

DESIGN RATIONALE - LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Project: **Harbour Road, Mullingar**

Project no.: **We.08**

Prepared on behalf of: **Westmeath County Council**

Prepared by: **DFLA**

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1 Introduction

The objective of this report is to describe the proposed landscape and external works as part of the proposed residential development at Harbour Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. This report should be read in conjunction with documents issued and included in this submission by DFLA, Westmeath County Council, Meinhardt, TOBIN, and others.

DFLA visited the site in February 2026, to observe conditions on site, such as existing vegetation, conditions under foot, boundaries and other items which would have a bearing on the design process.

Dr. Philip Blackstock, Independent Arboricultural Consultant, was commissioned to carry out a Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment in compliance with BS 5837:2012. These documents are included separately as part of this submission.

The following additional documents have been issued by DFLA as part of this submission:

No.	Scale	Size	Title
2001	1:500	A2	<i>Landscape Plan</i>
2500	1:20	A1	<i>Typical Landscape Details</i>

2 Landscape Appraisal

2.1 General

The subject site extends to approximately 1.6 hectares and is located immediately north of the Royal Canal, directly opposite Loreto College, within Mullingar town centre. The site is broadly rectangular in shape and is bounded by Harbour Road to the north-west, the rear gardens of detached residential properties and Harbour Street to the west, the Royal Canal to the south, the Harbour Quay residential development to the east, and the Coláiste Mhuire playing fields to the north.

The site is enclosed on all sides and is not currently accessible to the public. The lands are predominantly free-draining and consist primarily of improved grassland. There is a significant level change between the site and the road along the north-western site boundary. Within the site, topography is characterised by a gentle gradient of approximately 1m falling from south to north, with the lowest point located in the northern corner of the site. A hedgerow running on a north-south axis bisects the site.

2.2 Boundaries

The site boundaries vary in character. The north-western boundary comprises an embankment with an approximately 1.2m high timber post-and-rail fence at its base. The western boundary adjoining the rear gardens of the neighbouring residential properties is defined by an approximately 2m high concrete block wall, while the interface with Harbour Street consists of an approximately 1m high concrete block wall.

The southern boundary, adjoining the Royal Canal, comprises a timber post-and-rail fence with areas of overgrown vegetation. This boundary continues around the eastern side of the site, where it adjoins 2m high concrete post-and-mesh fence which separates the site from the Coláiste Mhuire playing fields to the north-east. A clipped hedge is located immediately outside this boundary.



Figure 1: Photograph taken from the centre of the site looking west towards Harbour Road. The embankment and the existing timber post-and-rail fence can be seen in the middle ground.



Figure 2: Photograph taken from the centre of the site looking south towards the boundary with the back gardens of residential properties.



Figure 3: Photograph taken from the centre of the site looking south towards Loreto College. The concrete block wall boundary can be seen in the middle ground.



Figure 4: Photograph taken from the footpath along Lady Aberdeen Cottages, looking south towards Loreto College. The timber post-and-rail fence with overgrown vegetation can be seen in the foreground.



Figure 5: Photograph taken from the centre of the site looking north towards the playing pitches. The concrete post-and-mesh fence can be seen along the boundary.

2.3 Existing Trees

There are two individual trees and one tree group located within private residential gardens to the west, with canopies overhanging the site. A group of mature Sycamore trees is located immediately south of the site, with canopies extending over the site boundary. The clipped boundary hedge along the north-eastern boundary comprises Cherry Laurel and Hawthorn.

The existing hedgerow bisecting the site comprises predominantly Elder and Hawthorn. In addition, two smaller hedge groups of similar species composition are located within the south-eastern portion of the site. Several smaller willow trees of varying quality categories are also located within the site.

All trees within the lands subject to this planning application have been surveyed by Dr. Philip Blackstock in accordance with BS 5837:2012. BS 5837:2012 calls for a realistic assessment of the viability of retaining trees in the context of proposed construction. The British Standard has been used here to rigorously assess the stock of existing trees and to make recommendations which are realistic and represent a fair assessment of the quality and long-term viability of the trees on site.

The hedges and trees located within the site are proposed to be removed to facilitate the proposed development. Particular consideration has been given to the group of mature Sycamore trees along the southern boundary, with the landscape design and site layout informed by the extent of their root protection areas and the retention of existing ground levels in their vicinity.

Substantial tree planting is introduced in the proposed Landscape Plan to replace existing trees removed and to improve the proportion of native species on site. A full schedule of proposed planting is included as part of this submission.

3 Landscape Strategy

3.1 General

The proposed landscape strategy has been developed collaboratively by the design team and client to integrate residential amenity, engineering requirements, and ecological considerations. The landscape design promotes a high-quality living environment by facilitating pedestrian and cyclist movement, bicycle parking, seating opportunities, and usable open spaces, while ensuring a strong landscape structure through the provision of extensive planting and flexible outdoor spaces. The proposed landscape seeks to support both passive and active recreation, enhance biodiversity, and contribute positively to the visual amenity of the development.

The overall landscape strategy comprises the following key elements:

- The provision of a diverse and attractive range of open spaces, incorporating both hard and soft landscape treatments, tree planting, and species-rich ground flora;
- Enhanced site permeability for pedestrians, with a connection from Harbour St. to local schools and the town centre;
- The provision of informal natural play opportunities within open spaces;
- The integration of underground attenuation infrastructure within the landscape design, ensuring functional and accessible open spaces while supporting site drainage requirements.

3.2 Diverse Range of Open Space

The landscape strategy establishes a distinctive sense of place and contributes to the overall character of the proposed development. The site layout has been structured around a series of interconnected open spaces that respond to the site's context.

A large open space is proposed along the southern edges of the site. The space accommodates a range of active and passive recreational opportunities, including informal natural play features such as timber logs and balancing equipment.

This space establishes a connection to Harbour Street, featuring well-defined pedestrian entrances to the southwest with large-format paving that joins the proposed pedestrian path. The existing timber post-and-rail fence along the southern boundary will be replaced with 1.5m high partial stone and galvanized railing (refer to architect's detail), supplemented by native hedgerow planting. Native Irish tree species are proposed along the eastern and southern boundaries, reinforcing the landscape structure and creating a welcoming arrival experience.

Further north, a central open space provides opportunities for recreation, including informal kick-about and passive enjoyment. Tree planting around the perimeter establishes enclosure, provides visual screening from the carriageway, and helps to create a comfortable setting for residents and visitors.

An underground attenuation tank is located beneath part of the central open space, allowing the area to perform a dual function as both a recreational amenity space and sustainable drainage infrastructure.

Additional clusters of native trees and native forestry whip planting are proposed around the development to strengthen the site's green infrastructure network, provide habitat opportunities, and create a buffer to roads and neighbouring land uses. The principal pedestrian routes meander through a variety of landscape character areas, creating an attractive and engaging environment for residents and visitors.

Within the residential curtilages, robust ornamental and native planting is proposed to soften the built form and provide visual screening of parked vehicles from pedestrian routes. The vehicular entrance at the north-western corner of the site has been designed as a pedestrian-priority environment, incorporating traffic-calming measures and quality surface treatments to encourage low vehicle speeds and enhance safety.



Figure 6: Precedent images showing character of proposed planting within the development site.



Figure 7: Precedent image showing natural play equipment.

4 Proposed Planting

4.1 General

To compensate for the removal of existing vegetation on site, substantial tree planting is proposed as part of the new development, to improve the proportion of native species on site and to build on the existing character of the area. Drawing 2001 *Landscape Plan*, prepared by DFLA, includes detailed schedules of proposed planting and illustrates the location and extent of mown lawn, managed long grass/meadow, groundcover, hedge and tree planting.

4.2 Tree Planting

Tree species are selected for longevity, suitability to local soil conditions and microclimate, biodiversity (native species) and suitability for proximity to residential buildings. Proposed tree sizes range from 16 to 35 cm girth. Typical tree species are illustrated below.

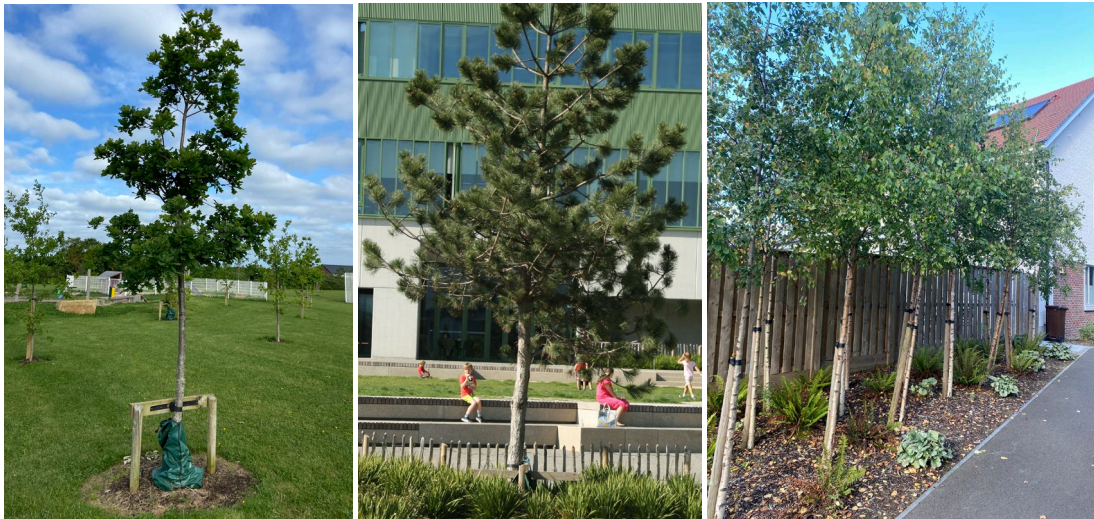


Figure 8: Selection of proposed tree species, left to right: *Quercus robur*, *Pinus sylvestris*, *Betula pubescens*.

4.3 Hedge, Groundcover and Bulb Planting

Low planting is utilised to create and reinforce sub-spaces within the larger landscape; for visual screening, defensible space, visual interest, ecological purposes and to guide or direct pedestrian's movement. The low planting is conceived as subtle layering of greens within the open spaces. The planting is layered as follows; lowest - groundcover planting, highest - clipped hedge planting.



Figure 9: Typical groundcover and herbaceous species.

5 Hard Landscape Materials and Finishes

The landscape strategy has been developed to accommodate the full range of functional requirements associated with the proposed development, including pedestrian and vehicular circulation, parking, bicycle parking, access for service and emergency vehicles, and sustainable drainage infrastructure. These elements have been carefully integrated within the landscape design to ensure a coherent and attractive environment while maintaining functionality and ease of movement throughout the site.

The surface water drainage strategy, developed in conjunction with the project engineers, is designed to attenuate and manage runoff by slowing surface water flows and maximising on-site storage during storm events. Additionally, permeable and porous paving materials are proposed where appropriate to assist infiltration and reduce runoff rates.

The hard landscape palette has been selected to provide a cohesive and legible character throughout the development while responding to the differing functional requirements of each space. A variety of hard landscape finishes are proposed within the open spaces, complemented by seating, cycle parking, and other street furniture to create welcoming and attractive places for social interaction and recreation.

Materials have been selected for their durability, permeability, and long-term performance, while also ensuring that hard surfaces integrate sensitively with adjacent lawn areas and soft landscape planting. Primary vehicular routes, pedestrian footpaths, and cycle connections will feature a robust palette of high-quality materials capable of withstanding regular use and accommodating maintenance requirements.



Figure 10: Hard landscape materials integrated with soft landscape.

END.