

An Bord Pleanála Oral Hearing

Córas Iompair Éireann/Iarnród Éireann

Dublin to Cork Railway Line Level Crossings

Brief of Evidence

Landscape and Visual

Richard Barker

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Landscape and Visual**

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND ROLE IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT

- 1 My name is Richard Barker. I am Principle Landscape Architect at Macro Works. I hold a master's degree in Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University (NZ) as well as a post graduate diploma in Forestry and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies. I am a Corporate Member of the Irish Landscape Institute.
- 2 In accordance with Section 39(1)(a) of the Transport (Railway Infrastructure) Act 2001 as amended and substituted (including by SI 743 of 2021), I confirm that I have over 17 years' experience assessing the landscape and visual impacts of a range of commercial and infrastructural development types including various forms of linear infrastructure and the integration of road and rail corridors. Together with the other Assessments which comprise the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, this Statement reflects the assessment prepared in Volume 3, Chapter 13 (Landscape and Visual) which comprise part of the assessments of the environmental impact assessment report for this Railway Order Application and which inter alia contains:-
 - i. a description of the proposed railway works comprising information on the site, design, size and other relevant features of the proposed works;
 - ii. a description of the likely significant effects of the proposed railway works on the environment;
 - iii. the data required to identify and assess the main effects which the proposed railway works are likely to have on the environment;
 - iv. a description of any features of the proposed railway works, and of any measures envisaged to avoid, prevent or reduce and, if possible, offset likely significant adverse effects on the environment;
 - v. a description of the reasonable alternatives studied by CIÉ which are relevant to the proposed railway works and their specific characteristics and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the railway works on the environment; and
 - vi. A summary in non-technical language of the above information.
- 3 I can confirm that, consistent with the other chapters of the EIAR, Chapter 13 dealing with landscape and visual effects takes into account the available results of other relevant assessments under European Union or national legislation with a view to avoiding duplication of assessments.
- 4 I have been involved in the Project since 2019 in the capacity of landscape lead and have advised Iarnród Éireann on landscape and visual constraints since the Preliminary Design stage of the Project which considered alternative options for the alternative access routes at each level crossing location. My involvement culminated in overseeing the preparation of the Landscape and Visual Chapter (chapter 13) in Volume 3 Part A of the EIAR, which was submitted to An Bord Pleanála in April 2021.
- 5 Chapter 13 in Volume 3 Part A of the EIAR was prepared with the benefit of inputs from Project Landscape Architect Cian Doughan, and visualisation specialist Amy Doran.
- 6 I confirm that this statement of evidence addresses the potential impacts on Landscape and Visual in the context of the Environmental Impact Assessment [EIA] to be carried out by An Bord Pleanála in respect of the Project.

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2. OVERVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 7 The landscape and visual impact assessment was undertaken in accordance with the Guidelines for IEMA Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA - 2013), which are recognised as the industry standard for such assessments in Ireland and the UK.
- 8 The options selection stage and subsequent detailed assessment of the preferred options involved establishing an appropriate study area and consideration of relevant landscape and visual designations in both the Limerick and Cork County Development Plans, as well as other sensitive visual receptors. This stage culminated in the selection of a set of potential viewpoints from which to study the visual impact of each site. Fieldwork was then carried out to establish the landscape character of the receiving environment, to confirm and refine the set of viewpoints to be used for the visual assessment and to capture baseline photography.
- 9 In relation to short-term construction stage impacts on landscape and visual receptors at all of the proposed crossings, there is considered to be an impact significance of Moderate-slight or lower. Whilst the quality of such effects is negative, they are not deemed to be significant and this is partly down to the limited duration. Instead, it is the permanent operational stage impacts on landscape character and views of the proposed crossings that is the key consideration.
- 10 For XC201 at Thomastown, the the operational stage impact on landscape character is deemed to be Low. Three representative viewpoints were used for the visual impact assessment at this crossing and there are no significant impacts assessed at any of these locations either before or after the establishment of proposed mitigation planting. Residual impacts are considered to range between Moderate-slight and Slight.
- 11 For XC209 at Ballyhay, the proposed interventions are modest from a landscape and visual perspective consisting of a single storey building, lighting towers, CCTV towers, and all associated fencing, surfacing signage and ancillary works. In this case the operational stage landscape impacts and visual impacts are deemed to be very minor.
- 12 For XC211 Newtown, the operational stage impact on landscape character is deemed to be Low. Three representative viewpoints were used for the visual impact assessment at this crossing and there are no significant impacts assessed at any of these locations either before or after the establishment of proposed mitigation planting. Residual impacts are considered to range between Slight and Slight-imperceptible.
- 13 For XC212 at Ballycoskery, the operational stage impact on landscape character is deemed to be Low, but two of the most notable impacts are considered to occur in respect of the views of the new overpass embankments of the XC212 development at Ballycoskery from the residential enclave of Beechwood Drive and from the front of Ballyhea National School. From Beechwood Drive, filtered and intermittent views of the new overpass embankments through an existing treeline that will be partly removed to facilitate the proposed development. However, replacement tree planting within that treeline, coupled with other mitigation planting on the new embankments is considered to reduce the visual impact from Moderate to Moderate-slight. At Ballyhea National School, the nearest embankment of the proposed overpass will foreshorten views that currently exist into the farmed fields beyond. In this instance a more ornamental approach has been proposed for mitigation planting to that embankment in conjunction with specimen trees to the fore. In this instance the significance of impact is deemed to reduce from Substantial-moderate to Moderate once mitigation planting becomes established. At the western end of the proposed project, a short section of roadside wall and some existing trees will also be removed and replaced to facilitate the western tie-in on the southern side of the road. Significant landscape and visual impacts are not considered to occur in respect of XC212.

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- 14 For XC215 at Shinanagh the operational stage impact on landscape character is deemed to be Low. Three representative viewpoints were used for the visual impact assessment at this crossing and there are no significant impacts assessed at any of these locations either before or after the establishment of proposed mitigation planting. Residual impacts are considered to be Slight-imperceptible at all three representative viewpoint locations.
- 15 For XC219 at Buttevant the operational stage impact on landscape character is deemed to be Low. Three representative viewpoints were used for the visual impact assessment at this crossing and there is a notable visual impact at VP2. In this instance a substantial section of overpass embankment will foreshorten farmland views to the south from the R522 regional road and a dwelling to the north of the road. In this instance proposed mitigation planting will not reduce the sense of enclosure, but it will soften the engineered appearance of the embankment, whilst screening roadside barriers and vehicles. The significance of visual impact is considered to reduce from Substantial-moderate down to Moderate as a result. Significant landscape and visual impacts are not considered to occur in respect of XC219.

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3. SUBMISSIONS/OBJECTIONS RECEIVED AND RESPONSES

16 In addition to the following responses, the issues raised in the submissions and observations made to the Board are also addressed in the Non-Technical Summary, EIAR Chapter 13, EIAR Appendix 13A – Landscape Mitigation Plans and EIAR Appendix 13B – Photomontages.

(A) Responses to Issues in Submissions

XC187

17 There were no specific issues raised in respect of landscape and visual matters in relation to this crossing.

XC201

Submission:

18 An issue of privacy was raised by 'Joseph and Anne Clifford' as follows:

"As the proposed new bridge will provide a birds eye view into my farmyard and Brother Donie Cotter's house we would like to see some screening put in place which would afford us some privacy for security purposes."

Response:

19 Whilst it is a common scenario throughout the country that elevated sections of road and rail afford views across farmyards, screening has been applied to all of the proposed embankments along XC201. As this proposed planting becomes established it will provide a consistent dense band of screening along the proposed alignment mitigating potential issues of overlooking and loss of privacy.

XC211

Submission:

20 The following specific issue was raised by 'Aidan O'Connor':

"The close proximity of the boundary line to my house as show in plan 4A. This raises major concerns for me and my family. As you can see from the drawing, part of the boundary line cuts into my property which is completely unacceptable and grossly unfair as this would affect our privacy greatly, devalue our property and will make our home less secure. It is also apparent that this is the only private dwelling that is impacted out of all seven of the proposed projects by CIE."

Response:

21 The proposed alignment does not cut into this property. Instead, the red line boundary runs along its north-western boundary. In terms of privacy, the proposed alignment cuts into the terrain and will be well screened by an existing hedge that occurs along the boundary of the dwelling in question. This will be further reinforced by the planting of a new native hedgerow along the southern verge of the proposed alignment. It is not considered that the proposed development will result in any overlooking of this property.

XC212

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Submission:

- 22 The following issue was raised by Ballyhea National School, which also contributes to a general theme raised by others in relation to the proposed overpass being disproportionate and inappropriate to its rural setting. The submission follows:

There will be a "disproportionate impact of the proposed ramps and overpass on the landscape which is deemed to be of very high value and sensitivity. It accepts that there is some merit to the criticism that the proposed ramps and overpass are better suited to a modern urban landscape rather than to a rural landscape". The observation also refers to use of materials such as undressed concrete, composite concrete blocks and stainless steel, in addition to the removal of a "significant proportion" of mature trees.

- 23 These issues have also been raised in submissions 20, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 44 and 45.

Response:

- 24 The scale of the overpass is not excessive for its primary function to provide a safe and efficient intersection of this section of road with this section of national railway line. The project LVIA acknowledges that the proposed development will have a negative impact on the landscape and visual setting, however, it concludes that such impacts are not considered to be significant in EIA terms. In respect of landscape impacts, the crossing is deemed to have short-term 'Moderate-slight' construction stage landscape impact and a 'Slight' operational stage landscape impact as it will not be a strong influence on this hinterland landscape character and such effects are very localised. The residual visual impacts are deemed to range between 'Slight' and 'Moderate', with the highest of these occurring outside Ballyhea National School.

- 25 It is also acknowledged within the project LVIA that the proposed development is located within a 'High Value Landscape (HVL)' designation within the Cork CDP, however, this is one of the broadest HVL designations in the county, principally relating to the Ballyhoura Mountains further to the east. Furthermore, the proposed development is located on the westernmost periphery of this HVL, which ceases immediately west of the proposal site at the N20 road corridor. Transitions in landscape character are not well represented by abrupt lines on a map and generally require a degree of interpretation. In this instance, the proposed development is considered to lie in a transitional part of the landscape that is partly influenced by being in the general proximity of the Ballyhoura range, but more so by the productive rural hinterland of Ballyhea Village, which also includes the N20 national road and a section of national railway line.

- 26 The proposed landscaping measures included on LD.CLLC.XC212 will soften the engineered appearance of the proposed alignment, especially from the front of the national school, where additional shrub mixes and climbers are proposed to mitigate the visual impact of the retaining structure situated to the south of the proposed carpark. Additional tree planting along the boundary of the railway line and its embankments will also soften the perceptually reduce the visual massing of the proposed development when viewed from the national school. With regard to use of materials, concrete is commonly used throughout the rural landscape for linear infrastructure projects such as road and rail overbridges.

- 27 Whilst the removal of 15 mature trees to facilitate the proposed crossing will contribute to the landscape impact, this will be offset by the additional planting proposed along the embankments of the alignment especially in the vicinity of the school where a low maintenance amenity mix of shrub and tree species is proposed.

Submission:

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28 The submission from Bernadette Leahy also relates to the scale of the proposed development, but includes reference to long distance visibility. The submission follows:

"the Ballycoskery Bridge would become the major built element both in the village of Ballyhea and in the surrounding countryside and would be visible for miles around. When seen from the vantage point in the mountains it would be conspicuous in the valley below and a terrible intrusion"

Response:

29 It is not considered that the proposed development would be visible 'for miles around' as the study area contains abundant dense tree-lined hedgerows, which will almost entirely screen the proposed overbridge from most of the wider study area. This will be further reinforced by proposed mitigation planting, which will add an additional layer of screening and aid in assimilating the development within its landscape and visual context.

30 It is considered that the proposed development will not be prominently visible from the "vantage point in the mountains". Instead, the proposed overbridge, if noticed by casual observers, will only ever appear as a small-scale feature within broad views afforded from the mountains, which only begin to rise around 2.5km east of the site. Furthermore, the proposed development will also be viewed in the context of the N20, the national railway line and the settlement of Ballyhea when seen from the elevated uplands in the east of the study area.

Submission:

31 In addition to previous themes already covered, the submissions from Margaret McNamara-Sihra and 'Melissa Sihra also includes reference to tourism. The submission follows:

"these works make a severe negative impact on the landscape and the natural environment of Ballyhea Village at Ballycoskery". The Submission notes the "high value landscape" designation and states the area is "of tourist interest" and is on the "wild Atlantic way".

Response:

32 The study area would not appear to be synonymous with tourism in a national or regional context. Furthermore, the Wild Atlantic Way route does not occur within the study area, or indeed, within this part of County Cork. With regard to tourism, the most notable aspects of amenity/tourist interest relate to the Ballyhoura Way, which is situated over 2km east and south of the site and the Kilmallock Cycle Hub Loop that will pass along a section of the proposed alignment.

Submission:

33 In addition to previous themes already covered, the submission from Maria McNerney also includes reference to a loss of greenspace. The submission follows:

"the scale and proportion of these works make a negative impact on the landscape and the environment" and would result in the "loss of green space".

Response:

34 It is acknowledged that the proposed development will have a negative impact on the landscape, however, the LVIA concludes that these impacts are not considered to be significant. Although the development will result in the loss of some views across farmed fields, it is not considered that it will result in any notable loss of public open green space. Indeed, the proposed development will result in

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a net increase of usable public open space as a new grassed area is proposed to the front of the national school.

35 These issues were also raised in submission 32.

Submission:

36 In addition to previous themes already covered, the submission from Councillor Ian Doyle also includes reference to proposed mitigation planting measures stating that:

"the mitigation proposals.... are inadequate to conceal the height and extent of the flyover".

Response:

37 The mitigation proposals could never conceal the height and extent of the flyover, but instead are intended to soften and assimilate the embankments within the surrounding setting and to screen traffic and thereby reduce the potential for overlooking, lightspill and privacy effects. Furthermore, the proposed development will only be a prominent feature within its immediate surrounds and will quickly become screened by intervening treelines and hedgerows beyond about 500m.

Submission:

38 In addition to previous themes already covered, the submission from John Dundon raises the concern that:

"the bridge is situated too close to our housing and school".

Response:

39 It is accepted that the proposed overpass will have a negative visual impact in relation to both Ballyhea National School and the residents of Beechwood Drive, but these are not considered to be significant effects especially once landscape mitigation proposals become fully established and help to soften and integrate the appearance of the overpass embankments. It should also be noted that to move the overpass further offline away from the school and Beechwood Park would increase the scale of works required and intrude further into the rural hinterland landscape of the village.

40 These issues have also been raised in submission 35, 37, 38 and 40.

Submission:

41 The submission made on behalf of Michael O'Kelly and the Community Hall Committee was prepared by Ken Hegarty of Hegsons Design Consultancy Service. It is a multifaceted submission that focusses on the methodology and findings of the LVIA, so each point will be responded to in sequence:

"the overall height of the road over rail will be 10.8m plus the associated street furniture. The highest part of the lamp columns will be 8m above the new land levels and will be seen over much longer distances especially in the Autumn and Winter seasons. These impacts have therefore been understated".

Response:

42 The overall height of the overpass including associated street furniture and lighting were modelled and included in the photomontages use for the visual impact assessment, which was undertaken in

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accordance with the IEMA Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2013. Therefore, the visual impact has not been understated. Furthermore, it is not considered that the visual impact of the proposed development will be materially greater during winter months than assessed in the LVIA as the viewpoint locations used are not heavily influenced by vegetative screening. From other locations in the wider context where intervening vegetation screening is greater, it is important to note that even winter views of the proposed overpass will be heavily veiled by winter branches and/or a proportion of evergreen species.

Submission:

"The scheme presented is over reliant on mitigation planting and the precast concrete sections and associated bridge street furniture will introduce urban features in this flat pastoral landscape".

43and a related comment:

"the visual acceptability of the scheme is heavily dependent on landscape mitigation "thus emphasizing its inappropriateness".

Response:

44 The mitigation planting forms an integral part of the proposed development and both pre-mitigation and post-mitigation residual impacts are assessed in the LVIA. The proposed planting will help to screen and soften the view of concrete sections and street furniture in this village hinterland setting where such features are not incongruous.

Submission:

"the language used such as 'likely; in relation to the proposed design is both uncertain and vague and therefore suggested that the design has not been fully considered in relation to the landscape impacts to the area".

Response:

45 In the LVIA, terms such as 'likely' are only used in instances where it may not be appropriate to be categorical with a statement. This might include reference to mitigation planting establishment, which is subject to natural processes or where an assessed viewpoint is representative of a particular receptor, but alternative views may be available. LVIA tends to contain such terms, because assessments are based on professional opinion weighing both positive, and negative factors rather than scientific or mathematical facts. While such terms may be used in general discussion, they are not used to be vague in relation to final assessments where specific impact judgements are always provided.

Submission:

"The language 'insofar as possible is vague and uncertain and therefore suggested that the design has not been fully considered in relation to the impact to the area. There should already be some understanding of what amount of the hedgerows will be retained already, what is the height of the mature tree lined hedgerow' compared to the raised new road, and it is unclear why this detail is not illustrated on sectional drawings. Based on the information provided, an accurate assessment of the impact of the project cannot be accurately undertaken".

Response:

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46 The context of the term 'insofar as possible', when referenced in the submission, relates to an existing roadside hedgerow where there will be some loss of vegetation required to facilitate the construction of the development. It is intended that such losses should be minimised through construction stage protection measures. However, the landscape mitigation plan indicates replacement planting specifically in the form of three semi-mature trees plus a 'type 1' hedgerow treatment for bolstering and replacement, which includes for additional semi-mature trees for gap filling as necessary. This scenario can be clearly seen in the sequence of photomontage images used to assess viewpoint 'XC212 Ballycoskery VP1', which is a spatially accurate and photo-real depiction of what the submitter has suggested should be subject of a more basic cross-sectional drawing. It considered that the term 'insofar as possible', used in this context is simply expressing a preference for retaining rather than regrowing a particular section of hedgerow, the material consequence of which, is very minor in terms of the landscape and visual impact.

Submission:

"the assessment of the proposed project is misleading. There are no other elevated road sections in this locality so it would be a 'new' form of road infrastructure and will appear incongruous in the locality"

Response:

47 Road and rail overpasses are a common feature in the rural context, and thus the proposed development will not present as an incongruous form of development. Three existing road-over-rail overpasses are located within c. 2km of the site. The nearest of these is situated less than 600m north of the site.

Submission:

"The road and proposed 8m high street lamps will considerably increase visual impact not only on the immediate locality but also on the wider locality and damage views of the Ballyhoura Mountains"

Response:

48 It is acknowledged in the LVIA that the proposed crossing will result in negative localised visual impacts, but of no greater than Moderate significance. However, it is not accepted that the proposed development will damage views of the Ballyhoura Mountains. The most notable impacts at residential dwellings occur at Beechwood Drive (represented by XC212 VP1) The dwellings to the front of this residential estate will be afforded the clearest views of the proposed development to the south, however, these dwellings are not afforded clear visibility of the Ballyhoura Mountains, which lie to the east and southeast as they are contained by areas of mature vegetation along the local road to the south and along the boundary of the existing railway line corridor.

Submission:

49 *"The limited impacts as set out in the design report are generally understated and cannot be relied upon to form an impartial assessment of project impacts"*

...and a related comment;

50 *"landscape impacts arising from the proposal are either not detailed/thorough enough or understated. The judgements made within the EIA, the arguments in the rationale for the ratings in the tables, the views expressed and the conclusions reached, rather than being impartial, are slanted in favour of the proposed design solution".*

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Response:

51 The LVIA was carried out by an appropriately qualified, experienced and chartered Landscape Architect who specialises in LVIA for infrastructure projects and used recognised standard guidelines for such assessments. The submission does not contain a parallel assessment, it simply refutes the findings. However, it should also be noted that the same submission goes on to acknowledge that "the visual impact is more balanced than the landscape assessment with the conclusions all confirming that the magnitude of impact is Medium to High". This acceptance of one part of the assessment and disagreement with the other may relate more to a misunderstanding of the difference between landscape impacts and visual impacts. The scale and nature of this development in this landscape setting has less potential to materially alter the hinterland landscape character than it does to generate localised visual impacts through visual obstruction or intrusion. This is reflected in the LVIA.

Submission:

52 An issue raised by Patrick and Helen Morrissey relates to;

"the road being "raised directly outside" their house" and their home being "totally shadowed". Observation also states that "we feel the natural light entering our home will be adversely affected"

Response:

53 The entrance to this dwelling is located at chainage 400 at which point the proposed alignment will be 1.07 below the existing ground level. The proposed alignment will not rise above the existing ground levels until chainage 360 further to the southwest of this dwelling. Furthermore, the dwelling is bordered to the west and southwest by a dense hedge c.1.5-2m high which will heavily screen views of the more elevated sections of the alignment adjacent to Ballyhea National School. It is not considered that the proposed development will result in any overshadowing at this dwelling.

Submission:

54 The submission made on behalf of 'Trustees of The Diocese of Cloyne' was prepared by McCutcheon Halley Chartered Planning Consultants who raised the following issue;

"We do not agree with the approach adopted in the landscape assessment in which the significance of the village setting is discounted in the landscape assessment on the grounds that the settlement: "is already influenced by the existing Dublin-Cork Railway Line and the N20".

Response:

55 It is entirely appropriate for the LVIA to consider the full baseline context of the receiving landscape, which includes the existing N20 and railway line as well as a variety of other rural land uses such as pastoral farmland, existing quarries and industrial land uses. The sensitivity of the receiving landscape is derived from this combination of factors.

Submission:

56 *"scale of the proposed road and bridges is excessive in a village setting" and they do not accept that the "mitigation measures proposed will reduce the residual impact to slight to moderate as the type of planting proposed will not provide adequate screening for the massive retaining structures during the winter months"*

Response:

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57 The LVIA considers that the proposed mitigation planting will reduce the visual impact significance at all three of the representative viewpoints that were assessed. This is on the basis that the proposed development will be considerably screened and softened by the low canopy woodland which will be densely planted and will contain a proportion of evergreen Holly.

Submission:

58 The submission also contends that the assessment should have included viewpoints which show the impact on the church and the parochial house which are of “*significant conservation*” value.

Response:

59 The Church grounds are enclosed to the east by dense coniferous planting, which will substantially screen the proposed development. Furthermore, existing mature vegetation to the south of the Church, will further screen the proposed development from the Church grounds. It is not considered that the proposed development will generate significant visual impacts at the Church or from its attendant grounds as it will be substantially screened from here.

XC219

Submission:

60 Issue raised from ‘Michael Kennedy and Deirdre Reilly’: relates to the potential for being overlooked from the elevated sections of the road and the potential for glare from headlights to glare onto their property. The submission also notes that no roadside screening is proposed on the more elevated sections of the embankments

Response

61 The proposed mitigation planting will cloak the embankments on both sides of the road. Once established, this will provide a layer of screening between the alignment and the submitters dwelling. Furthermore, a dense tree-lined hedgerow surrounds this dwelling, providing an additional layer of screening from the proposed development.

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4. RESPONSE TO FURTHER OBSERVATIONS (2022)

- 62 Following readvertisement of the project in early 2022 and the provision for further observations to be made, two additional observations were received from parties who had previously made submissions. These included the Board of management of Ballyhea National School and the Trustees of the Diocese of Cloyne. Both submissions referenced potential for cumulative impacts with the latest preferred route corridor of the M20 Motorway, which had been issued in March 2022, subsequent to the original assessment.
- 63 The nearest edge of the current preferred route corridor of the M20 motorway, which is 500m wide and subject to further refinement, is around 160m to the southwest of Ballyhea national School and therefore, approximately 100m from the proposed XC212 overpass. The centreline of the preferred M20 corridor is a further 250m southwest. Whereas the current N20 does not cross the railway line near Ballyhea, the preferred M20 route will require an overpass structure passing diagonally over the railway line in a northwest / southeast direction. In terms of a cumulative landscape impact potential, if the two overpass structures occurred in close proximity they would result in a marked change to the prevailing rural landform and landcover pattern and therefore landscape character due to the confluence of two elevated pieces of transport infrastructure. There is potential for a considerable increase in the scale and intensity of built development in the context of the current rural hinterland baseline setting and although this is likely to be predominantly due to the motorway overpass, the cumulative landscape effect could potentially be significant. However, in terms of design sequencing, the M20 project is still at option selection and refinement stage within a 500m wide corridor and this process is subject to public consultation. Ongoing alignment refinements and eventual environmental assessment of the M20 project will need to take account of the proposed XC212 overpass and other sensitive receptors within Ballycoskery in order to minimise potential cumulative impacts.
- 64 In contrast to the potential cumulative landscape impact, the potential cumulative visual impact is less likely to be significant from the main XC212 receptor locations of Ballyhea National School and Beechwood Drive because the nearer XC212 overpass structure is likely to screen the more distant M20 motorway overpass from view.
- 65 There is potential for increased construction stage cumulative impacts if both the proposed XC212 overpass and the potential M20 motorway overpass are constructed during overlapping time periods, but this is very unlikely based on current sequencing.

Review of Updated Development Plans

- 66 Both Cork and Limerick County Councils have adopted new county development plans since the original assessment was undertaken with both covering the period 2022 – 2028. A review of the specific landscape and visual related designations and policies indicates that there are no material changes that would alter the project landscape and visual assessment. In all cases the landscape and visual related mapping from the previous Cork and Limerick County Landscape Character Assessments has been brought forward into the current Development Plans along with associated sensitivity designations.

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5. CONCLUSION

- 67 The project LVIA considers both the effects on the landform and land cover of the proposed development sites and how such physical effects will, in turn, impact on the prevailing landscape character. Together these represent the landscape impacts of the proposal. Separately, views of the proposed developments from surrounding locations that represent those that live within and move around these areas are also considered in the context of visual impacts.
- 68 While there will be notable physical landscape impacts within the immediate context of each site such effects will be very localised in the context of the receiving environment and the prevailing rural and settlement hinterland landscape character will not be significantly altered. Similarly, in relation to visual impacts, there will be some localised negative effects from the provision of the overpass structures where they foreshorten or intrude on views that are currently more open. However, within relatively short distances the same structures become screened by intervening vegetation or become less noticeable component of views across a productive and settled landscape. Visual impacts are assessed both before and after the establishment of proposed landscape mitigation measures and in many instances impacts are considered to be reduced by the mitigation. It is not a weakness of the engineering design of the developments that landscape mitigation measures serve to reduce their visual impacts as has been suggested in some submissions – such measures are an integral part of the proposed developments, which have been designed by a multi-disciplinary team.
- 69 Based on the landscape and visual impact judgements provided throughout the LVIA, the proposed project is not considered to give rise to any significant residual impacts.

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Photomontages: (Presented On Screen)

Outline Description of Proposed Changes at Selected Viewpoints

XC201 Thomastown - VP1

- 70 The northern end of the proposed project will be visible from here where it intersects with the R515 regional road. A section of the existing roadside hedgerow is removed to facilitate the intersection with the new road and the proposed alignment will cross the foreground field at a slightly higher elevation than the existing ground levels as it continues to ascend towards the proposed overpass in the middle distance.

XC201 Thomastown – VP2

- 71 The proposed project will be partially and intermittently visible from this enclosed part of the local road laneway. The proposed crossing will be visible in two portions of the view, to the rear of the single storey dwelling in a westerly direction and at the point where the proposed alignment intersects with the local road laneway south of the viewpoint.

XC201 Thomastown – VP3

- 72 The most southerly portions of the proposed project will be visible from here where it intersects with the local road laneway and veers off in a north-westerly direction. The proposed alignment will result in a loss of some vegetation from the western roadside hedgerow.

XC211 Newtown - VP1

- 73 The proposed Project will be visible immediately north of the viewpoint with the proposed new intersection situated where the existing local road curves out of view. A section of the dense roadside hedgerow on the eastern side of the road corridor will be removed to facilitate the proposed road alignment opening up views across the adjacent field.

XC211 Newtown – VP2

- 74 This is a view to the south where a section of the southern roadside hedgerow will be removed to facilitate the proposed alignment and its associated sightlines and will generate an increased sense of openness along this local road corridor. An existing hedge along the boundary of the adjacent property will be supplemented by a new roadside hedge.

XC211 Newtown – VP3

- 75 Small sections of the proposed Project will be partially visible from here just beyond the railway corridor. The majority of the road corridor will be screened by the raised railway corridor in addition to trackside vegetation.

XC212 Ballycoskery - VP1

- 76 The proposed road embankment will be visible beyond the mature tree lined hedgerow that lines the southern side of the L1533 roadway. A section of the mature tree-lined hedgerow will be removed to facilitate the full footprint of the proposed development and these will be replaced by a series of specimen trees at the base of the embankment in combination with shrub planting on the embankment.

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XC212 Ballycoskery – VP2

- 77 The near view of the elevated roadside embankments and retaining walls will generate a stronger sense of enclosure to the front of the national school and foreshorten views across the neighbouring field. Ornamental shrub planting is proposed for the embankment with specimen trees lining the new circulation areas to the front of the school. Climber species are also proposed to soften the view of the concrete sections of the overpass.

XC212 Ballycoskery – VP3

- 78 This view is from the L1533 local road immediately east of Dooley's crossroads. A section of low scrubby hedgerow that lines the southern side of the road will be removed to facilitate the footprint of the proposed road. The existing crossroads will now take the form of two separate intersections, the furthest of which is situated at a slightly higher elevation than the nearer and more openly visible access to the school.

XC215 Shinanagh - VP1

- 79 The proposed project will be visible in the immediate foreground where the new corridor will replace the existing acute angle intersection with an adjoining local road. The existing intersection will be closed off whilst the low stone wall and scrubby vegetation that lines the local road corridor will be removed. The proposed carriageway will shift slightly to the west and a new sign posted intersection with the existing Shinanagh Bridge will be constructed.

XC215 Shinanagh – VP2

- 80 The proposed project will be seen from here in the distant middle ground adjacent to the existing Shinanagh Bridge. A large proportion of the proposed alignment will be screened from view by the layers of intervening hedgerow vegetation.

XC215 Shinanagh – VP3

- 81 The proposed project will be visible in the foreground as the new road veers to the east across the neighbouring pastoral field on the northern side of the local road and passes between the remains of Imphrick Church and the dense hedgerow that lines the Dublin-Cork Railway Line corridor.

XC219 Buttevant - VP1

- 82 A channelled view of the proposed project will be afforded from here at a distance of just over 100m. The proposed alignment will veer south from the straight alignment of the existing regional road corridor into the neighbouring pastoral field on the southern side of the R522. A section of the southern roadside hedgerow will be removed to facilitate the proposed road corridor and its associated embankments.

XC219 Buttevant – VP2

- 83 The proposed project is visible here at close quarters with the proposed overpass situated in the neighbouring agricultural field aligned parallel to the existing regional road corridor. There will be some sections of roadside hedgerow removed and replaced in the westerly quarter. Whereas, the proposed overpass bridge structure and the more easterly sections of the overpass will be screened from here by a section of dense roadside hedgerow, which is to be retained and supplemented by proposed hedgerow planting.

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XC219 Buttevant – VP3

- 84 This is a close westerly view of the proposed project where the new road will rise and veer southwards in the direction of the proposed overpass. A section of the dense road side hedgerow and remnants of a stone wall will be removed to facilitate the proposed alignment, which will generate a noticeably increased sense of openness at this location.