distinctive quality that makes a particular place memorable to the visitor, which can be interpreted in terms of the visual character of the landscape. A more emotive sense of place is that of local identity and attachment for a place “*which begins as undifferentiated space* [and] *becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value*” (Tuan 1977)[1].
Viewer exposure	The extent to which viewers are exposed to views of the landscape in which the proposed development will be located. Viewer exposure considers the visibility of the site, the viewing conditions, the viewing distance, the number of viewers affected the activity of the viewers (tourists or workers) and the duration of the views.
Viewer sensitivity	The assessment of the receptivity of viewer groups to the visible landscape elements and visual character and their perception of visual quality and value. The sensitivity of viewer groups depends on their activity and awareness within the affected landscape, their preferences, preconceptions and their opinions.
Visual absorption capacity (VAC)	The inherent ability of a landscape to accept change or modification to the landscape character and/or visual character without diminishment of the visual quality or value, or the loss of visual amenity. A high VAC rating implies a high ability to absorb visual impacts while a low VAC implies a low ability to absorb or conceal visual impacts.

[1] Cited in Climate Change and Our 'Sense of Place', http://www.ucsusa.org/greatlakes/glimpactplace.html

Visual amenity	The notable features such as hills or mountains or distinctive vegetation cover such as forests and fields of colour that can be identified in the landscape and described. Also included are recognised views and viewpoints, vistas, areas of scenic beauty and areas that are protected in part for their visual value.
Visual character	This addresses the viewer response to the landscape elements and the relationship between these elements that can be interpreted in terms of aesthetic characteristics such as pattern, scale, diversity, continuity and dominance.
Visual contour	The outer perimeter of the visual envelope determined from the site of the development. The two-dimensional representation on plan of the horizon contour.
Visual contrast	The degree to which the physical characteristics of the proposed development differ from that of the landscape elements and the visual character. The characteristics affected typically include: • Volumetric aspects such as size, form, outline and perceived density; • Characteristics associated with balance and proportion such scale, diversity, dominance, continuity; • Surface characteristics such as colour, texture, reflectivity; and • Luminescence or lighting.
Visual envelope	The approximate extent within which the development can be seen. The extent is often limited to a distance from the development within which views of the development are expected to be of concern.
Visual impact	Changes to the visual character of available views resulting from the development that include: obstruction of existing views; removal of screening elements thereby exposing viewers to unsightly views; the introduction of new elements into the view shed experienced by visual receptors and intrusion of foreign elements into the view shed of landscape features thereby detracting from the visual amenity of the area.
Visual impact assessment	A specialist study to determine the visual effects of a proposed development on the surrounding environment. The primary goal of this specialist study is to identify potential risk sources resulting from the project that may impact on the visual environment of the study area, and to assess their significance. These impacts include landscape impacts and visual impacts.
Visual quality	An assessment of the aesthetic excellence of the visual resources of an area. This should not be confused with the value of these resources where an area of low visual quality may still be accorded a high value. Typical indicators used to assess visual quality are vividness, intactness and unity. For more descriptive assessments of visual quality attributes such as variety, coherence, uniqueness, harmony, and pattern can be referred to.
Visual receptors	Includes viewer groups such as the local community, residents, workers, the broader public and visitors to the area, as well as public or community areas from which the development is visible. The existing visual amenity enjoyed by the viewers can be considered a visual receptor such that changes to the visual amenity would affect the viewers.
Zone of visual influence	The extent of the area from which the most elevated structures of the proposed development could be seen and may be considered to be of interest (see visual envelope).

LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE

Table 14: Confidence level chart and description

CONFIDENCE LEVEL CHART				
	Information, knowledge and experience of the **project**			
Information, and knowledge of the **study area**		3b	2b	1b
	3a	9	6	3
	2a	6	4	2
	1a	3	2	1

3a – A *high* level of information is available of the **study area** in the form of recent aerial photographs, GIS data, documented background information and a thorough knowledge base could be established during site visits, surveys etc. The study area was readily accessible.

2a – A *moderate* level of information is available of the **study area** in the form of aerial photographs GIS data and documented background information and a moderate knowledge base could be established during site visits, surveys etc. Accessibility to the study area was acceptable for the level of assessment.

1a – *Limited* information is available of the **study area** and a poor knowledge base could be established during site visits and/or surveys, or no site visit and/or surveys were carried out.

3b – A *high* level of information and knowledge is available of the **project** in the form of up-to-date and detailed engineering/architectural drawings, site layout plans etc. and the visual impact assessor is well experienced in this type of project and level of assessment.

2b – A *moderate* level of information and knowledge is available of the **project** in the form of conceptual engineering/architectural drawings, site layout plans etc. and/or the visual impact assessor is moderately experienced in this type of project and level of assessment.

1b – *Limited* information and knowledge is available of the **project** in the form of conceptual engineering/architectural drawings, site layout plans etc. and/or the visual impact assessor has a low experience level in this type of project and level of assessment. (Adapted from Oberholzer. B, 2005)

VISUAL RECEPTOR SENSITIVITY

Table 15: Visual receptor sensitivity

VISUAL RECEPTOR SENSITIVITY	DEFINITION (BASED ON THE GLVIA 2ND ED PP90-91)
Exceptional	Views from major tourist or recreational attractions or viewpoints promoted for or related to appreciation of the landscape, or from important landscape features.
High	Users of all outdoor recreational facilities including public and local roads or tourist routes whose attention or interest may be focussed on the landscape; Communities where the development results in changes in the landscape setting or valued views enjoyed by the community; Residents with views affected by the development.
Moderate	People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation (other than appreciation of the landscape);
Low	People at their place of work or focussed on other work or activity; Views from urbanised areas, commercial buildings or industrial zones; People travelling through or passing the affected landscape on transport routes.
Negligible (Uncommon)	Views from heavily industrialised or blighted areas

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