

13. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

13.1 Introduction

This chapter of the remedial Environmental Impact Assessment (rEIAR) addresses the landscape and visual impacts of the Existing Development and its component parts on the character and setting of the landscape. It has been prepared as part of an application for substitute consent for the Existing Development.

This chapter comprises a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The LVIA assesses the likely significant effects of the Existing Development on the landscape and visual amenity. The chapter covers the assessment methodology, a description of the Existing Development and the existing landscape baseline, based on relevant guidance. It includes a description of the landscape policy with specific reference to wind energy and the study area in which the Existing Development is located.

The landscape of the area is described in terms of its existing character, which includes a description of landscape values and the landscape's sensitivity to change. The potential impacts in both landscape and visual terms are then assessed, including in-cumulation and cumulative impacts.

13.1.1 Statement of Authority

MKO has developed extensive expertise and experience over the last 20 years in the LVIA of large-scale infrastructure developments for Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EIAR). The MKO Landscape and Visual team have produced LVIA across a diverse range of project types, including renewable energy and grid infrastructure; residential developments; transport infrastructure; extraction infrastructure; and a range of other projects.

This LVIA was written by Dija Mazonaite and Jack Workman and reviewed by Michael Watson.

Jack Workman MSc., TMLI, is the Landscape & Visual Project Director at MKO and is chartered as a Technician Member of the British Landscape Institute. Jack is an environmental scientist and an LVIA specialist with an academic background in the field of Environmental Science and Geography. Jack's primary role at MKO is scoping and writing LVIA for EIARs with over 5 years' experience managing all aspects of LVIA for a broad range of commercial infrastructure developments. Jack holds a BSc. in Psychology, and an MSc. in Coastal and Marine Environments (Physical Processes, Policy & Practice). Jack is an active participant in the National Landscape Forum, presenting in 2023 and 2024 on the topic of LVIA, he also regularly delivers guest lectures for students on the topic of LVIA at top third level institutions in Ireland including University of Galway, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and University College Cork. Jack holds a membership with the Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management and is also a member of the Landscape Research Group.

Dija Mazonaite is a Project Environmental Scientist - LVIA Specialist at MKO. Dija has a BSc (Hons) in Geography & Geosystems, PGCert in Marine Spatial Planning, and was recognised as a University Scholar at the University of Galway. Dija's primary role at MKO is producing and reviewing the LVIA chapter of EIA reports for large-scale infrastructure developments. Since joining MKO, Dija has over 3 years' experience conducting and project managing all aspects of LVIA for a broad range of commercial infrastructure developments including wind and solar energy projects, grid infrastructure, extraction industry and Strategic Housing Developments. Dija's key strengths include proficiency in GIS tools such as ArcGIS and QGIS, conducting landscape and visual impact assessments and capturing image data through drone surveys and photomontages. Dija is an affiliate member with the Landscape Institute and is an active participant of the Irish National Landscape Forum. Dija also regularly delivers guest lectures for students on the topic of LVIA at top third level institutions in Ireland.

Michael Watson is the Environment Division Director in MKO who has over 25 years' experience in the environmental sector. Following the completion of his master's degree in environmental resource management, Geography, from National University of Ireland, Maynooth he worked for the Geological Survey of Ireland and then a prominent private environmental consultancy prior to joining MKO in 2014. Michael's professional experience includes managing Environmental Impact Assessment Reports and Landscape & Visual Impact Assessments on behalf of clients in the wind farm, waste management, commercial and industrial sectors nationally. Michael worked on the capture and development of photomontages as well as compiling the Landscape & Visual Impact Assessments for some of the first wind turbines being proposed in Ireland in the early 2000's and has been compiling and reviewing LVIA chapters for multiple wind farm projects each year since 2014. Michael is a key member of the MKO senior management team and as head of the Environment Division has responsibilities to mentor various grades of team members, foster a positive work environment and promote continuous professional development for employees. Michael also has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Geography and Economics from NUI Maynooth, is a Member of IEMA, a Chartered Environmentalist (CEnv).

13.1.2 Existing Development Description

A full and detailed description of the Existing Development can be found in Chapter 4: Description of the Existing Development. Section 4.4 of that chapter describes the Existing Development and its component parts.

13.1.2.1 In-Text Referencing

As detailed in Section 1.1.1 in Chapter 1 of this rEIAR, the various development components are described and assessed using the following references: 'Subject Development', 'Existing Development', 'Prospective Development', 'Permitted Development', 'Site', 'Wind Farm Site', 'Grid Connection Site', 'BMEP Site', 'Grid Connection', 'November 2020 Peat Slide', '2017 EIAR' and 'proposed turbines' or 'proposed turbine locations'.

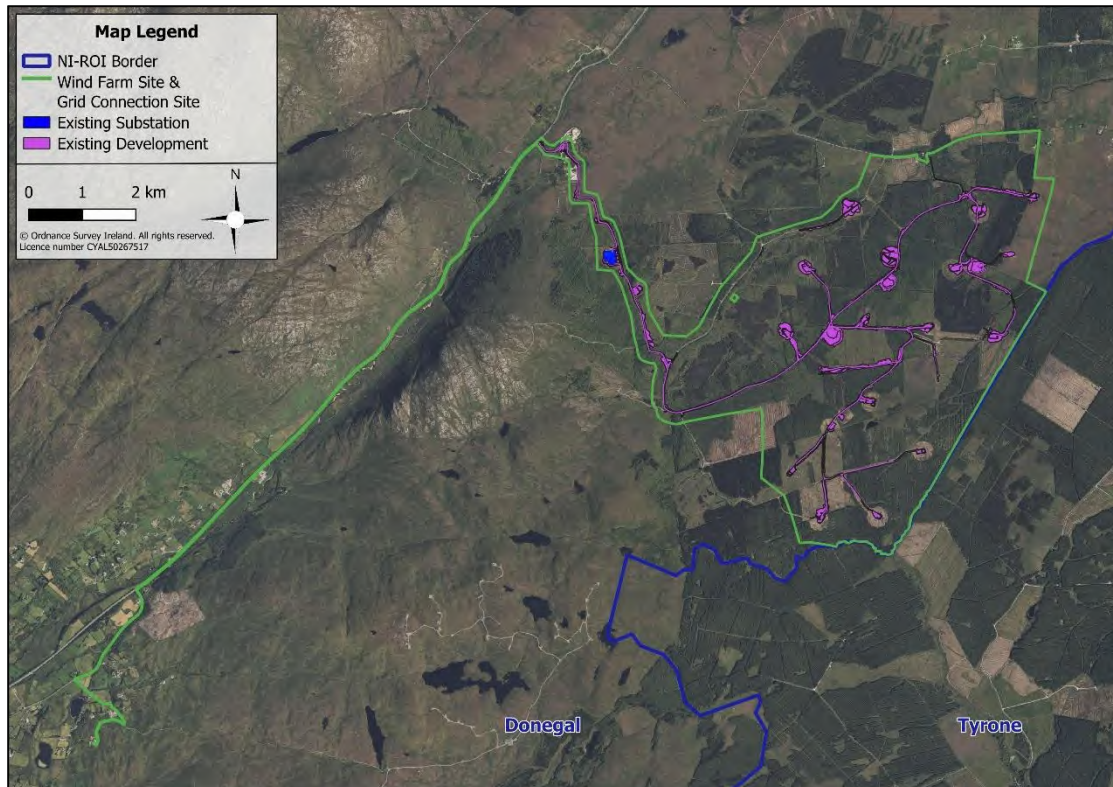


Figure 13-1 Aerial map of the Wind Farm Site and the Grid Connection Site.

13.1.3 Essential Aspects of the Existing Development from an LVIA Perspective

Guidance for the LVIA (GLVIA 3, 2013) states that:

“It is important to make sure that the project description provides all the information needed to identify its effect on particular aspects of the environment. For LVIA it is important to understand, from the project description, the essential aspects of the scheme that will potentially give rise to its effects on the landscape and visual amenity.”

The essential aspects of the proposal from an LVIA perspective include the tallest above ground elements of the Existing Development, such as the control buildings and lightning masts of the onsite 110kV substation. These are the most visually prominent features under assessment in this LVIA. However, the masts are very slender features and therefore, are not visually prominent within the landscape. The design and scale of these lightning masts are shown in Chapter 4.

All other infrastructure including general ground works (roads, hardstands), borrow pits, site entrance and Grid Connection is fully assessed and considered in the context of potential receptors.

13.1.4 Planning History, Site Location & Current Uses

As set out in Chapter 2, the Wind Farm Site has been the subject of previous planning applications, most recently the Permitted Development, which comprises the same optimised turbine layout and height of turbines as the Prospective Development. The Permitted Development was permitted by ACP in 2018, with the Inspector reporting acceptable levels of Landscape and Visual Impacts.

The Wind Farm Site and the Grid Connection Site together measure approximately 901 hectares and are located within a remote setting in County Donegal characterised primarily by commercial forestry.

The Wind Farm Site is located approximately 8 km southwest of the twin towns of Ballybofey and Stranorlar and approximately 12 km northeast of Donegal Town at its nearest point. The Grid Connection Site extends southwest from the Wind Farm Site for approximately 6 km along the N15 National Road towards Donegal Town before continuing south and east along local roads and through agricultural fields to the Clogher 110kV substation.

The Wind Farm Site and surrounding land use predominantly comprises peat bogs, commercial forestry and other seminatural areas with limited residential use along local roads. Existing access is from the N15 National Road in the northwest of the Wind Farm Site and the local road north of the Wind Farm Site. The N15 National Road runs southwest to northeast with the main Wind Farm Site area lying about 2km southeast of the road.

Construction of the Existing Development commenced in November 2019, at which point the majority of the civil engineering works, including wind farm access roads, 110kV electrical substation and underground grid connection, turbine hardstands, turbine foundations, and ancillary works were substantially completed over the following 12-month period up to November 2020 when a peat slide occurred.

13.1.5 Mitigation by Design

The Wind Farm Site was strategically selected as a landscape highly suitable for the development of wind energy. Through the iterative project design process for the Permitted Development, various best practice tools for assessing the landscape and visual impact of a proposed wind farm development were utilised to bring forward the optimum design with respect to landscape and visual factors. These tools include landscape modelling, Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping and the preparation of photomontage visualisations.

The iterative design process was informed by the siting and design guidance for wind farms in specific landscape types as set out in the Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities (Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government [DoEHLG], 2006), hereafter the 'Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2006)'

The final design of the Permitted Development included careful micro-siting of infrastructure with the aim of preventing the potential for significant landscape and visual effects. Although only partially constructed, that design has mitigated the potential for the Existing Development to have unacceptable landscape and visual effects.

The layout of the Existing Development, that is the subject of this LVIA, incorporates the following landscape and visual design considerations for good wind farm design:

- The Existing Development is sited within a low sensitivity landscape comprising sparsely settled, remote, marginal upland characterised by commercial forestry.
- The Existing Development is sited in a location where it is not the focus of any designated protected views in local planning policy.

13.2

Methodology and Assessment Criteria

This section outlines the methodology and guidance used to undertake this LVIA

13.2.1

Scope and Definition of Landscape and Visual Impact (LVIA) Study Area

The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition 2013 (hereafter GLVIA3) published by Landscape Institute (LI) & Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) (2013), refers to the identification of the area of landscape that is to be covered while assessing landscape and visual effects. The guidelines state:

“The study areas should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around it which the proposed development may influence in a significant manner.”

The landscape and visual assessments are based on a wider study area, the ‘rLVIA Study Area’. Considering the nature of the Existing Development as predominately surface level infrastructure and on the basis of the desktop study and survey work undertaken and the professional judgement of the assessment team, it is considered that landscape and visual effects could not potentially be significant beyond 5km of the Wind Farm Site. Therefore, the rLVIA Study Area was defined as all lands within 5km of the turbine hardstands within the Existing Development, as shown on Figure 13-2 below. The Existing Development is unique in terms of defining the rLVIA Study Area in that it already exists. The rLVIA Study Area has therefore been primarily defined by the onsite fieldwork completed on the Wind Farm Site itself and in the wider area and from the public realm. This included consideration of the landscape and visual enclosure provided by landforms to the west and south of the Wind Farm Site and above ground infrastructure such as the substation. This process also included onsite appraisal of the Grid Connection Site, which is not included in the 5km Study Area boundary as this would be misleading in terms of the potential for wider effects associated with what is an underground component of the Existing Development. Therefore, assessment of landscape and visual effects from locations beyond 5km (beyond 5km of the constructed turbine hardstands) and areas beyond the immediate vicinity of the Grid Connection Site (300m) are scoped out of this assessment.

The Existing Development is located in Co. Donegal on the border to County Tyrone. Due to the mountainous and heavily vegetated areas, within the rLVIA Study Area, baseline studies and site visits found that there will be no visibility of the Existing Development from receptors within County Tyrone. Therefore, County Tyrone has been scoped out from further assessment. On this basis, there is no potential for transboundary landscape or visual effects, and these have been scoped out from further assessment.

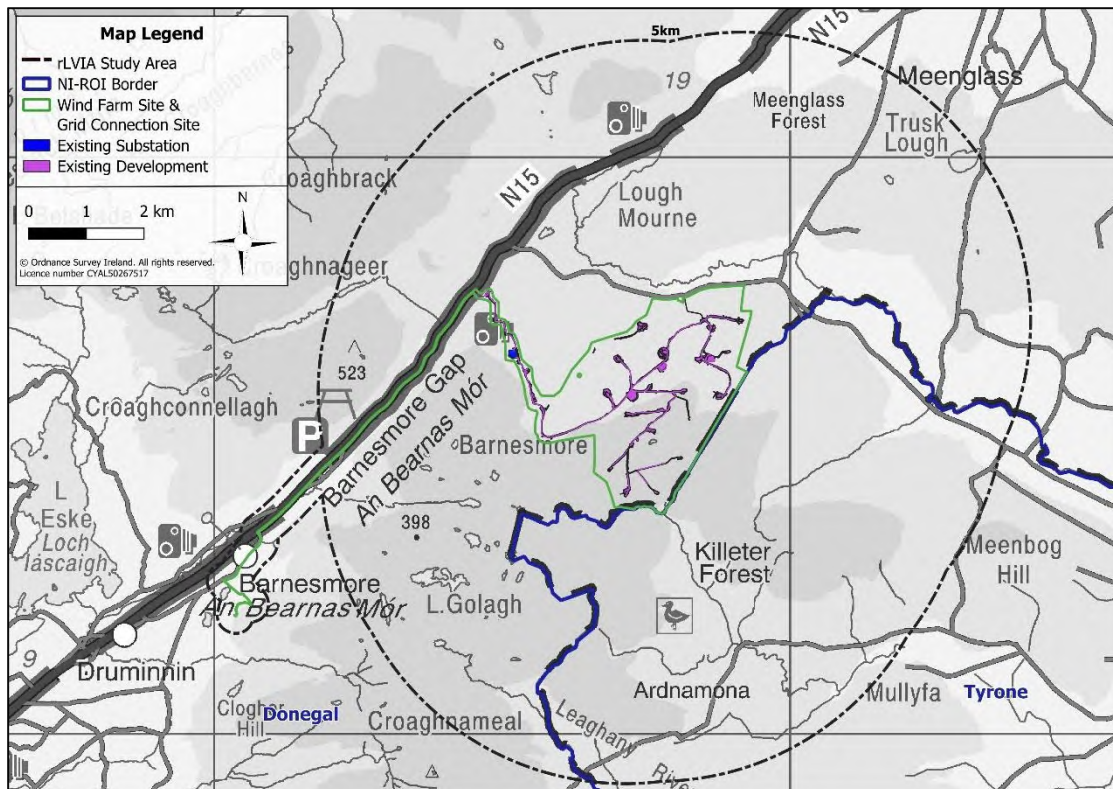


Figure 13-2 rLVIA Study Area

13.2.2 Guidance and Reference Materials

In 2000, the Department of the Environment and Local Government (DoEHLG) published ‘*Landscape and Landscape Assessment: Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities*’, which recommended that all local authorities adopt a standardised approach to landscape assessment for incorporation into development plans and consideration as part of the planning process. This document remains in Draft.

In 2002, Ireland signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC). This introduced a pan-European concept that centres on the quality of landscape protection, management and planning. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht published a National Landscape Strategy for Ireland in 2015. The strategy aims to ensure compliance with the ELC and contains six main objectives, including undertaking a National Landscape Character Assessment and developing landscape policies.

Although the DoEHLG 2000 guidance remains in draft form, this section of the LVIA has been informed by the landscape assessment guidelines presented in the DoEHLG document as well as other guidelines, such as the following:

- > GLVIA3 (LI & IEMA, 2013);
- > ‘Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of GLVIA3: Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 2024-01’ (hereafter, LI TGN 24-01) published by the Landscape Institute (LI) (2024);
- > Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EPA, 2022);
- > Donegal County Development Plan 2024–2030 (DCDP).

For guidelines pertaining to the siting and design of wind energy developments (which influenced the Existing Development design), this LVIA considered the best-practice guidance of the Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2006).

13.2.3 Baseline Landscape and Visual Information

In order to carry out this assessment, an initial desk study of baseline information was undertaken that has informed the LVIA, and this included the following:

Landscape

- Policies, objectives and designations contained in the Donegal County Development Plan 2022-2028 pertaining to landscape and wind energy;
- Landscape character and description of the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site and its immediate surroundings, determined by a multiple site survey's conducted in December 2023, 2024, and 2025;
- Landscape sensitivity (derived from the appraisal of landscape value and susceptibility to change) of the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site and its immediate surroundings, informed by the desk study and site surveys;
- Landscape character of the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site as designated for planning authorities in Section 6.9 *'Landscape Character Types as a Basis for Guidelines'* of the Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2006) and the Draft Guidelines (DoHPLG, 2019); and
- Landscape character of Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site and its wider setting as designated by LCAs in county-level policies for Landscape Character Assessment.
- Review of the 2017 EIAR Landscape and Visual Assessment.

Visual

- Identification of Visual Receptors in the rLVIA Study Area.

13.2.4 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments are informed by appraisals conducted during multiple site visits. In the context of this rEIAR, no photomontages were required as the infrastructure is already built. Photos of Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site are included throughout this chapter to aid discussion and the assessment of effects.

13.2.4.1 Identification of Landscape & Visual Receptors

Section 13.3 below includes the Landscape Baseline. This section reviews the policies and objectives of various planning policy documents relating to landscape, planning and the locational siting of wind farms, as they relate to the Wind Farm Site. The rLVIA Study Area is situated in Counties Donegal and Tyrone. The Landscape Baseline states baseline information about the receiving landscape of the Wind Farm Site and its wider setting.

Section 13.4 includes the Visual Baseline. This section identifies key sensitive visual receptors in the rLVIA Study Area where visibility of the Existing Development is likely to occur and reports upon the nature of this visibility from visual receptors. Receptors with no visibility of the Existing Development are scoped out from assessment in the effects section of the Chapter.

The effects on key sensitive landscape and visual receptors identified in the baseline investigation are assessed in Section 13.5 - Likely or Significant Landscape and Visual Effects, using the methodology reported below. The assessment of effects is primarily informed by desktop studies and site visits.

13.2.4.2 Assessing Landscape Effects

The methodology uses qualitative methods to arrive at an assessment, which is based on the Landscape and Landscape Assessment (2000) Guidelines as well as the GLVIA3, and the Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2006) were also taken into account.

Landscape effects can be described as changes which affect the landscape as a resource. This includes how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects and its landscape character. Landscape effects also relate to changes in the structure of the landscape. Under the GLVIA3, the assessment of likely significant effects on landscape receptors includes a judgement on both the sensitivity of the receptor as well as magnitude of the change.

13.2.4.2.1 Landscape Effects – Assessing Landscape Sensitivity

Landscape Sensitivity, which is described in the GLVIA3 as a combination of the landscape's susceptibility to change as well as the value attached to the landscape receptor.

Susceptibility to change can be described as the ability of the landscape receptor (either the overall character, quality of the landscape or a particular landscape feature) to accommodate the Existing Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline (existing) landscape and/or the aims of landscape planning policies and strategies. Table 13-1 below presents differing description criteria for susceptibility to change.

Table 13-1 Description criteria for susceptibility to change

Susceptibility of landscape receptor to change	Description and example criteria
High	Landscape receptors where the overall character of the landscape receptor or the nature of the individual landscape receptor causes it to have a high susceptibility to change considering its inherent characteristics and where the landscape receptor has a low ability to accommodate the proposed change without undue consequences for the maintenance of its landscape character, and/or its quality or condition, and/or its particular aesthetic and perceptual aspects, and where such change is not in compliance with planning policies/strategies.
Medium	Landscape receptors where the overall character of the landscape receptor or the nature of the individual landscape receptor causes it to have a medium susceptibility to change considering its inherent characteristics and where the landscape receptor has a moderate ability to accommodate the proposed change without undue consequences for the maintenance of its landscape character, and/or its quality or condition, and/or its particular aesthetic and perceptual aspects, with consideration given to planning policies/strategies.
Low	Landscape receptors where the overall character of the landscape receptor or the nature of the individual landscape receptor causes it to have a low susceptibility to change considering its inherent characteristics and where the landscape receptor has a strong ability to accommodate the proposed change without undue consequences for the maintenance of its landscape character,

	and/or its quality or condition, and/or its particular aesthetic and perceptual aspects, and where such change may be in compliance with planning policies/strategies.
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Landscape value is a combination of values which are assessed in the landscape baseline, combining any formal landscape designations, and, where there are no designations, judgements based on individual elements of the landscape receptor, for example particular landscape features, notable aesthetic, perceptual or experiential qualities, and combination of these contributors. In addition, it is noted that the GLVIA3 states that “there should not be over-reliance on designations as the sole indicator of value”. The assessments of landscape value undertaken in this report include consideration of various elements that contribute to landscape value of specific receptors, using best practice standards and professional judgement. Where this occurs, landscape value will be judged based on clearly stated criteria.

Table 13-2 below presents differing description criteria for landscape value.

Table 13-2 Description criteria for landscape value

Value attached to Landscape elements	Description and example criteria
High	Landscape receptors forming part of designations (e.g. areas of amenity, scenic routes/views) in the development plan, or at a national or international level, or landscape receptors not designated but where the receptor is judged to be of equivalent value using clearly stated criteria including wildness, naturalness, very strong cultural heritage or natural heritage associations and/or very high recreational value.
Medium	Landscape receptors where value is not formally designated but are of value as good examples of high quality, intact landscapes or landscape features and are deemed to be of relatively high scenic quality. Landscapes or landscape receptors that contain some rare elements, include areas or features which are wild or have a sense of naturalness, strong cultural associations or which have recreational value.
Low	Landscapes that are not formally designated and considered as modified. Areas which do not have particularly scenic qualities, do not include rare elements or landscape features and do not have strongly evident cultural or heritage associations.

In combining the assessment of the landscape value of a landscape receptor with the susceptibility to change of that receptor, it is noted here that a judgement of high landscape value does not necessarily imply that this receptor has a high susceptibility to change, and it is emphasised that this relationship is complex. The combination of these, which determines the landscape sensitivity, is undertaken using professional judgement with the rationale for judgements clearly explained in the description of the assessment of effects or in the baseline study. On this basis landscape receptors have been assigned one of the four following sensitivity ratings:

- > Very High
- > High
- > Medium
- > Low

It is noted that sensitivity classifications are generally guided by local and national planning policy, particularly for Landscape Character Areas and County Policy in relation to these, as well as County Wind Energy Policy. However, it is noted that in cases where local variations in landscape receptors merit a smaller scale focused assessment that may differ from the policy, this is undertaken using professional judgement and is clearly explained in the main body of the report.

13.2.4.2.2 Assessing Magnitude of Change in the Landscape

The term 'Magnitude of Change' is used in the impact assessment included in this rEIAR. The context of this assessment where the Existing Development already exists in the landscape, the magnitude of the continued impact of this is considered. In order to facilitate the impact assessments, and effectively determine the continued impact, the magnitude of change was determined by considering the change that has occurred.

The magnitude of change in each landscape character area is a combination of the visual presence - size and scale of the change, the extent of the area to be affected, and the duration and reversibility of the effect. The magnitude of change for each landscape character area was assessed using the definitions outlined in Table 13-3 below.

Table 13-3 Magnitude of Landscape Change Assessment Criteria

Magnitude of Change	Description
Substantial	Where a landscape will experience the loss of key landscape features or the introduction of uncharacteristic additions over a large area. The changes to the landscape are prominent and large in scale. The level of change has an effect on the overall landscape character. The effects are likely long term and may be irreversible.
Moderate	A more limited loss of or change to landscape features over a medium extent which will result in some change to landscape features and aesthetics. Could include the addition of some new uncharacteristic features or elements that would lead to the potential for change in landscape character in a localised area or part of a landscape character area. Would include moderate effects on the overall landscape character that do not affect key characteristics. The effects could be long to medium term and/or partially reversible.
Slight	The loss of or change to landscape features of limited extent, or changes to landscape character in smaller areas. Changes would not affect key characteristics. The addition of any new features or elements to the landscape would only result in low-level changes to the overall aesthetics of the landscapes. Changes to the landscape are more evident at a local level and not over a wide geographical area. The effects could potentially be medium to short term and/or reversible.
Negligible	A change affecting smaller areas of landscape character including the loss of some landscape elements or the addition of features or elements which are either of low value or hardly noticeable. The effects could be short term and/or reversible.

The Landscape Effects Assessment Matrix Table 13-4 below shows the significance of landscape effects, arrived at by combining the landscape receptor sensitivity and the magnitude of change classifications. Landscape receptor sensitivity is shown in the first column and magnitude of landscape change is

shown in the first row. This table is used as an indicative tool to assist in determining the significance of landscape effects. In different circumstances differing levels of mitigating factors may ultimately result in a different determination of the level of significance. The significance of a landscape effect is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of effect. The significance of landscape effect is arrived at using a combination of the matrix shown in Table 13-4 and Figure 13-3 later.

Table 13-4 Landscape Effects Significance Assessment Matrix

	Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Very High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor
High	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor
Medium	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible
Low	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible	Negligible

The determination of significance uses a seven-point scale, ranging from Major to Negligible. This seven-point scale is translated to the EPA, 2022 impact assessment classifications of significance, as outlined in Table 13-5 below.

Table 13-5 Impact Assessment Significance Classification for Landscape Effects

Matrix Classification Significance	EPA, 2022 Significance Classification	EPA,2022 Definition of Significance
Major	Profound	An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics
Major/Moderate	Very significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters most of a sensitive aspect of the environment
Moderate	Significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment.
Moderate/Minor	Moderate	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends
Minor	Slight	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities
Minor/Negligible	Not Significant	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.
Negligible	Imperceptible	An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences

13.2.4.3 Assessing Visual Effects

Visual effects relate to changes in views and visual amenity of the surroundings of individuals or groups of people. These may result from changes in content and character of views as a result in changes to the landscape.

It should be noted that in assessing visual effects, there are different types of visual effects:

- > **Visual obstruction:** This occurs when there is an impact on a view which blocks the view.
- > **Visual intrusion:** This occurs when there is an impact on a view, but which does not block the view.

The likely significant effects of the Existing Development in terms of visual and landscape effects are informed by baseline studies and on-site appraisals. The significance of the effect on visual receptors is a combination of the sensitivity of the receptor as well as the magnitude of the change.

13.2.4.3.1 Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Visual Receptor Sensitivity depends on the occupation or activity of the people, as well the extent to which the attention is focused on views and visual amenity, according to the GLVIA3. Visual receptor sensitivity is assessed as either being Very High, High, Medium, or Low, based on the definition of descriptions and examples set out in Table 13-6 below.

Table 13-6 Visual Receptor Sensitivity Assessment Criteria

Sensitivity of Visual Receptor(s)	Description
Very High	Included in this category are viewers that are primarily focused on views from this particular location, such as visitors to popular destinations identified for their outstanding views. Residents in close proximity who have primary views of the highest scenic quality in the direction of the development.
High	Includes viewers at designated views or landscapes. Viewers such as residents in close proximity to the location who have primary views that will be in the direction of the development that may not necessarily be of a particularly scenic quality; viewers at well-known heritage or popular tourist or recreational areas, viewers along scenic or tourist routes.
Medium	Includes viewers who may have some susceptibility to a change in view. Viewers such as residents in medium proximity but who do not have views focused on the direction of the Existing Development or whose views are not of a particularly scenic quality; those from views which are not designated but may have local recreational uses or those travelling along routes or at view which are considered moderately scenic.
Low	Includes viewers engaged in activities where the focus is not on the landscape or view. These including those travelling along a busy route, viewers at work or engaged in sport not related to views or experience of the landscape.

13.2.4.3.2 Magnitude of Visual Change

The components of the Existing Development have been constructed and are therefore existing in the landscape. In order to facilitate the visual impact assessments and effectively determine the visual impact of the Existing Development the magnitude of change was determined by considering the change that has occurred.

The magnitude of the visual change resulting at each location is a combination of scale of the change, the extent of the area to be affected and the duration and reversibility of the effect. The magnitude of change is determined in accordance with the definitions and descriptions included in Table 13-7 below.

Table 13-7 Magnitude of Visual Change Assessment Criteria

Magnitude of Change	Description
Substantial	Substantial change, where the proposals would result in large-scale, prominent or very prominent change, leading to substantial obstruction of existing view or complete change in character and composition of the baseline through removal of key elements or addition of uncharacteristic elements which may or may not be visually discordant. This includes locations where the Existing Development is fully or almost fully visible over a wide extent, at close proximity to the viewer. This change could be long term or of a long duration.
Moderate	The change in the view may involve partial obstruction of existing view or partial change in character and composition of the baseline through the introduction of new elements or removal of existing elements. Likely to occur at locations where the development is partially visible over a moderate or medium extent, and which are not in close proximity to the development. Change may be readily noticeable but not substantially different in scale and character from the surroundings and wider setting.
Slight	The proposals would be partially visible or visible at sufficient distance to be perceptible and result in a low level of change in the view and its composition and a low degree of contrast. The character of the view may be altered but will remain similar to the baseline existing situation. This change could be short term or of a short duration.
Negligible	Any change would only be barely distinguishable from the status quo “do-nothing scenario” in the surroundings. The composition and character of the view would be substantially unaltered, approximating to little or no change.

Visual Effects Assessment Matrix in Table 13-8 below shows the significance of visual effects, arrived at by combining the visual receptor sensitivity and the magnitude of change classifications. Visual receptor sensitivity is shown in the left-hand first column and magnitude of visual change is shown in the first row at the top of the table. This table is used as an indicative tool to assist in determining the significance of visual effects. In different circumstances differing levels of mitigating factors may ultimately result in a different determination of the level of significance (see below). The significance of a visual effect is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of effect. The significance of visual effect is arrived at using a combination of the matrix shown in Table 13-8 and Figure 13-3 later.

Table 13-8 Visual Effects Significance Assessment Matrix

	Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Very High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor
High	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor
Medium	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible
Low	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible	Negligible

The determination of significance uses a seven-point scale, ranging from Major to Negligible. This seven-point scale is translated to the EPA, 2022 impact assessment classifications of significance, as outlined in Table 13-9 below.

Table 13-9 EPA, 2022 Impact Assessment Significance Classification for Visual Effects

Matrix Classification Significance	EPA Significance Classification	EPA (2022) Definition of Significance
Major	Profound	An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics
Major/Moderate	Very significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters most of a sensitive aspect of the environment
Moderate	Significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment.
Moderate/Minor	Moderate	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends
Minor	Slight	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities
Minor/Negligible	Not Significant	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.
Negligible	Imperceptible	An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences

13.2.4.3.3 Residual Visual Effect

After determining the significance of the visual effect using the above visual effects assessment matrix and significance graph, mitigating factors are taken into consideration to arrive at the final residual effect. In some cases, mitigating factors merit a reduction in classification.

13.2.4.4 Determination of Residual Landscape and Visual Effects

The matrices and tables above are tools to aid professional judgement in the determination of the significance of an effect. They are useful in that they provide a transparent, objective, structure to the

process of balancing sensitivity and magnitude of change. In the context of the determination of visual effects, the formulaic process created by the use of the matrix above provides an indicative initial assessment, which is clearly demonstrated in the visual assessment tables.

However, over-reliance on the formulaic process, which is heavily influenced by the definitions of sensitivity and magnitude of change contained in Table 13-4 and Table 13-8 above, can lead to a failure to properly account for the full range of circumstances and factors at play in the determination of the significance of a visual effect (see section 3.35, GLVIA3). A wide range of factors, mitigating or otherwise, can factor into such a determination, and it is not possible to capture the complexity involved in balancing all considerations within the necessarily limited definitions contained in these tables. This then naturally results in circumstances whereby the process of the determination of significance using the formulaic method involved with the matrix can result in misrepresentations of the significance of visual effects. It is only with professional judgement, and narrative descriptions of effect, that such complexity can be integrated into the determination of significance. Therefore, the formulaic methods based upon the matrix presented above is combined with professional judgement in the determination of significance. This is illustrated in Figure 13-3 below where the professional judgment of the competent expert is used to properly determine the significance of an effect taking all considerations into account.

A focus is placed upon the narrative description of effects (see section 3.36, GLVIA3) given the naturally subjective nature of the significance determination process, particularly in relation to visual effects, ensuring that the rationale for the overall judgement is clear (see sections 3.28-3.29, GLVIA3). The comprehensive assessment of the effects of the Existing Development included in Section 13.5.6 aims to provide a transparent and robust determination of residual visual effects utilising the graph in Figure 13-3 below in combination with a clear and logical narrative.

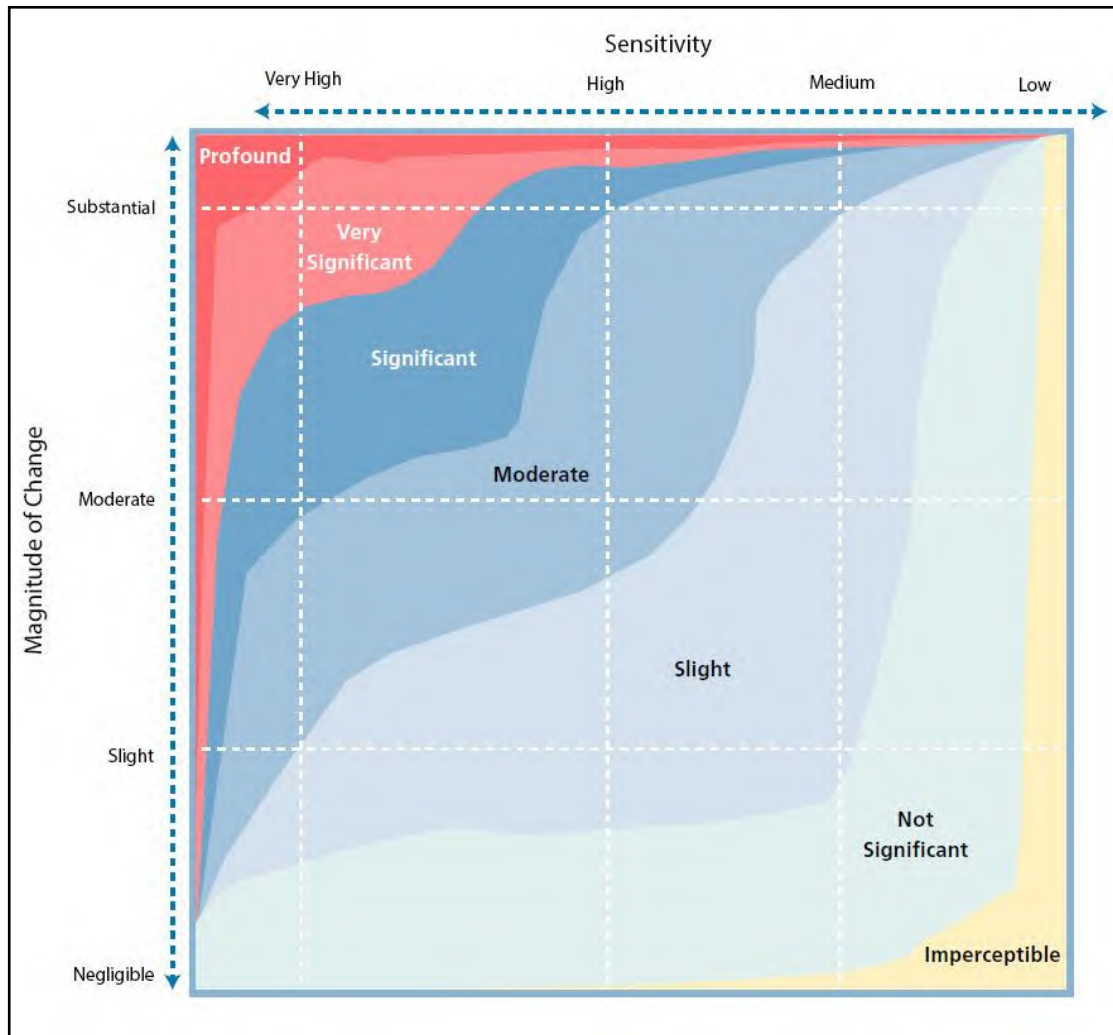


Figure 13-3 Visual Effect Significance Graph (adapted from EPA, 2022)

13.2.5 Assessment of In-Cumulation and Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

This chapter assesses the likely landscape and visual impacts of the Existing Development, both independently, as well as in-cumulation with the Prospective Development as well as cumulatively with all other relevant projects in the rLVIA Study Area. The assessments consider the Existing Development cumulatively with all 'likely future receiving environments' (EPA, 2022) which includes all existing, permitted and proposed developments in the 5km rLVIA Study Area as discussed above in Section 13.2.1.

The effects reported in this chapter and within the impact assessment tables use appropriate and logical narrative to discuss cumulative interactions between the Existing Development and all other developments including the Prospective Development. Discussion of cumulative interactions on specific landscape and visual receptors is relative to the effects on that receptor and proportionate to the likelihood of significant landscape and visual effects occurring.

Assessment of Cumulative Landscape Effects

Assessment of cumulative landscape effects consider where two or more developments have the potential to cumulatively effect the physical fabric of the landscape and specific landscape components and receptors. Cumulative effects on landscape character arise when two or more developments

introduce new features into the landscape. In this way, they can change the landscape character to such an extent that they create a different landscape character type, in a similar way to large scale afforestation. That change need not be adverse; some derelict or degraded landscapes may be enhanced as a result of such a change in landscape character.

Assessment of Cumulative Visual Effects

The GLVIA3 guidance also notes that cumulative visual effects can be experienced in combination, where two or more developments are visible from one location, either simultaneously or in succession and these are considered in the assessment of visual effects from this location. Another type of cumulative visual effect includes where two or more developments are seen sequentially, where a viewer moves to another location and sees the same or different developments.

13.3 Landscape Baseline

The Landscape Baseline reports relevant policy pertinent to the LVIA, as well as a description of the receiving landscape of the Wind Farm Site and its wider setting. This is broken down into the following sections:

- **Landscape Designations and Policy Context** - Policy setting pertaining to the location and nature of Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site from a landscape perspective based on:
 - Donegal County Development Plan 2024-2030
- **Landscape Character of the Wind Farm Site** - A description of the physical landscape and characteristics of the Wind Farm Site from site visits as well as an appraisal of its landscape value and sensitivity to change.
- **The Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities** - A review of the Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2006) and the Draft Guidelines (DoHPLG, 2019) and siting guidance relating to the landscape characteristics of the Wind Farm Site.
- **Landscape Character of the rLVIA Study Area** – A description of landscape in the rLVIA Study area, including the identification of designated Landscape Character Areas (LCAs).

13.3.1 Landscape Policy Context

This sub-section reviews the policies and objectives of various planning policy documents relating to landscape, planning and the locational siting of wind farms, as they relate to the Existing Development.

The Existing Development is located in County Donegal and therefore, the Donegal County Development Plan 2024-2030 was consulted to identify landscape designations existent in the rLVIA Study Area. Additionally, general landscape policy and landscape policy pertaining to wind energy development are also included in this section of the LVIA, providing context for the selection of the Wind Farm Site as a landscape suitable for a wind energy development. The Existing Development is not visible from other counties including Northern Ireland.

13.3.2 Donegal County Development Plan 2024-2030

Chapter 11 of the Donegal County Development Plan 2024-2030 (hereafter referred to as the DCDP) policies and objectives relating to landscape. The protection of sensitive landscapes from unsuitable developments is seen as one of the Council's most important roles. The DCDP describes the designation of landscapes of the highest quality which are characterised by wilderness, and which have little or no man-made structures, including high quality coastal or upland areas. These areas are known as Areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity (EHSAs). These are mapped on *Map 11.1* of the DCDP.

The Donegal County Development Plan 2024-2030 sets out the following policies and objectives for landscape conservation:

***“L-O-1:** To protect, manage and conserve the character, quality and value of the Donegal landscape.*

***L-P-1:** To protect areas identified as ‘Especially High Scenic Amenity’ on Map 11.1 ‘Scenic Amenity’. Within these areas, only developments of strategic importance, or developments that are provided for by policy elsewhere in this Plan may be considered.*

***L-P-2:** To protect areas identified as ‘High Scenic Amenity’ and ‘Moderate Scenic Amenity’ on Map 11.1 ‘Scenic Amenity’. Within these areas, only development of a nature, location and scale that integrates with, and reflects the character and amenity of the landscape may be considered, subject to compliance with other relevant policies of the Plan.*

***L-P-3:** To safeguard the scenic context, cultural landscape significance, recreational/tourism amenities, and environmental amenities of the County’s coastline from inappropriate development, save for strategic infrastructure provision of overriding regional or national public interest. This policy will be implemented by the Council in so far as same can be practicably and reasonably achieved within the context of Strategic Infrastructure Projects including, but not restricted to, the TEN-T Priority Route Improvement Project, Donegal, the Bridgend to County border project scheme, the Buncrana Inner Relief Road and Greenways.*

***L-P-6:** To safeguard prominent skylines and ridgelines from inappropriate development.*

***L-P-7:** To preserve the views and prospects of special amenity value and interest as identified on Map 11.1.*

***L-P-8:** To preserve scenic views between public roads and the sea, lakes and rivers. Such developments shall be considered on the basis of the following criteria.*

- a. whether the integrity of the view has been affected to-date by development;*
- b. whether the development would intrude significantly on the view; and*
- c. whether the development would materially alter the view.*
- d. In operating this policy, a reasonable and balanced approach shall be implemented so as to ensure that the policy does not act as a blanket ban on developments between the road and the sea, lakes and river but also seeks to maintain existing landscape qualities in the area.”*

13.3.2.1 Landscape Classifications

Within *Section 11.2.2* of the DCDP, three separate Landscape Classifications are identified for Donegal County. These are shown in Map 11.1 of the DCDP, which is recreated in Figure 13-4 below, and defined as follows:

- 1. **“Areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity (EHSA):** These are sublime natural landscapes of the highest quality that are synonymous with the identity of County Donegal. These areas have extremely limited capacity to assimilate additional development.*
- 2. **Areas of High Scenic Amenity (HSA):** These are landscapes of significant aesthetic, cultural, heritage and environmental quality that are unique to their locality and form a fundamental element of the landscape and identity of County Donegal. These areas have the capacity to absorb sensitively located development of scale, design and use that will enable assimilation into the receiving landscape and which does not detract*

from the quality of the landscape, subject to compliance with all other objectives and policies of the plan.

3. **Areas of Moderate Scenic Amenity (MSA):** These are primarily landscapes outside Local Area Plan Boundaries and Settlement framework boundaries, that have a unique, rural and generally agricultural quality. These areas have the capacity to absorb additional development that is suitably located, sited and designed subject to compliance with all other objectives and policies of the Plan.”

The Wind Farm Site is located within all three Landscape Classification Areas. The following policies, outlined in Section 11.2.2 of the DCDP are relevant to these Landscape Classification Areas:

“LP-1: To protect areas identified as ‘Especially High Scenic Amenity’ on Map 11.1 ‘Scenic Amenity’. Within these areas, only developments of strategic importance, or developments that are provided for by policy elsewhere in this Plan may be considered.

LP-2: To protect areas identified as ‘High Scenic Amenity’ and ‘Moderate Scenic Amenity’ on Map 11.1 ‘Scenic Amenity’. Within these areas, only development of a nature, location and scale that integrates with, and reflects the character and amenity of the landscape may be considered, subject to compliance with other relevant policies of the Plan.”

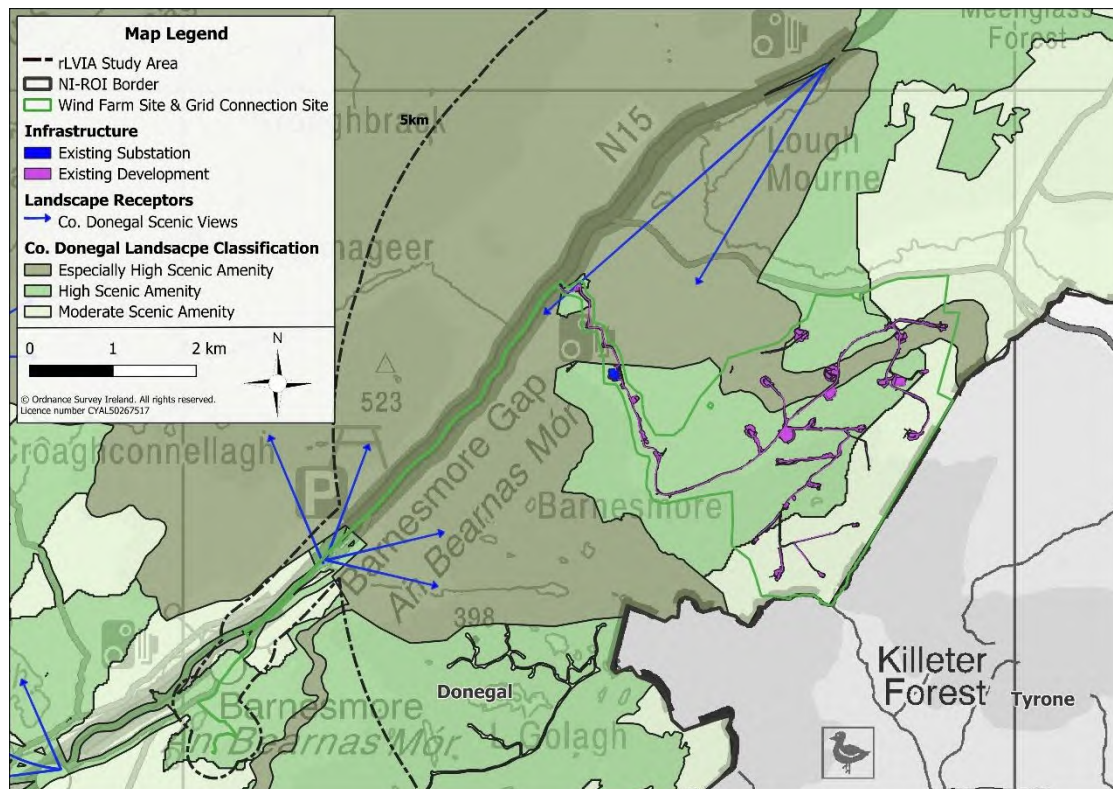


Figure 13-4 Annotated Map 11.1 of the DCDP - Landscape Classification

EHSA Previous Policy Context

It is important to note that the 2017 EIAR and planning application for the Permitted Development was assessed within a different planning policy context, following the Donegal County Development Plan 2012-2018 (Hereafter ‘2012-2018 CDP’). The 2012-2018 CDP included the EHSA designation as the highest tier of landscape sensitivity at that time, as it does now. The 2012-2018 CDP did not include a medium or lower tier of landscape sensitivity. At the time, the EHSA designations in the 2012-2018 CDP were a policy driver informing the favourability of areas of Donegal with respect to wind energy development. It is very relevant to highlight that the Wind Farm Site, which has not moved location, was not an area comprising any EHSA designations in the 2012-2018 CDP and was an ‘Area Open to

Consideration' for wind energy development. Therefore, with respect to both landscape sensitivity policy and wind energy zoning, the previous policy direction in the 2012-2018 CDP was supportive of the Wind Farm Site as a landscape capable of accommodating wind energy development.

13.3.2.2 Views and Prospects

Map 11.1 of the DCDP, shown in Figure 13-4 above, shows the Views and Prospects within the rLVIA Study Area for the Existing Development. The following policies, outlined in Section 11.2.2 of the DCDP are relevant to Views and Prospects:

“L-P7: To preserve the views and prospects of special amenity value and interest as identified on Map 11.1.

L-P8: To preserve scenic views between public roads and the sea, lakes and rivers. Such developments shall be considered on the basis of the following criteria:

- a. whether the integrity of the view has been affected to-date by development;*
- b. whether the development would intrude significantly on the view; and*
- c. whether the development would materially alter the view.*
- d. In operating this policy, a reasonable and balanced approach shall be implemented so as to ensure that the policy does not act as a blanket ban on developments between the road and the sea, lakes and river but also seeks to maintain existing landscape qualities in the area”*

There are two designated Views and Prospects within the rLVIA Study Area which are included in the assessment.

One is located on the N15 National Road, approximately 2.5km to the north of the Wind Farm Site and has protected views in a southwest direction towards the Barnesmore Gap across Lough Mourne. The Barnesmore Gap is a dramatic mountain pass at the south-eastern edge of the Bluestack Mountains. The DCDP states in Policy L-P-8 that in seeking to preserve Views and Prospects, particular attention will be paid to views between public roads and seas, lakes and rivers. This is particularly relevant to the protected view from the N15 National Road to the north of the Wind Farm Site. There is visibility of the Existing Development from the protected view to the north of the Wind Farm Site, albeit outside of the field of view of the Gap. Imagery was captured from this protected view to the north of the Wind Farm Site which is shown and discussed in Section 13.4.2 below.

The other protected view in the rLVIA Study Area is located approximately 1.3km to the west of the Wind Farm Site on the N15 National Road and has protected views in a northeast direction towards the Barnesmore Gap. There is no visibility of the Existing Development, from this protected view to the west due to topographical screening by the landforms at the Barnesmore Gap. Therefore, this protected view is scoped out from further assessment in this LVIA Chapter.

13.3.2.3 Wind Energy Strategy and Zoning in the DCDP

Section 9.2 of the DCDP outlines policies and objectives relating to wind energy developments. The DCDP identifies the following policy area designations as the means of determining the principle of the acceptability or otherwise of proposed wind farm developments:

***“Acceptable In Principle** - Wind farm developments shall be generally acceptable in principle in these areas*

***Open to Consideration** - Wind farm developments shall be generally open to consideration in these areas*

Not Normally Permissible -Like the other two designations, these areas were identified on foot of a comprehensive analysis of the environmental sensitivities and the wind energy potential of the County. On foot of this determination, and in-line with national guidelines, it follows that most windfarm developments will not normally be permissible. This should apply in particular to such proposals on previously undeveloped sites, inclusive of sites with a lapsed un-implemented permission (and where substantive works have not been undertaken). Notwithstanding, and having regard to previous planning assessments and decisions and the subsequent investment incurred, it is the position of Donegal County Council that a more balanced approach is required when dealing with windfarm proposals in these areas where, crucially, there is an already existing strong planning history. This refers to the following categories: Existing Windfarms; **Developments Under Construction**; Developments Where Permissions Have Lapsed But Where Substantial Works Have Been Completed; and Sites With a Live Permission but not yet started. For such sites, it is considered reasonable to allow for the consideration of proposals for the augmentation, upgrade and improvement of such developments in accordance with the details set out in Policy WE-P-1.”

The policies relevant to this are set out below:

“WE-P-1 - That the principle of the acceptability or otherwise of proposed wind farm developments shall be generally determined in accordance with the three areas identified in Map 9.2.1 ‘Wind Energy’ and as detailed below:

- a. *Acceptable in Principle* Wind energy development shall be generally acceptable in these areas.
- b. *Open to Consideration* Wind energy development shall be generally open to consideration in these areas.
- c. *Not Normally Permissible* Windfarm development proposals on previously undeveloped sites, inclusive of sites with a lapsed un-implemented permission (and where substantive works have not been undertaken) will not normally be permissible.

WE-P-1A - The augmentation, upgrade, repowering and improvements of: existing windfarms; **windfarm developments under construction**; developments where permission has lapsed but substantial works have been completed, **or on sites with an extant planning permission** will be open to consideration in all three designated areas (‘Not Normally Permissible’, ‘Open to Consideration’, and ‘Acceptable in principle’) on Map 9.2.1 where such proposals shall be generally confined to the planning unit of the existing development, or where a modestly-proportioned projection (relative to the established unit) beyond the established site can be demonstrated to be essential and unavoidable for the project in terms of operational efficiencies, and can demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that all environmental issues can be adequately addressed.”

The Existing Development is within the ‘Not Normally Permissible’ Area in Map 9.2.1 of the DCDP. However, the Existing Development fits within two of the categories set out in the exceptions cited above, as per WE-P-1A (highlighted in bold), it qualifies as ‘**Developments under Construction**’ (although construction is paused) and ‘**on sites with an extant planning permission**’ (Subject Development relates to the Permitted Development)’. The Existing Development therefore qualifies for policy WE-P-1A, therefore the appropriate designation for the Wind Farm Site is ‘Open to Consideration’.

13.3.2.4 Designated Landscape Character Areas

General Policy on Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape character refers to the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently in a particular type of landscape, and how people perceive this. It reflects combination of geology,

landforms. Soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement, and creates the sense of place found in different areas.

Landscape Character Assessment, as carried out by the local authorities in all counties in Ireland to meet the objectives of the National Landscape Strategy Framework 2015–2025 (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht [DoAHG], 2015), forms an important basis of this LVIA.

The Landscape Character Assessment is intended to analyse the character, value and sensitivity of landscapes identified within a particular area (i.e. counties) as part of efforts by the DoAHG to achieve national-level consistency in terms of landscape decision-making and uphold compliance of European Landscape Convention best practices. This approach aligns with the best practise guidance (GLVIA3, p.74), which states that:

“Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the key tool for understanding the landscape and should be used for baseline studies”.

County Donegal LCAs

Donegal County Council prepared a Landscape Character Assessment for County Donegal (hereafter referred to as LCACD) in May 2016, which defines landscape character within the county. As stated in the 2016 LCACD, the objectives of this plan are to:

- *“Carry out a Landscape Character Assessment for County Donegal in accordance with National and Regional legislation and Guidelines, the European Landscape Convention 2000 and having regard to existing best practice.*
- *Incorporate the findings of the Seascape Character Assessment of County Donegal, the Settlement Assessment of County Donegal and the Historic Landscape Characterisation of County Donegal into the Landscape Character Assessment.*
- *Collaborate with adjoining planning authorities to ensure cross boundary (and cross-border) continuity of landscape designations.”*

The LCACD defines, designates and maps Landscape Types and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) across the entirety of Donegal. The DCDP states the following in relation to the LCACD:

“The process was an analysis, characterisation and narrative of the component parts of the landscape of County Donegal and is not to be construed as an accompanying policy document of this Plan.”

Given the very specific and deliberate statement cited above, the LCACD and its LCAs do not form part of the policy in the current DCDP and are not protected or referenced in any planning policies. The LCACD is therefore used in this LVIA as a point of reference to inform the baseline landscape character assessments of the Wind Farm Site and wider rLVIA Study Area. However, the impact assessments in this LVIA considers the LCAs included in the LCACD, as well as the other landscape designations and classifications in the current DCDP.

The majority of the Wind Farm Site is located within LCA 40 - Cashelnaven Border and Uplands, as shown in Figure 13-5 below. This LCA is described as follows:

“a vast, mountainous, remote and undeveloped upland area bordering Northern Ireland characterized by peat covered hills and the mountain lakes of Lough Mourne and Lough Carn. The N15, one of the major routes into and through the county travels along the valley floor of Barnesmore gap alongside the freshwater Lough Mourne which providing water to much of east Donegal. There are isolated areas of semi-improved farmland nestled with single rural dwellings

throughout this LCA, contrasting greatly with the many large swathes of geometric commercial forestry plantations on the lower slopes and shoulders of the hills.”

A small section of the Wind Farm Site is also located within Donegal LCA 38 – Bluestack and LCA 41 - Croaghnameal Border & Uplands, as shown in Figure 13-5 below. Effects on all three LCAs are discussed in further detail in Section 13.5.

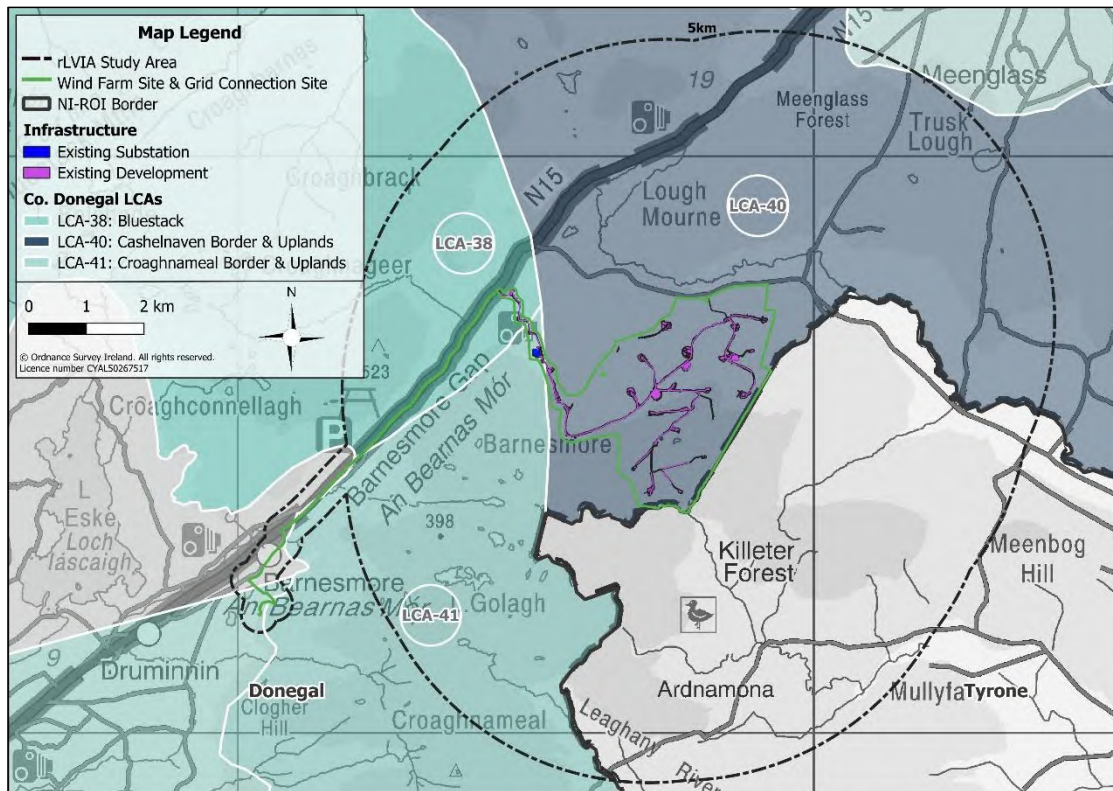


Figure 13-5 LCAs Map

A detailed description of each LCA which falls within the Wind Farm Site is outlined in Table 13-10 below.

Table 13-10 Landscape Character Areas that fall within the Wind Farm Site

LCA	Description	Sensitivity to Change
LCA 38 – Bluestack	<i>“Bluestack LCA is a wholly inland landscape within the Gaeltacht dominated by the Bluestack Mountain Range, a vast area of upland mountains, bogs and lakes with dramatic and wide river valleys that form and frame all of the views into and within this LCA. A dispersed low density rural population live in isolated one-off dwellings on the lower slopes of the mountains and within the North-western area of this LCA on agricultural river plains.”</i>	Within the Co. Donegal Landscape Character Assessment, it is noted that one of the defined ‘forces for change’ for this LCA is ‘Wind Farms’. The Existing Development is associated with wind farm infrastructure and so the sensitivity to change is deemed to be ‘Low’.
LCA 40 - Cashelnaven	<i>“Cashelnaven Border & Uplands LCA is a vast, mountainous, remote and undeveloped upland area bordering</i>	Within the Co. Donegal Landscape Character Assessment, it is noted that one of the defined ‘forces for change’

Border & Uplands	<i>Northern Ireland characterized by peat covered hills and the mountain lakes of Lough Mourne and Lough Carn. The N15, one of the major routes into and through the county travels along the valley floor of Barnesmore gap alongside the freshwater Lough Mourne which providing water to much of east Donegal. There are isolated areas of semi-improved farmland nestled with single rural dwellings throughout this LCA, contrasting greatly with the many large swathes of geometric commercial forestry plantations on the lower slopes and shoulders of the hills."</i>	for this LCA is 'Renewable energy development' (windfarms). The Existing Development is associated with wind farm infrastructure and so the sensitivity to change is deemed to be 'Low'.
LCA 41 - Croaghnameal Border & Uplands	<i>"Croaghnameal Border & Uplands LCA is a remote area of primarily upland mountainous blanket bog and mountain lakes with significant areas of commercial forestry, particularly along the eastern boundary with Northern Ireland. The northern part of the LCA forms half of the iconic 'Barnesmore Gap', a steep sided and wide river valley through which the N15 and the old Donegal Railway line runs, and one of the main vehicular routes into Donegal from the south."</i>	Within the Co. Donegal Landscape Character Assessment, it is noted that one of the defined 'forces for change' for this LCA is 'Renewable energy development' (windfarms). The Existing Development is associated with wind farm infrastructure and so the sensitivity to change is deemed to be 'Low'.

These LCA's are discussed further in Section 13.5 in terms of effects arising from the Wind Farm Site and where relevant, the Grid Connection.

13.3.2.5 Designated Walking Routes and Cycle Routes

Section 8.1.5 of the DCDP outlines the following policy relating to walking routes and cycle routes within Donegal:

"T-P3 - To consider all developments against the general objectives of providing safe and effective active travel linkages and public transport facilities and to require the provision of such facilities. In this regard, it shall be the policy of the Planning Authority to require that:

- a. development proposals protect potential linkages (such as linear parks, roads, footpaths, trails, greenways and cycleways) where the Authority considers that a strategic opportunity exists to provide linkages to, or between, adjoining areas; and*
- b. the design and layout of multiple residential, community, large scale industrial and commercial developments incorporate distinct and effective provisions for pedestrian and vehicular traffic movements within the site and its locality.*

T-05 - To retrospectively provide safe walking and cycling infrastructure, segregated from other traffic, in settlements and into settlements from suitable adjacent rural areas accessing cultural, recreational, commercial, educational and employment destinations and attractions".

The North-West Cycle Trail travels through the rLVIA Study Area to the west and north of the Wind Farm Site on the N15 National Road and L-6554 Local Road. Visibility from this trail is described in Section 13.4.2 and assessed in Section 13.5. The Trusk Lough Walkway is located to the north-east of

the Wind Farm Site around Trusk Lough and is also discussed in Section 13.4.2. There are no other existing designated walking routes or cycle routes within the rLVIA Study Area. The proposed Barnsemore Gap Greenway is located adjacent the N15 National Road. Whilst not currently existing, given its proximity to the Wind Farm Site and its sensitivity that it goes through the Barnsemore Gap, it has been considered in this LVIA.

The proposed Barnesmore Gap Greenway is located adjacent to the N15 National Road. Although it is not yet an existing recreational route, it has been considered in this LVIA due to its proximity to the Wind Farm Site.

13.3.3 Landscape Character of the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site

Landscape character refers to the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and how people perceive this. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement, and creates the particular sense of place found in different areas. The identification of landscape character as outlined in the Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2000) comprises the identification of primarily physical units (areas defined by landform and landcover) and, where appropriate, of visual units.

13.3.3.1 Site Visit Findings

The assessment of both the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site was conducted in conjunction with a visibility appraisal from the surrounding public roads. Both the Wind Farm Site and the Grid Connection Site are located within a remote landscape comprising a mosaic of conifer forest of various plantation age classes interspersed with shrubs and degraded peat bog. Both the Wind Farm Site and the Grid Connection Site also comprises wind turbine infrastructure, internal site roads and all supporting infrastructure as well as the on-site substation and Grid Connection.

The November 2020 Peat Slide locally altered areas of the landscape comprising conifer plantations. The remnants of this peat slide and other minor peat movements on the Wind Farm Site, as reported in Chapter 8 of the rEIAR, are locally discernible in the areas where this occurred and contribute to the existing character of the Wind Farm Site. The features of the landscape arising from the peat slippages are not particularly visible or discernible from visual receptors in the public realm.

The landscape surrounding the Wind Farm Site comprises irregular, undulating topography. There is a prominent ridgeline to the southwest of the Wind Farm Site. As seen in Figure 13-6 below, the topography slopes down towards the north of the Wind Farm Site. The elevation of the Wind Farm Site itself ranges from approximately 147 metres to 321 metres Above Ordnance Datum (mAOD).

Prior to the construction of the Existing Development, i.e. the baseline, the Wind Farm Site comprised a remote landscape of a mosaic of conifer forest of various plantation age classes interspersed with shrubs and degraded peat bog and internal forestry access roads. Prior to the construction of the Grid Connection, the Grid Connection Site predominantly comprised stretches of the national (N15 National Road) and local road network. A short off-road section of the underground cabling route runs through a portion of agricultural land, and the final section of the cabling route runs through the private access track to Clogher Substation. The short section through agricultural land was reseeded following construction. As such, there has been no discernible change to the Grid Connection Site baseline following the completion of the Grid Connection.

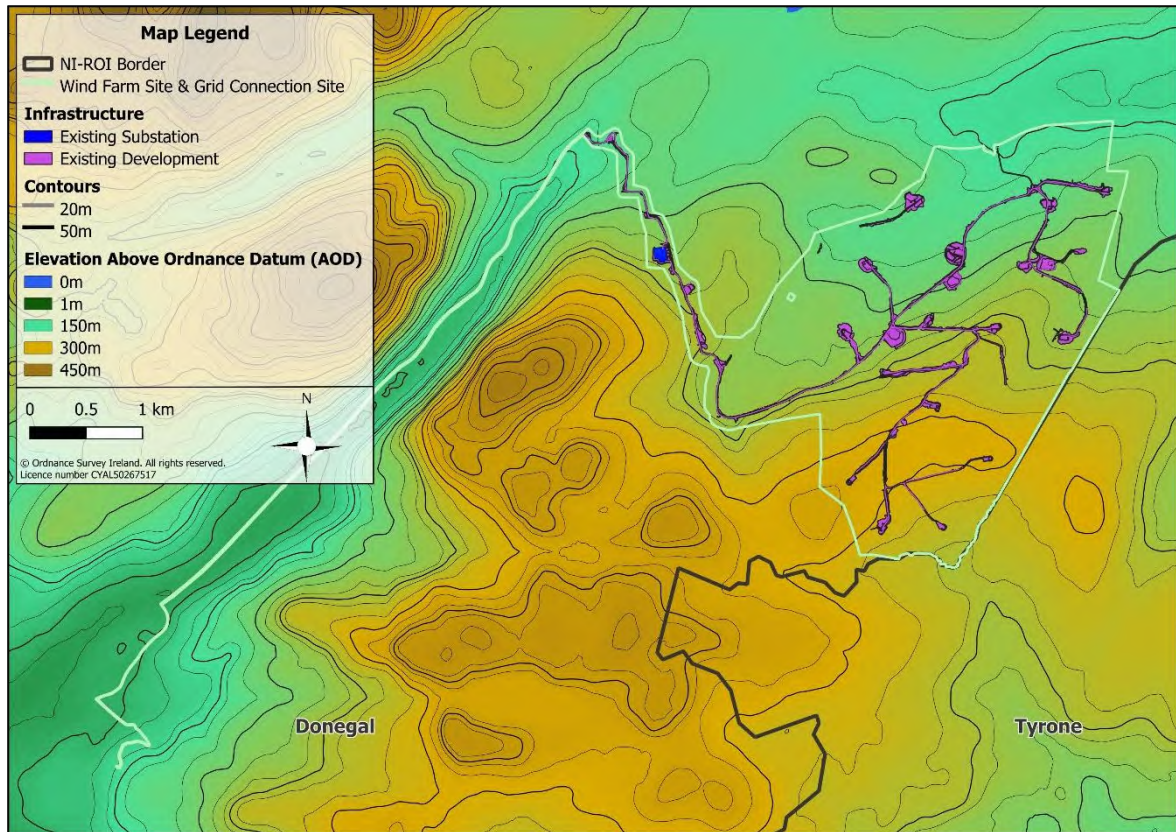


Figure 13-6 Topography of the Wind Farm Site / Grid Connection Site

13.3.3.2 Landscape Character and Sensitivity of the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site

Landscape Values were assessed in order to determine the landscape sensitivity of the Wind Farm Site and the Grid Connection Site as well as the wider landscape setting and establish the capacity of the immediate landscape in which the Existing Development was built, as it is prescribed by best practice guidance *“as part of the baseline description the value of the potentially affected landscape should be established”* (Page 80, GLVIA3). Comprehension of the landscape value and its susceptibility to change enables determination of the sensitivity of the landscape at a micro level and its capacity to absorb the Existing Development.

Determination of landscape value takes into consideration the scenic amenity designations, the sensitivity and value designations found in the local landscape policy as well as other indications of landscape value attached to undesignated landscapes. Table 13-11 below describes various factors that aid in identifying landscape value. These factors and indicators were appraised collectively to determine a landscape value for the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site. The Landscape value and susceptibility to change were then considered in forming a landscape sensitivity classification of either **Low, Moderate, High** or **Very High**.

The Landscape Character draws on the previous 2017 EIAR and site visits conducted by MKO prior to the construction of the Existing Development. There is therefore no ambiguity with regards the baseline environment in the context of this remedial EIAR.

Table 13-11 Indicators of Landscape Value

Indicator	Description
Landscape Designations	The Wind Farm Site is located within EHSA, HSA and MSA areas. It is also located within three Donegal Landscape Character Areas LCA 40 - Cashelnaven Border and Uplands, LCA 38 – Bluestack and LCA 41 - Croaghnameal Border & Uplands. Within the Landscape Character Assessment, it is noted that ‘forces for change’ in these LCAs are Wind Farms and the Existing Development is associated with wind farm infrastructure.
Landscape Elements Quality/Condition	This refers to the physical state of the landscape and the condition of individual elements. It is and was a heavily modified working landscape due to the dominant presence of forestry and associated roads and utility of the land for these purposes. The landscape was and is modified by artificial drainage, access tracks and agricultural infrastructure.
Scenic or Aesthetic Qualities	The part of the Wind Farm Site dedicated to commercial forestry had and has few notable aesthetic qualities. Due to the forestry surrounding the Wind Farm Site, which has been in place for many years and prior to the Existing Development, there are limited long ranging views and views of a scenic quality. The grid connection works are located in or close to the carriageway of existing public roads and therefore have limited scenic or aesthetic qualities.
Rarity or Conservation Interests	The Wind Farm Site is part of a remote mountainous landscape with degraded peatland and conifer forest. A comprehensive assessment of the Ecology on site is included in Chapter 6 – <i>Biodiversity</i>. The grid connection works are located in or close to the carriageway of existing public roads.
Wildness/Naturalness	The Wind Farm Site is surrounded by mountainous terrain interspersed by blanket bog, coniferous forestry and woodland scrub.
Recreational Value	The Wind Farm Site comprises private lands and does not currently have any wider or designated recreational value. A local walking trail, The North West Cycle Trail, is located to the north of the Wind Farm Site.
Cultural Meaning / Associations	There are no national monuments or cultural heritage receptors within the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site.

In consideration of the factors detailed in Table 13-11 above, the landscape value of both the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site is deemed to be of ‘**Low**’ value considering its long term use for forestry, agriculture, public road carriageway and the associated landscape effects of these. Considering this, as well as the small-scale nature of the Existing Development, the susceptibility of the landscape of both the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site to the change which has occurred is ‘Low’. Overall, on balance, the sensitivity of this landscape to the Existing Development is deemed to be ‘**Low**’.

13.4

Visual Baseline

The main purpose of establishing the visual baseline is to identify the nature of the Existing Development as it differs from the previous baseline and to identify the key visual receptors that should be considered for assessment for any visual impacts related to the Existing Development following its construction in context of the previous baseline. Review of the DCDP, desk-based analysis, site visits, as well as the review of information gathered during the many site visits and assessments conducted for this and previous assessments (including the 2017 EIAR and planning application), have been taken into consideration. The following types of receptors were identified:

- > Designated Protected Views
- > Settlements
- > Recreational Routes:
 - Waymarked Walking Routes
 - Cycle Routes
 - Tourist Routes
- > Residential Receptors

13.4.1

Nature of the Existing Development as it Relates to Visibility

This section describes the nature and characteristics of the Existing Development as it relates to visibility, which is highly localised within the Wind Farm Site. The existing character of the private lands within the Wind Farm Site is described below, illustrating the nature of the development relative to the receiving landscape and its visual exposure. These descriptions are based on site visit findings from December 2023, 2024, and 2025 following the construction of the Existing Development.

The landcover is a mosaic of conifer forest of various plantation age and degraded peat bog. The Wind Farm Site has been heavily modified by previous and current land use; it comprises the infrastructure of the Existing Development including turbine hardstand infrastructure, the existing onsite 110kV substation, internal site roads and supporting infrastructure, influencing landscape character. The internal site roads are made with a gravel surface and are lined with low fencing in some locations.

Plate 13-1 shows a view towards the hardstanding area of proposed turbine T10. As shown in this image, coniferous forestry surrounds the hardstanding area, which screens views from northwest towards the wider landscape.



Plate 13-1 View northwest toward proposed turbine T10 from an elevated point within the Wind Farm Site

Plate 13-2 below shows a view facing north from a road within the Wind Farm Site near the Wind Farm Site entrance off the N15 National Road. To the left background of this image, the rugged mountainous landscape beyond the N15 National Road is evident.



Plate 13-2 View facing north from a road within the Wind Farm Site near the entrance off the N15 National Road

Plate 13-3 below show a view of an internal site road within the Wind Farm Site. As seen in this image, coniferous forestry is located on both sides of the road and screen views from this road.



Plate 13-3 View facing southwest from a road within the Wind Farm Site

Plate 13-4 below shows a view facing south from a location to the south of the onsite 110kV substation. This image shows a typical example of the landcover of the Wind Farm Site which is comprised of peatland, coniferous forestry and infrastructure of the Existing Development on the Wind Farm Site.



Plate 13-4 View facing south from a road within the Wind Farm Site to the south of the onsite 110kV substation

Plate 13-5 below was captured from a road from the south of the Wind Farm Site. This image shows an example of the extent of vast coniferous forestry plantations currently within the Wind Farm Site.



Plate 13-5 View facing southeast from a road within the Wind Farm Site

Plate 13-6 below shows a view facing northwest towards the onsite 110kV substation. This is the most visually prominent element of the Existing Development within the Wind Farm Site.



Plate 13-6 View facing northwest towards the onsite 110kV substation

The November 2020 Peat Slide altered areas of the landscape comprising conifer plantations. The remnants of this peat slide are locally discernible in the areas where this occurred. Other minor peat movements of varying degrees occurred on the Wind Farm Site, as reported in Chapter 8 of the rEiAR. The features of the landscape arising from the peat slippage are not visible or discernible from visual receptors in the public realm.

The Wind Farm Site comprises a broad hilltop, with landform gently sloping downwards from a high point at the southern extent. The landscape surrounding the Wind Farm Site comprises irregular, undulating topography with the Barnesmore Gap (a prominent landform feature) to the west. The topography slopes down towards the north of the Wind Farm Site. The elevation of the Wind Farm Site ranges from approximately 150 metres to 320 metres.

Overall, visibility of most of the Existing Development is extremely limited from locations outside of Wind Farm Site due to the predominantly surface-level nature of infrastructure such as roads and hardstands, and their location and setting enclosed within remote commercial forestry plantation. The existing onsite substation is an above-ground feature with greatest visual exposure from outside of the Wind Farm Site and is the key focus of the discussion in the following section and assessments in this LVIA.

13.4.2 Visibility of the Existing Development

The Grid Connection is constructed underground and is not visible from the public realm, therefore this section of the LVIA chapter describes the existing views towards the Wind Farm Site (and its above ground features) from the surrounding area. From a landscape and visual impact assessment perspective, this is a unique situation where the impact has occurred, and the actual visibility is present. This removes any ambiguity around actual visibility from receptors and makes the assessment somewhat simpler.

There are very limited views into the Wind Farm Site from the public realm due to distance, screening from vegetation and localised landforms. There is visibility of the onsite 110kV substation from locations to the west and northwest of the Wind Farm Site on the N15 National Road, the Wind Farm Site entrance off the N15 National Road as well as the potential for groundwork to be visible from some residential receptors to the northeast.

Apart from the substation, visibility of all other features of the Existing Development are not likely to be discernible from outside the Wind Farm Site due to screening from vegetation and the topography. However, for the avoidance of doubt, a visibility appraisal was conducted from receptors in the public

realm in close proximity to the Wind Farm Site as reported below with photographic imagery. The location of the imagery captured can be seen in Figure 13-7 below.

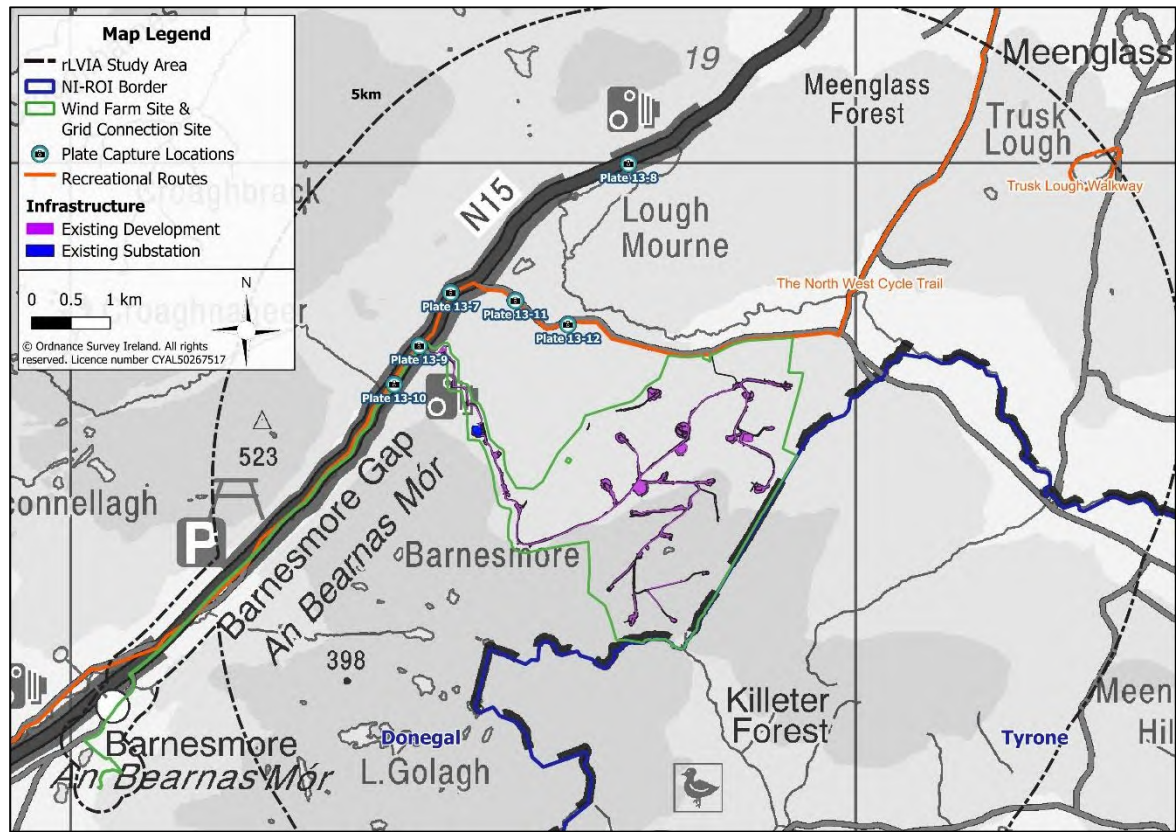


Figure 13-7 Visual Baseline Map

N15 National Road / Proposed Barnsemore Gap Greenway

On site visibility appraisals determined that visibility of the Existing Development is limited to views of the onsite 110kV substation and the Wind Farm Site entrance off the N15 National Road. Due to topographical and vegetation visual screening, no perceptible visibility of other aspects of the Existing Development occurs from the N15 National Road (including the proposed Barnsemore Gap Greenway).

The substation is located c 1.7km from the N15 National Road where it is visible in the distance, at a slightly elevated location with the elevation of the topography to the west and northwest of the substation decreasing substantially. As a result, there are distant, open views from the west and northwest of the substation within the rLVIA Study Area. Views from the N15 National Road specifically towards the onsite 110kV substation are limited due to intermittent screening from roadside vegetation, coniferous forestry and localised landforms in the intervening landscape. Plate 13-7 and Plate 13-8 below represent the most open views towards the onsite 110kV substation from the N15 National Road. From these locations, the onsite 110kV substation appears as a small element within the view.

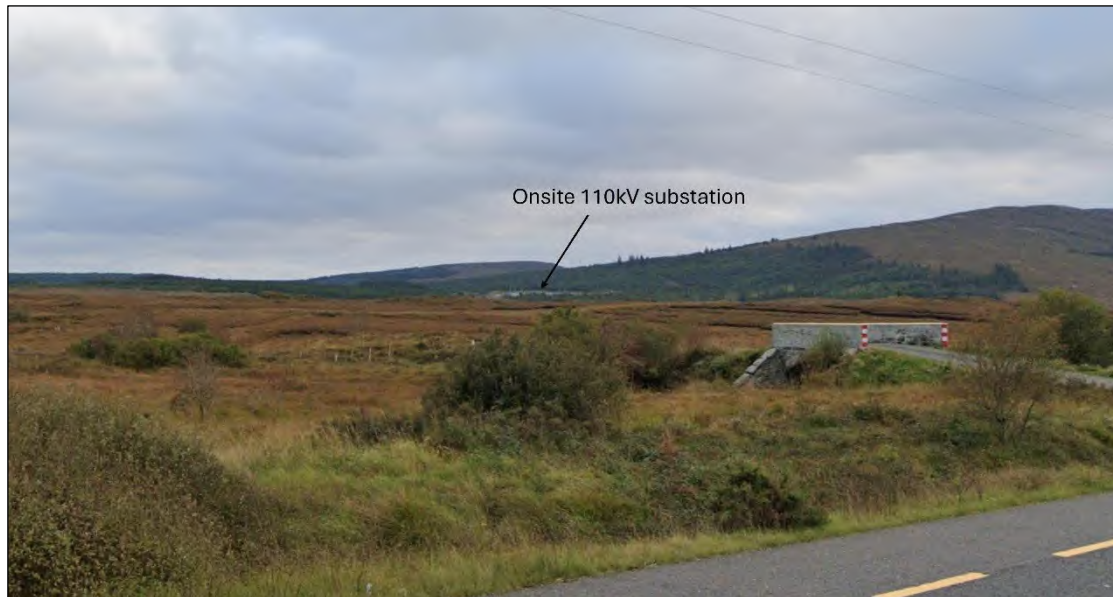


Plate 13-7 View facing south approximately 1.8km from the onsite 110kV substation from the N15 National Road

Plate 13-8 below shows views towards the onsite 110kV substation from the N15 National Road in close proximity to Lough Mourne. This image was captured in very close proximity to the designated protected view to the north of the Wind Farm Site, as identified previously in Section 13.3.2.2. There is no visibility of the onsite 110kV substation from the location of the designated view. This view is however representative of views towards the onsite 110kV substation from the roadway close to the protected view. From this location, there are views of the onsite 110kV substation across Lough Mourne, approximately 2.6km away. The onsite 110kV substation is seen as a small element in the distant background of views from this location. The views of Lough Mourne from this location are relevant to Policy LP-8 in the DCDP, which seeks to preserve scenic views between public roads and the sea, lakes and rivers. In this view, the onsite 110kV substation appears as a very small element in the background of views i.e. it is not located between the protected view and Lough Mourne.

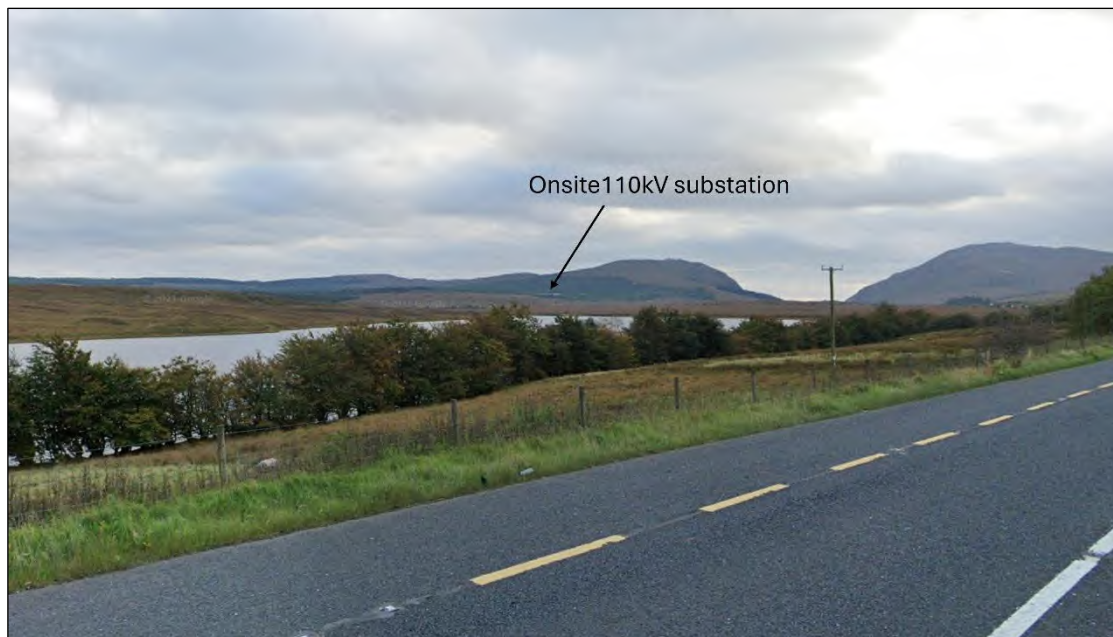


Plate 13-8 View facing south approximately 3.7km from the onsite 110kV substation from the N15

Plate 13-9 below shows a view facing towards the entrance to the Wind Farm Site on the N15 National Road and in the direction of the onsite 110kV substation. Plate 13-10 shows a view facing in the direction of the onsite 110kV substation from the south on the N15 National Road. Both views towards

the onsite 110kV substation are screened by a rise in topography. Views towards the onsite 110kV substation from southern sections of the N15 National Road within the rLVIA Study Area are screened by topography, as is evidenced by the views presented in Plate 13-10.

The Wind Farm Site entrance is a visible feature of the Existing Development but is not new. There was a smaller entrance at this location, providing access to the private lands and the commercial forestry. The construction of the Existing Development has created a larger entrance area (to facilitate deliveries to the Wind Farm Site) as can be seen in the Plate below. Should the Subject Development be consented it is proposed to construct a berm closing off this entrance widening, following completion of deliveries to the Wind Farm Site, leaving the original smaller entrance in place for the operational phase. In terms of receptors, the Wind Farm Site entrance is only visible to users of the N15 National Road (proposed Barnsemore Gap Greenway).



Plate 13-9 View from entrance to Wind Farm Site from the N15 National Road, approximately 1.24 km from the onsite 110kV substation



Plate 13-10 View from the west, approximately 1.1km from the onsite 110kV substation on the N15 National Road

North-West Cycle Trail

The North-West Cycle Trail enters the rLVIA Study Area to the southeast and travels north on the N15 National Road to the west of the Wind Farm Site. It then turns off the N15 National Road onto the L-6554 Local Road to the north of the Wind Farm Site before turning north towards Ballybofey.

There will be a small section of visibility along this route shortly after it diverts off the N15 National Road onto the L-6554 Local Road, as seen in Plate 13-11 below. The onsite 110kV substation appears as a small distant feature in the background of this view from this trail. There will be no visibility of the

substation from other locations along this route due to screening provided by the intervening landforms and vegetation. This is evident in Plate 13-12 where views toward the onsite 110kV substation are screened beyond a rise in topography.

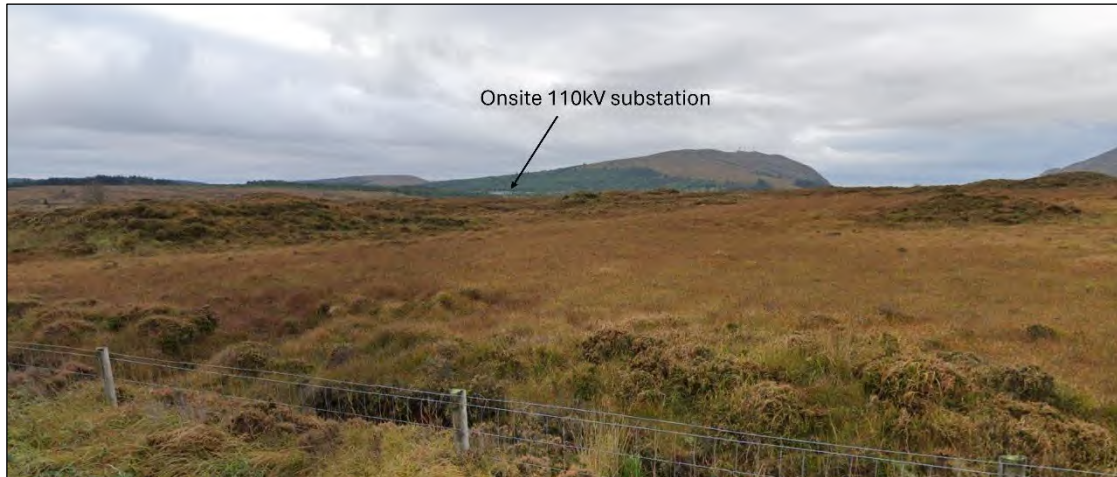


Plate 13-11 View facing south from the North-West Trail on the L-6554 Local Road, approximately 1.7km north of the onsite 110kV substation

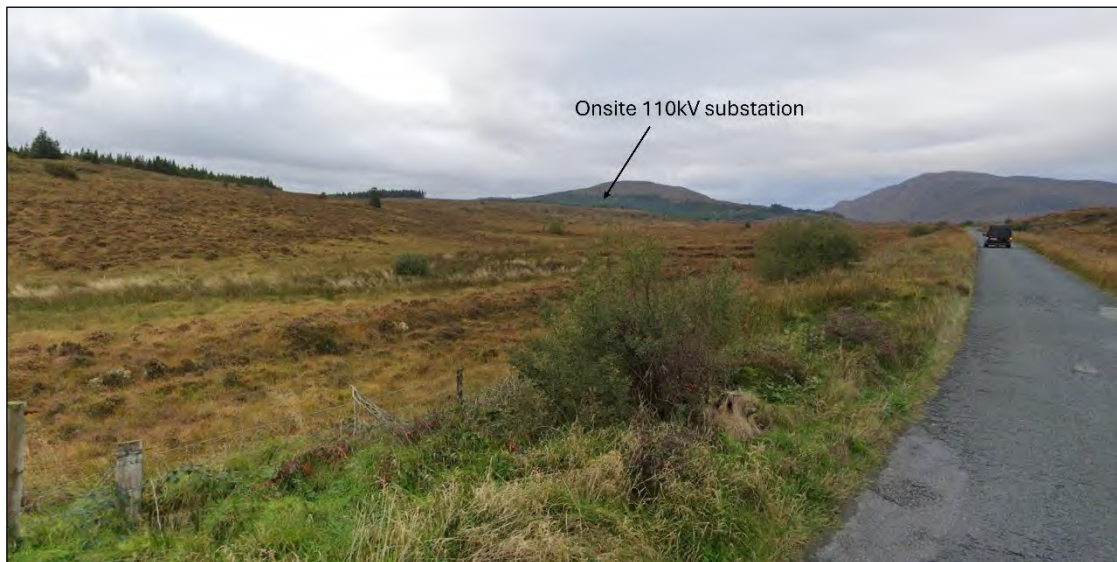


Plate 13-12 View southwest from the North-West Cycle Trail on the L-6554 Local Road, approximately 1.7km northeast of the onsite 110kV substation

Continuing north along the North-West Cycle Trail past the location of Plate 13-12, the trail traverses in a northerly direction away from the Wind Farm Site with views towards the Existing Development screened from view by the intervening landform. There is no discernible visibility of any other component of the Existing Development.

As the North-West Cycle Trail travels north past the location of Plate 13-12, Trusk Lough Way, a short circular walk around Trusk Lough, is located to the east of the cycle trail. Site visits determined that given the set-back distance, there will be no visibility of the onsite 110kV substation from along the walking loop. There is no discernible visibility of any other component of the Existing Development. Therefore, Trusk Lough Way is not considered further in this Chapter.

Residential Receptors

There are several dwellings located along local roads within the rLVIA Study Area. The locations of these residential receptors are shown on Figure 13-8 below. The images presented below have been

captured to represent views from close proximity to these residential receptors. The locations of these images are also presented in Figure 13-8 below.

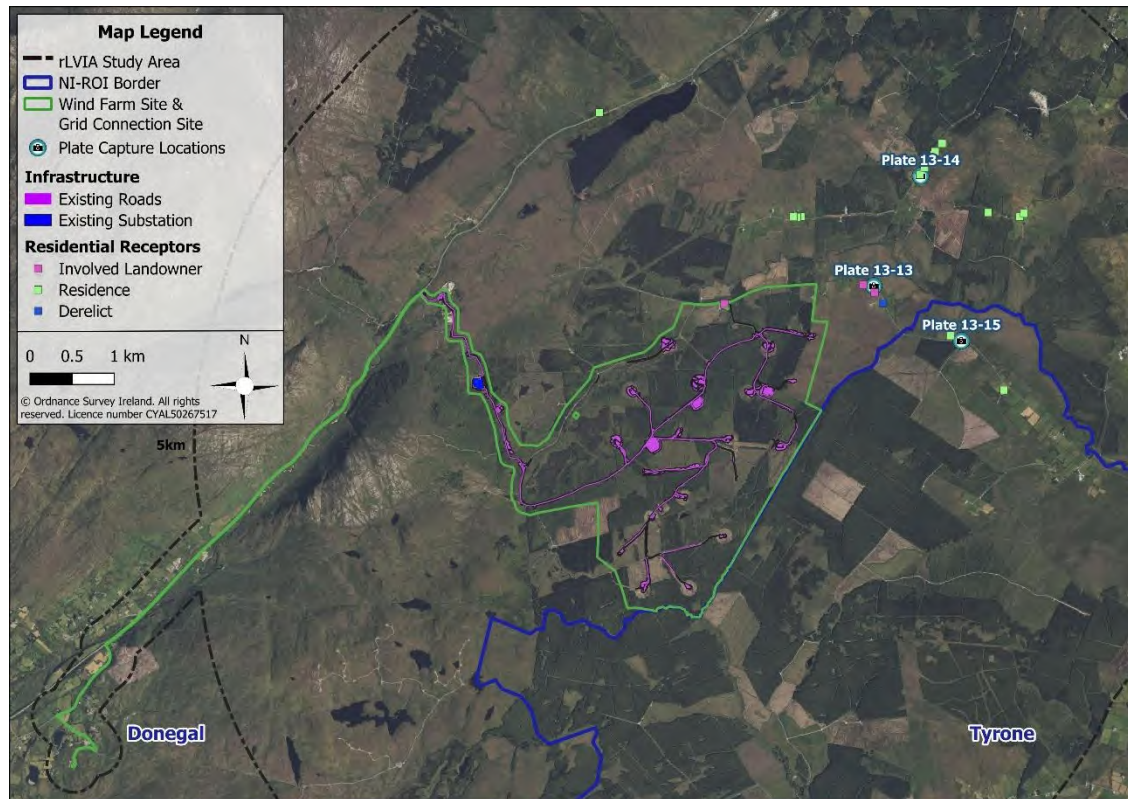


Figure 13-8 Residential receptors in close proximity to the Wind Farm Site

Plate 13-13 below shows a view facing towards the Wind Farm Site from the L-6554 Local Road in close proximity to 2 residential receptors located on this local road to the north of the Wind Farm Site. This image was captured approximately 650 metres to the north of the Wind Farm Site. As can be seen from this view, there is no visibility of the Existing Development due to screening provided by topography in the intervening landscape. Residential receptors in close proximity to this location have been scoped out for further assessment.

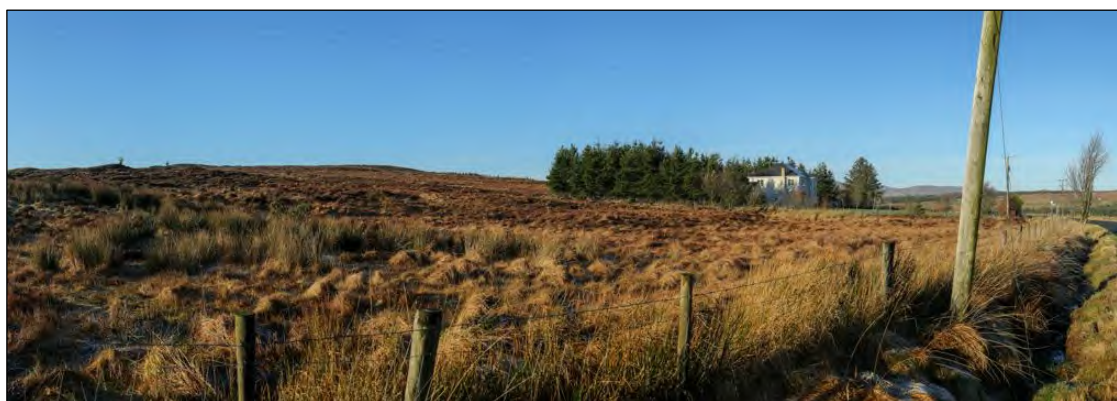


Plate 13-13 View facing southwest towards the Wind Farm Site from the L-6554 Local Road

Plate 13-14 below shows a view facing towards the Wind Farm Site from the L3014 local road in close proximity to 4 residential receptors on this local road to the north of the Wind Farm Site. This image was captured approximately 1.8 kilometres to the north of the Wind Farm Site. As can be seen from this view, there is no visibility of the Existing Development from this location. Residential receptors in close proximity to this location have been scoped out for further assessment.



Plate 13-14 View facing southwest towards the Wind Farm Site from the L3014 local road

Plate 13-14, mapped in Figure 13-7, shows a view facing towards the Wind Farm Site from the N15 National Road. This image is located in close proximity to 1 residential receptor on the N15 National Road. As shown in Plate 13-8, there is visibility of the onsite 110kV substation from this location, which appears as a small element within the landscape in the background of this view. The residential receptor represented by this view is located approximately 517m southwest on the N15 National Road from this viewpoint, and approximately 3.5km from the onsite 110kV substation. As outlined above, there is limited visibility of the onsite 110kV substation and surrounds from this distance. No Significant visual effects occur from the residential receptors in close proximity to this view.

Plate 13-15 is located on the Corgary Road approximately 1.6km to the northeast of the Wind Farm Site, in County Tyrone. There are 8 residential receptors located on the Corgary Road which are within the rLVIA Study Area. As seen in Plate 13-15 below, dense commercial forestry lines much of this local road, screening views towards the Wind Farm Site. Views from other residential receptors further east on the Corgary Road, away from the Wind Farm Site, are screened by topography in the intervening landscape between this road and the Wind Farm Site. There will be no impact on residential dwellings on the Corgary Road. Residential receptors in close proximity to this location have been scoped out for further assessment.



Plate 13-15 View towards the Wind Farm Site from Corgary Road in Co. Tyrone

Visibility Appraisal Overview

As outlined above, there will be intermittent visibility of the onsite 110kV substation from locations, on the North-West Cycle Trail and the N15 National Road (with two residential receptors located on the N15) and the Wind Farm Site entrance on the N15 National Road. The onsite 110kV substation is visible at intermittent sections of the road along the N15 National Road and a small section of the

North-West Cycle Trail. Visibility of the onsite 110kV substation from residential receptors on the N15 National Road is limited, with the onsite 110kV substation appearing as a very small element in the distant background of the views.

Visibility of other components of the Existing Development will be mainly restricted to within the Wind Farm Site. These other components within the Wind Farm Site are located on private land and enclosed by forestry and topography and will have no effects on visual receptors within the rLVIA Study Area. There is no significant visibility of the Existing Development from any other visual receptors within the rLVIA Study Area due to screening provided by vegetation or topography. No Significant visual effects occur from visual receptors in the rLVIA Study Area.

13.5 Likely or Significant Landscape and Visual Effects

13.5.1 ‘Do-Nothing’ Scenario

The ‘Do-Nothing’ alternative is an alternative scenario to retaining and regularising the Existing Development. In this scenario, the Existing Development will remain in-situ as an unauthorised and partially completed wind farm, which is, in effect, the “Do-Nothing” alternative insofar as it represents the current situation as at the date of the application for substitute consent.

There would be no direct negative environmental effects as a result of implementing the “Do-Nothing” alternative. Under the Do-Nothing Scenario, the landcover of both the Wind Farm Site and Grid Connection Site would remain in its current state; there would be no further landscape or visual effects as a result of the Existing Development and the effects that have occurred to date would remain unchanged. Should this scenario occur, the impact would be as set out in this rEIAR. However, by implementing this ‘Do-Nothing’ alternative, the opportunity to capture a significant part of the country’s renewable energy resource by completing the Meenbog Wind Farm (subject to appropriate planning consents) would be lost, as would the opportunity to contribute to meeting Government and EU targets for the production and consumption of electricity from renewable resources and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The opportunity to generate local employment, local authority development contributions, rates and investment in the local area would also be lost. Furthermore, the opportunity to implement the proposed biodiversity enhancement measures would be lost. Please see Prospective Development EIAR, Appendix 6-4 Biodiversity Management and Enhancement Plan of the EIAR for details. Under the “Do-Nothing” alternative the opportunity to put in place the community benefit scheme proposed as part of the Prospective Development would also be lost.

13.5.2 Existing Development – Effects Assessment

13.5.2.1.1 Visual Effects

Visual impacts of the Existing Development are mitigated by its location in a sparsely populated and remote location with vegetation and local topography screening views. The substation is the main element of the Existing Development which is visible from visual receptors within the rLVIA Study Area, albeit at relatively significant distances. There is visibility of the substation from two residential receptors on the N15 National Road as well as intermittent sections on the N15 National Road (including the proposed Barnsemore Gap Greenway) and from a small stretch on the North-West Cycle Trail along the L-6554 Local Road.

As demonstrated from the annotated imagery in Section 13.4, visibility of the substation is currently limited to long ranging views where the onsite 110kV substation buildings and electrical infrastructure appears as a small and distant feature within views from the north and northwest. As discussed in Section 13.4.2, whilst there is no visibility of the onsite 110kV substation from the location of the

designated view, there are views of the onsite 110kV substation from other areas along the N15 National Road, including from areas overlooking Lough Mourne. The protected view on the N15 National Road is focussed towards the Barnesmore Gap across Lough Mourne. This protected view is deemed to be of 'High' Sensitivity. This protected view is also protected under Policy L-P-8 in the DCDP. However, as shown in the imagery in 13.4, the onsite 110kV substation appears as a small element in the distant background of the view and does not infringe on the views towards the Barnesmore Gap nor Lough Mourne.

Visual effects of the majority of other components of the Existing Development are localised to the immediate setting of the Wind Farm Site. The Wind Farm Site entrance is visible on the N15 National Road. Certain components of the Existing Development including peat cells as well as the remnants of the November 2020 Peat Slide, as well as other minor peat movements have revegetated thereby mitigating the overall potential for visual effects associated with these elements of the works.

Residential receptors and Protected Views represent the most sensitive visual receptors within the rLVIA Study Area and are deemed to be 'High' Sensitivity. Overall, the Magnitude of Change from these residential receptors and the protected view to the north was deemed to be 'Negligible' due to the limited visibility of the substation and no perceptible visibility of any other components of the Existing Development. 'High' sensitivity balanced with a highly localised 'Negligible' magnitude of change amounts to 'Not Significant' permanent visual effects on the visual amenity of visual receptors.

13.5.2.1.2 Landscape Effects

The construction works have had a direct effect on the landscape where the landform and landcover of the Wind Farm Site has been materially altered. The construction activities caused temporary change to the character of the landscape areas where and when they occurred. All of these landscape effects were highly localised to locations within the Wind Farm Site itself. During the construction of the Existing Development, localised, 'Short-term', 'Not Significant', 'Negative' landscape effects would have occurred in the immediate setting of the Wind Farm Site.

The landscape of the Wind Farm Site has undergone a change in character from its original condition (as an area of degraded peat and forestry) by the introduction of the Existing Development. The Existing Development includes wind farm access roads, turbine foundations and hardstands, peat cells, borrow pits, site entrance etc as set out in Chapter 4. Certain components of the Existing Development including peat cells, side cast peat have revegetated since they were constructed thereby mitigating the overall landscape effects associated with these elements of the works.

As stated in Section 13.3.3.2, the landscape sensitivity of the Wind Farm Site was deemed to be 'Low'. The magnitude of change is deemed to be 'Slight' due to the highly localised setting and visibility of the Existing Development. 'Low' sensitivity balanced with a highly localised 'Slight' magnitude of change amounts to long-term landscape effects which are 'Not Significant' on the physical fabric of the landscape of the Wind Farm Site.

Grid Connection

No perceptible landscape or visual effects exist or will occur associated with the Grid Connection. The Grid Connection is placed underground and therefore, is not visible from the public road network, and the visual elements of the construction phase are no longer apparent. The Grid Connection does not interfere with the character of the landscape except in occasional and localised maintenance works that will not have a significant impact or fundamentally effect any key sensitivity in the landscape.

Landscape and visual effects associated with the Grid Connection are deemed to be a Long-term, Negative Effect of Imperceptible Significance. While under construction, temporary 'Negative' effects of 'Imperceptible' significance occurred associated with road openings and construction teams present along the route.

13.5.2.1.3 Landscape Character Areas

The LCAs where the Wind Farm Site is located within the rLVIA Study Area (Donegal LCA 38, LCA 40 and LCA 41) have undergone a very small degree of change in the landscape character of these LCAs. This is outlined in Table 13-12 below.

Table 13-12 Landscape Character Effects of LCAs within the rLVIA Study Area

LCA	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Residual Effect
LCA 38 – Bluestack	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible
LCA 40 - Cashelnavern Border & Uplands	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible
LCA 41 - Croaghnameal Border & Uplands	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible

Grid Connection

Some minor direct landscape effects were associated with the construction activities of the Grid Connection such as earthworks, vegetation removal and temporary change in localised landscapes and landform. These effects included temporary effects such as the activities of machinery.

Overall, the construction of the Grid Connection would have had a localised Temporary, Negative Effect of Not Significant significance on the landscape during construction. The Grid Connection is placed underground and therefore, is not visible from the public road network, and the visual elements of it are no longer apparent. The Grid Connection does not interfere with the character of the landscape except in occasional and localised maintenance works that will not have a significant impact or fundamentally effect any key sensitivity in the landscape.

13.5.3 Cumulative Landscape & Visual Effects- Existing Development

This section presents an assessment of the cumulative effects associated with the Existing Development and other developments (existing and/or proposed) at the time of construction on Landscape and Visual receptors. Remediation works occurred after the November 2020 peat slide caused a degree of change to the landscape of the Wind Farm Site. It is considered that the impact of these works cumulatively with the constructed elements is 'Imperceptible', in the context of limited visual receptors within the immediate proximity of the remediation works.

Other key projects include forestry activities in the vicinity of the Existing Development. Due to the localised nature of the Existing Development, there is no significant interaction between the Existing Development and other developments within the rLVIA Study Area from a landscape and visual perspective. Ongoing forestry activities including felling may open up areas for visibility however the effect of this is likely to be localised and intermittent. It is considered that there are no significant cumulative effects as a result of the Existing Development.

There are no significant cumulative effects as a result of the Existing Development with any other existing permitted, or proposed projects in the rLVIA Study Area.

13.5.4 In Cumulation Landscape and Visual Effects

This section considers the in-cumulation impact of the combination of the Existing Development and Prospective Development (the Subject Development).

In terms of potential for in-cumulation landscape and visual effects it is relevant that the Existing and Prospective Developments differ in nature in the context of landscape and visual effects. Visibility associated with the Existing Development is much more restricted i.e. the potential for visual receptors to perceive the Existing Development (ground level or close to ground level components) is limited to localised areas whereas this is not necessarily the case for the Prospective Development (tall structures, i.e. proposed turbines). The potential for in-cumulation effects arising from the interaction of the Existing Development and the Prospective Development is summarised in Table 13-13 below.

Table 13-13 Assessment of potential In-Cumulation Effects of the Subject Development

Topic	Existing Development	Prospective Development	Subject Development
Landscape Effects	The extent of landscape effects from the Existing Development are limited in that it comprises predominantly ground-level changes. The impact assessment in this rELAR for the Existing Development concludes that there are no significant negative on-going residual landscape effects.	The Prospective Development includes for some additional groundworks, and the erection of tall structures i.e. proposed turbines and met mast. Where practicable, the Prospective Development will utilise the footprint of the Existing Development, limiting direct landscape effects. The characteristics of the receiving landscape are appropriate for accommodating the proposed turbines. Residual landscape effects arising from the Prospective Development are not considered significant.	From an LVIA perspective, the essential elements of the Subject Development will be the proposed turbines and the proposed met mast of the Prospective Development, and the Existing Development is already in place. The residual effects of the Prospective Development on the landscape are not considered significant. The residual landscape effects from the Existing Development are not considered significant. The potential for in-cumulation landscape effects from the Subject Development is not considered significant.
Visual Effects	The remote nature of the Existing Development and its surrounding topography and vegetation generally limit potential visual effects.	The proposed turbines and met mast are the most essential aspects of the Prospective Development and therefore are the most	From an LVIA perspective, the essential elements of the Subject Development will be the proposed turbines and the proposed met mast of the Prospective Development, and the Existing Development is already in place. The residual

	The impact assessment in this rEIAR for the Existing Development concludes that there are no significant negative on-going residual visual effects.	visually prominent features. The Prospective Development design mitigates the potential for significant visual effects on visual receptors. Overall, residual visual effects are not considered significant.	effects of the Prospective Development on visual receptors are not considered significant. The residual visual effects from the Existing Development are not considered significant. The potential for in-cumulation visual effects from the Subject Development is not considered significant.
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13.5.5 Cumulative Effects – Subject Development

Cumulative effects of the Subject Development considers the discreet cumulative effects arising both from Existing Development, as well as that of the Prospective Development. However, the approach of cumulative landscape and visual effects of the Subject Development primarily aligns with that applied to the Prospective Development, as outlined in Section 1.10 of Appendix 13-1 (*L VIA Methodology*) of the accompanying EIAR, where the cumulative assessment focuses on wind energy developments, as only these would be described as very tall vertical elements in the landscape and therefore have the most potential to give rise to significant cumulative effects. On this basis, the potential for cumulative landscape and visual effects for the Prospective Development is the same as the potential for cumulative landscape and visual effects for the Subject Development. The assessment of cumulative effects has been integrated within the visual impact assessment tables included in Appendix 13-2 of the accompanying EIAR.

13.5.6 Transboundary Landscape and Visual Effects

The Subject Development is on the border between ROI and NI, therefore receptors on both sides of the border have been assessed in the accompanying EIAR. This includes RLCA 5 - West Tyrone Uplands, which was discussed in Section 13.7.3.1 Landscape Effects, resulting in a residual landscape effect of 'Long-Term', 'Negative' and 'Moderate'. The assessments in the EIAR determined that the relevant section of the border running alongside the Wind Farm Site comprises a ridgeline through blocks of remote upland commercial forestry, and the landscape either side of the border does not fundamentally change in terms of landscape character, sensitivity and composition. Whilst the proposed turbines of the Prospective Development are seen from NI, the Existing Development is not due to the surrounding landscape. As such, no significant transboundary landscape effects occur. A full assessment of effects of the Prospective Development on visual receptors in NI is presented in the accompanying EIAR in Section 13.7.3.2, including Photomontage viewpoints 10 and 14.

13.6 Conclusion

This chapter assesses the likely significant landscape and visual impacts arising as a result of the Existing Development. As established throughout this chapter, there is very limited visibility of the Existing Development in the rLVIA Study Area, with the exception of the onsite 110kV substation which is visible as a small distant feature within the landscape, primarily with potential visibility along certain portions the N15 National Road (incl. the proposed Barnsemore Gap Greenway) that do not directly impact protected views and a small portion of the North-West Cycle Trail. A small stretch of the N15 National Road (incl. the proposed Barnsemore Gap Greenway) will also likely experience visibility of the modified, existing entrance. These existing elements are located within a landscape that was, and

remains, of generally low landscape sensitivity. Considering the limited visual exposure of the Existing Development and limited number of sensitive landscape and visual receptors impacted within the rLVIA Study Area, the Existing Development has not resulted in any significant negative landscape or visual effects.