

Appendix 11.1

Visual Impact Assessment at Viewpoints

11.1 (a) – Appraisal of Visual Receptor Sensitivity

11.1 (b) – Appraisal of Visual Impact Magnitude



Laois County Council Planning Authority Viewing Purposes Only

Appendix 11.1(a)

Appraisal of Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Degree of Association within each Criterion

Strong association	Moderate association	Mild association	Negligible association

Receptor Sensitivity Criterion and Analysis at each Viewshed Reference Point (VRP)

Susceptibility / Values associated with the view	VP1	VP2	VP3	VP4	VP5	VP6	VP7	VP8	VP9	VP10 a/b
Susceptibility of receptor group to changes in view										
Recognised scenic value of the view										
Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas										
Intensity of use, popularity (number of viewers)										
Provision of vast, elevated panoramic views										
Sense of remoteness / tranquillity at the viewing location										
Degree of perceived naturalness										
Presence of striking or noteworthy features										
Sense of Historical, cultural and / or spiritual significance										
Rarity or uniqueness of the view										
Integrity of the landscape character within the view										
Sense of place at the viewing location										
Sense of awe										
Visual Receptor Sensitivity	L	H	L	HM	ML	ML	ML	ML	ML	M

N = Negligible; L = low sensitivity; ML = medium-low sensitivity M = medium sensitivity; HM = High-medium sensitivity; H = high sensitivity; VH = very high sensitivity.

Susceptibility / Values associated with the view	VP11	VP12	VP13	VP14	VP15	VP16	VP17	VP18	VP19	VP20
Susceptibility of receptor group to changes in view										
Recognised scenic value of the view										
Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas										
Intensity of use, popularity (number of viewers)										
Provision of vast, elevated panoramic views										
Sense of remoteness / tranquillity at the viewing location										
Degree of perceived naturalness										
Presence of striking or noteworthy features										
Sense of Historical, cultural and / or spiritual significance										
Rarity or uniqueness of the view										
Integrity of the landscape character within the view										
Sense of place at the viewing location										
Sense of awe										
Visual Receptor Sensitivity	M	L	M	M	L	ML	ML	ML	H	L

N = Negligible; L = low sensitivity; ML = medium-low sensitivity M = medium sensitivity; HM = High-medium sensitivity; H = high sensitivity; VH = very high sensitivity.

Appendix 11.1(b)

Appraisal of Visual Impact Magnitude

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP1	N80, at northern outskirts of Portlaoise	N	10.2km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centres of Population Major Routes 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Low			
Existing View	<p>The roundabout in the foreground signals the northern entry to the town of Portlaoise, along the N80. In that regard, it represents the nearest point in the town, or its outskirts, to the site of the proposed development. At this location, there are numerous sizeable retail units, a petrol station, apartments and low-density housing developments. This location marks a sharp transition to the rural/pastoral landscape that is prevalent north of here. Within the vicinity of the N80, the scale of mature trees is evident.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Owing to intervening mature trees over the course of more than 10km, there is no potential for views of the proposed wind farm from this location. Consequently, the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible.</p>			
Summary	<p>Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.</p>			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP2	Rock of Dunamaise	NW	14.9km	8
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated Scenic View • Amenity and heritage features 			
Receptor Sensitivity	High			
Existing View	<p>The Rock of Dunamaise is a ruined 12th Century castle that sits upon a rocky outcrop 46m above the Midlands plain, offering compelling and panoramic views of the surrounding terrain.</p> <p>Perhaps the most striking aspect of this view is the broad, ostensibly flat agricultural plinth that extends towards the similarly low, even, northern horizon. Cropping, followed by pasture, is prevalent in the near-distance, as is a general lack of mature or semi-mature trees in those field boundaries. Linear roadside dwellings, like those found across much of the study area, are also evident, while towards the west of this scene the Slieve Bloom Mountains can be also be seen.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Although almost 15km distance from this location, the proposed turbines will be fully revealed rising out of the rural plains in the middle distance of this vast view. The blade sets and most of the towers will be seen along, or marginally above, the distant horizon, and with a subtle degree of contrast against the sky. At this elevation and distance, the turbines are seen at a relatively low scale, with a consolidated lateral extent, and will not be a prominent feature of the view. While all eight proposed turbines will be visible from the Rock of Dunamaise, their distance from the Rock will mean they will not be particularly noticeable. In the context of the overall vista afforded from this hilltop, the scheme is considered to have a sub-dominant visual presence.</p> <p>In terms of aesthetics, the proposed wind farm will be seen in a clear and legible manner within the productive rural plain of north Laois. The proposed turbines will not present any sense of scale conflict, as they will present as a clear cluster of turbines rising out of a virtual plinth, with no other apparent vertical/tall elements visible within the study area to contrast with. While there is a small degree of turbine overlap in a couple of instances, this will be greatly diluted with distance. Neither the height nor lateral extent of the turbines will be conspicuous, in terms of the broad and visually-competing nature of the surrounding landscape pattern, or the overall context of this vast panorama.</p> <p>As a result, the magnitude of visual impact is Low-Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	High	Low-negligible	Slight	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP3	M7 overpass at Junction 15	NW	12.3km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major Routes 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Low			
Existing View	<p>In terms of context for this viewpoint location, for at least 5km to either side of this overpass along the M7 (i.e. effectively from Portlaoise, northeast towards Dublin, until the motorway exits the study area), the motorway is almost exclusively enclosed by embankments and/or semi-mature trees. This serves to channel views along this arterial corridor, curtailing longer-distance views to either side (e.g. in the direction of the site). In such a terrain and vegetative context, the best potential for views in the direction of the site are represented by overpasses such as that at Junction 15.</p> <p>In this instance, semi-mature roadside trees visually 'frame' a small roundabout for access on/off the motorway for local communities. Taller trees and buildings further back are also evident.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>While the elevated prospect of this overpass increases theoretical visibility of the proposed wind farm, views in the direction of the site are curtailed by foreground, semi-mature roadside trees, in tandem with taller trees and buildings further back.</p> <p>Thus, the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP4	Emo Court Demesne	NW	9.8km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amenity and heritage feature 			
Receptor Sensitivity	High-medium			
Existing View	<p>Designed by renowned architect James Gandon, Emo Court House is a neo-classical mansion attracting thousands of visitors each year. Emo Court Demesne – namely its gardens, lake and woodlands - are also a popular draw, not just for visitors/tourists but also local residents who use its series of picturesque woodland tracks, in particular, for regular walks/runs.</p> <p>This view is from a lawn area in close vicinity of the house, and from one of the most elevated areas of the Demesne. In the foreground, a well-kept lawn area is marked with a small driveway, some fencing, a car park and some mature specimen trees. In the distance, a thick woodland of mature trees within the Demesne preclude any further views to the west or northwest. This woodland also marks the western/north-western boundary of the Demesne.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>As a result of the aforementioned mature trees within the Demesne, there is no potential for views of the proposed development.</p> <p>The magnitude of visual impact, therefore, is Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	High-medium	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP5	R419 at western outskirts of Portarlinton	W	8.4km	1
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centres of Population; Major Routes. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low			
Existing View	<p>This location is from a bridge on the R419 as it crosses over the main Dublin-Cork rail line, on the western outskirts of Portarlinton. Located within 1km of the town centre, the view also shows the River Barrow meandering through this flat, agricultural landscape, while Portarlinton town is fully visible from this bridge, to the east and northeast.</p> <p>In the foreground of this view, a green palisade fence cuts down from the bridge towards the Barrow. A series of tree-lined field boundaries, as well as mature riparian woodland, preclude more distant views to the west, with the exception of the Slieve Blooms rising further west.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>The partial blade set of one proposed turbine and the blade tip of another proposed turbine will be seen rising above the treeline to the west. The rotation of the blades on this vegetated skyline may draw the eye to some degree, though they will have a minor lateral extent within the broad context of the view, and will be, at times, screened by foreground trees as one crosses this bridge in a south-westerly direction. The partial blade set visible on one turbine, has a backdrop of both sky and landform; in this case, the Slieve Blooms. This is likely to ensure marginally more noticeability than might otherwise be the case. Consequently, the visual presence of the turbines is deemed to be in the order of sub-dominant to minimal.</p> <p>Although the view of one turbine blade set and one turbine tip rotating amongst tree tops may generate a small degree of visual clutter and scale/distance confusion, such effects are diluted by their modest visual presence. Furthermore, the visible presence from this bridge of a large town to the east and northeast, as well as a busy rail line running beneath the bridge, create a more immediate competing panorama adjacent to this rural hinterland.</p> <p>The magnitude of visual impact, therefore, is Low.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium-low	Low	Slight-imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP6	Cul de Sac third class road at Garryhinch townland	W	3.1km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Views 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low			
Existing View	<p>In terms of context of setting, there are at least 15 dwellings located along a 700m stretch of this local road at Garryhinch townland, which is itself located off a further third class road. Approx. 600m past this location, this local road narrows into a rutted, unsealed forestry/peatland track, after which there are no further residences.</p> <p>In this scene, mature and semi-mature trees, as well as telephone lines/utility poles, align the roadside, albeit in an inconsistent fashion, as the road extends west. In the foreground, residential entrances and maintained/grassy roadside verges are apparent.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Above the aforementioned vegetation, the tips of three rotating proposed turbines will be partially visible. However, the majority of the proposed turbines will be fully screened. From this location, the vertical scale of the three blade tips is neither apparent nor striking, as there is a strong vertical legacy created by the roadside utility poles in this view. In addition, the three blade tips will also have a backdrop of sky, against which they have a low degree of contrast. As a result, the visual presence of the proposed windfarm is deemed to be sub-dominant.</p> <p>There will be a discordant element generated in this scene due to the partial view of turbine blade sets rotating amongst tree tops, which can cause an element of visual disharmony, particularly within the central study area. While such effects are relatively limited within the broader visual spectrum, and will not be conspicuous for road users, for residents living approx. 3km from the nearest proposed turbine, the blade tips will be a noticeable element, representing a minor intrusion into views from some residences along this road.</p> <p>On balance, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Low.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium-low	Low	Slight	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP7	Housing development at northern outskirts of Mountmellick	N	2.3km	3
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Views; Centres of Population. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low			
Existing View	<p>The context of this setting is that of an extensive housing development in the north-eastern outskirts of Mountmellick. This location is less than 50m from the slender Owenass River (out of sight behind palisade fencing), which meanders through the rural hinterland and into this peri-urban setting. While housing is predominant to the south of here, a small industrial estate is located within 70m west of this location.</p> <p>In this view, fallow vegetation occupies the foreground, until it meets a palisade fence closing off the (out of sight) Owenass River. Beyond the river, a complex vista of utility poles and swathes of underutilised and/or semi-industrial and/or storage land use is partially discernible. Within approx. 200m north of this location the landscape appears to transition to a more traditional aesthetic of irregular/inconsistent tree-lined hedgerows, beyond which land use cannot be determined.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Above the foreground vegetation, three proposed wind turbines will be visible, with a fourth partially discernible, along with the blade tip of a fifth turbine. They will be seen at a modest scale from this distance, within a complex and highly-modified vista. The three central turbines will rise at a similar scale and to a comparable degree above the skyline with blade sets mostly seen in silhouette. The proposed turbines will not be spatially dominant in this part peri-urban, part rural hinterland context. The visual presence of the proposed development is deemed to be in the region of co-dominant to subdominant.</p> <p>Aesthetically, there will potentially be some ambiguity relating to the partial view of turbine blades rotating amongst intervening tree branches. However, these rotating blade tips are not likely to draw the eye as much as the three central turbines, whose clear and coherent form, scale and function is more aesthetically balanced. Indeed, the proposed turbines will not appear out of place in this strongly anthropogenic vista.</p> <p>On balance of these factors, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Medium-low.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium-low	Medium-low	Moderate-slight	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine:	to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP8	Third class road at Forest Lower townland	N/NW	1.1		5
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Views 				
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low				
Existing View	<p>The context of this setting is that of much modified, reclaimed landscape that supports intensive agriculture, as well as broadleaf commercial forestry. According to historical mapping, this wide and flat locale was primarily uncultivated damp land (e.g. bog or heathland) to within a century ago.</p> <p>Up to six dwellings are located within 700m further along the narrow local road in the foreground. After this, the road narrows to a pitted, unsealed track that exclusively serves commercial peatland and forestry, before terminating in a dead end. The typography of this scene is indicative of land use associated with intensive dairying practises. Pasture occupies the lion's share of visible land use, while a large agricultural-type building is present in the distance, as are roadside utility poles.</p>				
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>This location will serve as the source for a very clear and unambiguous view of a contemporary wind farm. The five nearest turbines punctuate this wide, flat vista. While the proposed turbines will be visually prominent and are likely to be the first thing that the onlooker will observe in this scene, owing to the broad, wide scale of setting, they will not feel spatially dominant or over-bearing. The majority of the eight turbines will be clearly observed, while the blade sets of a sixth, and blades tips of the remaining two turbines, will be partially visible in the distance.</p> <p>In terms of aesthetics, this will be a strong view of a windfarm, with a highly-evident degree of compositional balance and harmony, in tandem with a suitably aesthetic order and clarity. The wide and legible spacing between proposed turbines across this wide panorama, will result in them being conspicuous, but not overbearing. To put it another way, the spatial extent of the proposed windfarm will be relative to, and appropriate for, the scale of its panoramic setting.</p> <p>The blade sets of the four most prominent turbines will largely rotate clear of the treeline, with the profile of the four remaining turbines proving less distinct. In addition, there will be a broader absence of any scale conflict that will be apparent in this view, or any sense of the proposed turbines dwarfing other landscape elements within this highly modified, intensively managed landscape.</p> <p>On balance, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Medium.</p>				
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.				
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact		
	Medium-low	Medium	Moderate		

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP9	N80, at Nyra townland	E/SE	1.1km	3
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Views; Major Routes. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low			
Existing View	This location is approx. 5km northwest of Mountmellick, along the N80 to Tullamore, at a junction of a third class road heading west towards County Offaly. In the roadside field adjacent to this busy National Road, pasture is prevalent. However, beyond the first roadside field, views further east or southeast are curtailed by mature, if inconsistent, tree-lined field boundaries.			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>In this view, the proposed turbines will be located more than 1km away. All eight of the proposed turbines will be partially visible from this location, with only three of the proposed nacelles being largely visible. Two other blade sets will be partially visible, as will the rotating blade tips of the remaining three turbines. Owing to the broad, wide scale of this setting, the proposed turbines will not feel spatially dominant or over-bearing, although they will be prominent and are likely to be the most noticeable element in the landscape.</p> <p>In terms of aesthetics, the proposed wind farm will be seen in a coherent and unambiguous manner. There will be one instance of turbine overlap, which contributes a minor degree of visual clutter. Also, the presence of the majority of turbine tips rotating above the intervening treeline will not be an ideal optic, for road users or residents alike. However, the flat profile and staggered layout of the scheme will reflect the underlying terrain, and the spatial extent of the proposed turbines will be appropriate for the scale of its panoramic setting. The scale of the proposed turbines will not be overbearing within this wide, flat terrain and the turbines will appear well accommodated, in a thematic sense, within this highly modified, lowland landscape.</p> <p>As a result, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Medium.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium-low	Medium	Moderate	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP10a	N80, at northern end of Grange townland	Southeast	4.5km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Views; Major routes. Designated Scenic Route* 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium			
Existing View	<p>Please note, VP10 has been split between VP10a and VP10b, to best represent the fluid and contrasting nature of likely views of the proposed windfarm from Grange townland on the N80. Both locations are within 400m of each other, along this National road, and both locations relate to the same receptor. *It is useful to note that there is a Laois County Council designated view from this road at this townland, but it is orientated towards the Slieve Blooms in the southwest, rather than the direction of the site of the proposed wind farm, to the southeast.</p> <p>The scene of this location is at an entrance to a private driveway/access track on the east side of the N80. Across a field of pasture, tall trees within two different field boundaries preclude more distant views in the direction of the site.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Owing to the aforementioned tall trees, no views of the proposed development will be attained from this location.</p> <p>Thus, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP10b	N80, at southern end of Grange townland	Southeast	4.0km	6
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Views; Major routes. Designated Scenic Route* 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium			
Existing View	<p>Similar to VP10a, the scene of this location is at an entrance to a private entrance, only on the west side of the N80, approx. 400m southeast of VP10a. A lack of a mature roadside hedgerow, or even embankment, on the west side of this National road, combined with a low-mid height roadside hedgerow on the eastern side of the road, allow for relatively open views of the surrounding landscape. Like so many of the low-lying locales across the Midlands, this road has been constructed notably higher above the surrounding the terrain, which tends to increase views across adjacent terrain. To either side of the national road, overhead electricity lines are supported by utility poles. Again, it is important to note that although this is designated as a scenic route, the designation relates to views of the Slieve Blooms in an opposing direction to the site.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Along the road alignment, six turbines will be clearly visible, while the blade sets of a seventh will be discerned behind a distant roadside tree. The blade sets will be silhouetted against the sky, with a modest degree of contrast. From this location, the proposed windfarm will be a readily noticeable element within this landscape, as it will sit broadly within the line of sight of road users travelling southeast (i.e. towards Mountmellick); a fact that is accentuated by the lack of mature roadside vegetation. Thus, the visual presence of the proposed development is deemed to be co-dominant within the overall vista.</p> <p>From this location, the irregular spacing of the turbines may appear indifferent to the broad, unenclosed landscape of its setting. This is likely to result in the wind energy development being limited in spatial extent, relative to the scale of its panoramic setting due to the end-on view of the array. The tight lateral extent of the turbines will line one turbine up before/behind another, creating instances of turbine stacking, as well as visual overlap with at least three of the receding/distant utility poles, causing a degree of contextual and scale confusion as well as visual clutter. Overall, there will be some visual disharmony and clutter associated with this particular view.</p> <p>On balance, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Medium.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium	Medium	Moderate	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine:	to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP11	Linear residential development at Kilcavan townland	SE	4.8km		5
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community views 				
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium				
Existing View	<p>The context of this view is that of a marginally elevated local road, running east-west, near the settlement of Kilcavan. This location marks one of the closest positions to Kilcavan, and which also has the potential for more open views of the proposed development. There are several dwellings along this road, which tend to be orientated to maximise views to the south/southeast/southwest. As this view is more at an oblique angle to the road and may be precluded to car users (as opposed to pedestrians or cyclists) owing to the roadside embankment, it is more representative of those shared by residents along this road.</p> <p>In this view, a relatively low roadside embankment on the southern side of the road allows for views in the direction of the site. Along with the embankment, a large roadside field of pasture anchors the foreground. Beyond this field, one dwelling, a large agricultural building, utility poles and some mature and semi-mature trees in a field boundary can be seen. Beyond these, a verdant lowland plain is seen as a series of stacked field boundaries and trees, resulting in land use being less clear to be determined. In the far distance, the low hills of south Laois are visible.</p>				
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Three turbines will be particularly evident in this view, as they rise from the dark green lowlands about them. Their blades rotating clear above the treeline, these three turbines will be patent, after which the observer is likely to notice the partially screened fourth and fifth blade set, followed by the blade tips of the remaining three turbines. The turbines will be seen at a modest scale at this distance and with a relatively consolidated lateral extent, in comparison to the broad panorama, but they will still be a relatively prominent and distinctive feature of the view. In the context of the overall vista afforded from this marginally elevated road, the scheme is considered to have a co-dominant visual presence.</p> <p>In terms of aesthetics, the proposed wind farm will be seen in a relatively open manner within the productive rural landscape, allowing the viewer to read the underlying landscape, rather than compete with it. From this location, the turbine layout might appear lacking in cohesion, but this is principally a result of the three intervening mature trees set in the distant field boundary (i.e. within a 10 or more metres to either side of this location, this is unlikely to be the case). Blade sets will rotate to a backdrop of part-sky, part-land, which is not ideal from an aesthetic perspective. However, being a marginally elevated view, the vertical imprint of the turbines will be less pronounced, and this will be accentuated by the presence of the aforementioned tall trees in the mid-ground.</p> <p>As a result, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Medium-low.</p>				
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.				
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact		
	Medium	Medium-low	Moderate-slight		

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP12	R420 at Clonygowan village	SW	4.8km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Views; Centres of population. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Low			
Existing View	Clonygowan is a small Co. Offaly village on the outer edge of the central study area. This viewpoint location is at the southern entrance to the village, on the R420 (which also serves as the village's Main Street), within 50m of the Dublin-Galway/Mayo rail line. This location was chosen as it is the nearest location to the village centre where buildings/dwellings in the direction of the site are not present.			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>In the foreground, mature hedgerow/trees curtail distant views in the direction of the proposed wind farm.</p> <p>As a result, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP13	Kildare Co. Co. designated view RB9 near Monasterevin	W	15.3km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designated scenic view 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium			
Existing View	<p>In terms of context, this view is located on a bridge over the River Barrow, at the boundary between Counties Kildare and Laois. This location is a County Kildare designated view, albeit with a view that relates principally to those "of the River Barrow," rather than any more distant views.</p> <p>In this instance, a foreground field of pasture is set well below the bridge/road level, beyond which multiple layers of mature trees are evident, curtailing more distant views.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Owing to the aforementioned tall trees, there will be no views of the proposed windfarm from this location.</p> <p>The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP14	Grand Canal Way at Cappyrore townland	S	13.7km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amenity and heritage features 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium			
Existing View	<p>This location was selected along the Grand Canal, owing to the particularly low amount of tall trees on the southern side of the canal, thereby allowing for more open views in the direction of the site than is the case elsewhere along the canal. While watercraft on the canal is markedly less frequent than in centuries past, the Offaly Rowing Club is located approx. 1.5km west of this location. More importantly, the Grand Canal Way is a very popular, year-round route for cyclists and walkers, not just for local residents, but also those crossing the country on multi-day cycles/hikes.</p> <p>This view is arguably more layered and complex than comparable, rural-based canal tow path views across the Midlands. Firstly, the canal is marginally elevated above the surrounding landscape, allowing for increased views of the terrain. While the canal corridor itself shares landscape qualities and character of the 18th Century, it is restricted to that corridor. Intensive lowland agriculture is prevalent in the mid-distance, with irregular spacing of mature trees within field boundaries. The scale of energy and/or telecommunications infrastructure is striking within the scene. A tall communications mast rises out of an industrial type building to the east (i.e. left) of the view, while, further afield, at least three pylons can be discerned along the skyline.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>At over 13km from the canal, the partial blade sets of three turbines will be seen, while the blade tip of a fourth turbine will be discernible. In terms of scale and height, these four turbines are less prescient than intervening pylons and mature trees. However, unlike the pylons and trees, these four blade sets/blade tips will be rotating/in motion and are therefore more likely to attract the eye and highlight their location. However, they will not be anywhere near as noticeable as the aforementioned telecommunications mast, or series of pylons. In the context of the overall vista, the visual presence of the turbines is considered to be in the order of Subdominant-minimal.</p> <p>Whilst the view of some of the turbines along the distant skyline and through intervening trees could lead to visual clutter and contextual ambiguity (i.e. an understanding of where the turbines are located within the landscape), these will be barely noticeable, primarily owing to their considerable distance. It is not considered that the distant view of four blades/blade sets upon the horizon will have any material effect on the visual amenity of the Grand Canal, especially in the context of the complex setting where large scale energy and telecommunications infrastructure is highly evident.</p> <p>As a result of these factors, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Low-negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium	Low-negligible	Slight-imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP15	N52 at south-eastern outskirts of Tullamore	SE	14.2km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Routes; • Centres of population. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Low			
Existing View	<p>The context of this view is that of the N52, which serves as a ring-road around the eastern and southern sides of Tullamore. Combined with its marginally elevated setting, it represents the nearest and most advantageous location in or near Tullamore that has potential views of the proposed wind farm.</p> <p>In this scene, roadside vegetation, combined with mature field boundaries stacked against the horizon, prevent long distance views from this location, in spite of the marginally elevated setting of this road. In the foreground, pastoral fields are set below the raised national road.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Owing to the aforementioned mature vegetation, there will be no views attained of the proposed wind farm from this location.</p> <p>The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP16	Offaly Co. Co. designated scenic route at Killurin village	SE	14.6km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated Scenic route; • Centres of Population. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low			
Existing View	<p>Located along the R421, at the northern entry to the small village of Killurin, this section of road is also along an Offaly County Council designated scenic route. There are several residences along the western side of this road, at this location.</p> <p>In this view, a roadside concrete post-and-rail fence separates a grass verge from a large flat pastoral field, with utility poles supporting overhead power lines. One dwelling is visible to the south (i.e. right), as is a low hill behind it. Otherwise tall vegetation in field boundaries preclude more distant views in the direction of the site.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>Between the utility poles in the foreground field, the blade tip of a single distant turbine can be discerned above the treeline. At over 14km distance, this blade tip – even when rotating – is highly unlikely to be noticed by even the stationary observer. Thus, the visual presence is deemed to be minimal.</p> <p>The distant turbine blade tip is one of many anthropocentric elements within this view. At such a considerable distance, even if seen the blade tip if seen/observed, it will not materially affect the visual amenity enjoyed from this scenic route.</p> <p>Consequently, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance nearest turbine: to	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP17	Offaly Co. Co. designated view V5 at N52	SE	17.5km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated Scenic View; • Major Route. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low			
Existing View	<p>Along the N52, which connects Tullamore to Birr, that are intermittent open views to the south/southeast. This location represents the most open views in the direction of the site that is nearest an Offaly County Council designated view (V5) along this national road.</p> <p>In this view from a marginally elevated N52, tillage is evident in the roadside field, beyond which – almost to all sides – more distant views are precluded by mature vegetation.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>No aspect or element of the proposed development will be visible from this location, chiefly owing to mature intervening vegetation over the course of more than 17km.</p> <p>The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP18	Clonaslee village	E	10.6km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centres of Population. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Medium-low			
Existing View	<p>Clonaslee is a village in northwest Laois and is located near the foothills of the Slieve Blooms. It is useful to note that there is a Laois County Council designated view from near this village, but it is orientated towards the Slieve Blooms in the south/southwest, rather than the direction of the site of the proposed wind farm, to the east.</p> <p>In this view, the foreground is occupied by land within Clonaslee graveyard. Beyond a wall and evenly spaced, semi-mature, non-native species, pastoral farmland can be seen. Beyond that farmland, more distant views are screened by buildings and tall vegetation.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>No aspect or element of the proposed development will be visible from this location, chiefly owing to mature intervening vegetation over the course of more than 10km.</p> <p>The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP19	Laois Co. Co. designated view 004 at Slieve Bloom Mountains	E/NE	9.7km	8
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated Scenic View; • Heritage & Amenity feature. 			
Receptor Sensitivity	High			
Existing View	<p>The Slieve Bloom Mountains in the west/southwest of the study area are a very popular recreational reserve for hikers, in particular, who avail of its multiple waymarked trails that loop and crisscross the range; chief among them being the Slieve Bloom Way. Aside from conservation designations, the range is also home to large scale commercial forestry plantations. According to Laois County Council, the summit of the Slieve Blooms is a designated scenic view, for views to the southwest and to the northeast (i.e. in the direction of the site).</p> <p>The location of this viewpoint is along a well-used track that links the townland of Larchfield, on the lowlands south of the R422, to the Slieve Bloom Way that crisscrosses the range. However, forestry largely precludes views in the direction of the site from the Slieve Bloom Way, whereas this is the nearest track to it, which is not subject to the flux of forestry growth, and that has open views in the direction of the site.</p> <p>In this scene, heathland, heather and gorse are apparent on the mountain in the foreground. In the distance, the low even plateau of northern Laois rolls out towards the northern horizon. The landscape on the lower terrain is largely a mix of pasture with more woodland near the foothills of the Slieve Blooms. The Mountlucas Wind farm is discernible in the far distance to the northeast within the heart of the lowland plains.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>This will be a clear and unambiguous view of an eight-turbine windfarm, centred upon the lowland plains of northern Laois, with the blade sets of all the towers set marginally below the distant horizon. Being an upland view, the vertical imprint of the proposed turbines will be noticeably less than it might otherwise be. While all eight proposed turbines will be visible from several locations along the Slieve Blooms, their distance from the range will mean they will not be conspicuous. In the context of the overall vista afforded from this hilltop, the scheme is considered to have a sub-dominant visual presence.</p> <p>The proposed windfarm will be read by the observer in a very clear and legible fashion from the Slieve Blooms. There will be no overlapping of the blade sets from this orientation, nor any visual clutter or disharmony. Neither will the proposed turbines present any scale conflict, as there will be no other apparent vertical/tall elements visible within the study area to contrast with. Neither the height nor lateral extent of the turbines will be conspicuous, in terms of the broad and visually-competing nature of the surrounding landscape. To put it another way, the spatial extent of the proposed windfarm will be relative to, and appropriate for, the scale of its panoramic setting.</p> <p>On balance, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be Low.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	High	Low	Moderate-slight	

Viewshed Reference Point		Direction of View	Distance to nearest turbine:	Number of turbine nacelles visible:
VP20	Northern outskirts of Mountrath town	NE	17.4km	0
Representative of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centres of Population 			
Receptor Sensitivity	Low			
Existing View	<p>The small town of Mountrath is located in the far southwest of the study area. The context of this view is from a housing development on the northern outskirts of the town.</p> <p>In this view, front gardens of nearby residences can be seen in the right of the scene. Across the road, pasture is largely prevalent, with the exception of one relatively modest industrial-looking building. In the distance, tree-lined hedgerows are stacked against the horizon, while in the left (i.e. west) of the view, the foothills of the Slieve Blooms can be seen.</p>			
Visual Impact of Dernacart Wind Farm	<p>The only aspect of the proposed development that might be seen from this location will be the distant tips of three turbines on the far-off horizon. However, at over 17km distance, these blade tips will be highly unlikely to be noticed, even when rotating, and even when viewed by static observers such as residents.</p> <p>Thus, the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible.</p>			
Summary	Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in section 11.2.5 the significance of visual impact is summarised below.			
	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact	
	Low	Negligible	Imperceptible	