Castlepollard Quarry, Deerpark, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath

Castlepollard Quarry

Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Section 11

Landscape

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11.1 INTRODUCTION

Westmeath is an inland county in the north midlands and lacks a coastline. The county is known as the Lakeland County, but its landscape includes a diversity of landscape types, ranging from rolling hills and lakes to peatlands, grasslands, woodlands, eskers and wetlands. The county consists of lowland limestone terrain containing several prominent lakes, including Lough Ree on the River Shannon, which forms the southwest border of the county. There are no mountains in the county although the hills in the north of the county are a conspicuous feature. There are also significant cutaway peatlands in the county, particularly the swathes running along the northwest border of the county from Lough Sheelin to Ballymahon, along the southern border from Athlone to Clara, and along the eastern border from Tyrrellspass to Lisclogher. There are also prominent esker systems (i.e., Athlone, Moate and Moyvore esker systems) in southwestern Westmeath between Athlone and Clara.

Inland waterways consisting of the River Shannon (forming the Westmeath-Roscommon border in the southwest) and its many tributaries, such as the River Inny (incl. tributaries such as the Yellow River) and the River Brosna, as well as the Royal Canal as it traverses central Westmeath from east to west, provide important visual and recreational amenities within the landscape.

These landscapes intrinsically constitute invaluable elements of the natural resource base of the county and need to be protected from inappropriate development. Scenic and high amenity areas not only have intrinsic value as places of beauty, but also because of their importance in terms of recreation, tourism and other uses. They are also a source of pride and inspiration for many residents and visitors alike. All aspects of the natural, built and cultural heritage come together in the landscapes we experience every day. Landscapes are an important part of people's lives, giving individuals a sense of identity and belonging, contributing to our well-being. Sensitive development and conservation of this resource is essential to the underpinning of the rural economy and quality of life.

This section of the EIAR addresses the landscape and visual impacts with respect to an accompanying planning application for the proposed development at Deerpark, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath. The section is essentially an overview of the landscape and visual amenity within the vicinity of the proposed development, coupled with an assessment of the potential impact, if any, of the proposed development on the existing environment in respect of these issues.

The application site is located within the Townland of Deerpark c. 2 km southeast of Castlepollard and c. 5 km northwest of Collinstown, County Westmeath. The site is located adjacent to the R395, the regional road connecting of Edgeworthstown in the northwest to Delvin in the southeast, via Castlepollard and Collinstown. The site is situated adjacent to, and with direct access onto, the R395.

The N52 and N55 National Secondary Roads can be accessed at Delvin and Granard, respectively, and thus connect the site to the principal transport arteries in north of the county.

The N4 National Primary Road, a radial arterial route, bypasses just north of Mullingar and traverses the centre of the county in a NW-SE orientation connecting with Edgeworthstown in County Longford. The N4 is accessible c. 15 km to the south via the R394 from Castlepollard.

The proposed development will consist of the continued use and operation of the existing quarry (permitted under P.A. Ref. 01/525), including deepening of the quarry, along with minor amendments to the permitted quarry layout comprising an extraction area of c. 4 ha within an overall application area of c. 11.4 ha. The development will include provision of new site infrastructure including water management system, wheelwash and other ancillaries.

The landscape consists of the visible characteristics of an area or region, including those elements that are physiographic (e.g., mountains and rivers), biological (e.g., vegetation and animals), transient (e.g., weather and climate), and human (e.g., built structures and land use). Landscapes variously combine human cultural influences superimposed on nature, creating places of unique character and identity, and by contributing to individual and social wellbeing and quality of life, is important in human fulfilment and in reinforcement of identity. Landscape also constitutes a resource favourable to economic activities, particularly tourism.

The European Landscape Convention 2000 states that landscape is "an area as perceived by people, whose visual features and character are the result of the action of natural and / or cultural (that is human) factors…landscapes evolve through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings".

EPA (2015) offers guidance on the description of the landscape in terms of context, character, significance and sensitivities, the analysis of the potential impacts on the landscape, and any proposed mitigation measures. This section also indicates the associated sections within the EIAR that consider these impacts and any proposed mitigation measures.

The assessment of the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development has been prepared in accordance with the Advice Notes for preparing Environmental Impact Statements, Draft (EPA 2015). Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, Draft (EPA 2017) were also consulted.

11.2 REGULATORY BACKGROUND

11.2.1 LEGISLATION

The European Landscape Convention (ELC), to which Ireland is a signatory, was adopted in 2000, and requires signatories to recognise landscapes in law and establish policies aimed at their protection, management and planning. The ELC aims to encourage public bodies to adopt policies and measures at national, regional and local level to protect, manage and plan landscapes. Under the convention, landscape means "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors", and can include high quality natural areas, rural lands, urban areas, peri-urban areas, degraded areas and everyday spaces.

There is no Irish legislation specifically governing protection of the landscape, although preparation of the landscape and visual impact assessments was done in conformance with the European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 296 of 2018). The latter Regulations transpose the EIA Directive 2014/52/EU, amending previous Directive 2011/52/EU, on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment into Irish planning law.

Planning legislation and national guidelines, such as the Draft Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment (DoEHLG 2000) clearly indicate that conservation of the landscape in all its contexts must now be integrated into all aspects of planning policy.

11.2.2 PLANNING POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

There are two main documents that deal with long-term national and regional development strategies, and these underpin the direction of spatial development at the strategic level in the County. Firstly, at the national level, the National Spatial Strategy 2002 (DoELG 2002), and secondly at the regional level, the Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2019-2031 (EMRA 2019).

The 2002 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was designed to provide a framework for balanced social, economic and physical development between the regions for the next 20 years (DoELG 2002). It therefore provided the strategic planning context for government policies and investment in housing, water services, transport, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure. The NSS was revoked in 2013, but its legacy persists in the Regional Planning Guidelines and County Development Plans.

In early 2018, the government published "Project Ireland 2040", the new overarching public policy initiative, which consists of the National Planning Framework to 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027 (DoHPLG 2018a; b), which replaces the revoked NSS and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021 (DoPER 2016), respectively. This represents an alignment of the investment strategy with the strategic planning policy, to create a unified and coherent plan, which will drive the long-term economic, environmental and social progress across all parts of the country over the next ten years. This has now fed into the planning processes by being incorporated into the new Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies (RSES) that are replacing the Regional Planning Guidelines.

The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) had extended the implementation of the NSS down to the regional and local levels, by linking national spatial policy with planning by local authorities. The RPGs were influenced by a wide range of international, national and regional level plans, programmes and legislation, and in turn form a framework for lower level plans and programmes (e.g., County Development Plans, Local Area Plans, etc.). The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 (MRA 2010) were replaced by the new Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) in June 2019 (EMRA 2019), and will directly influence planning policy in Westmeath as they have been incorporated into the CDP, which was adopted in May 2021.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (EMRA 2019) recognises the European Landscape Convention (ELC), and also acknowledges the importance that local authorities within the Midland Region move towards consensus and adopt a shared methodology and consistency in landscape classification and assessment to ensure compatibility in decision-making (i.e., Landscape Policy Objective RPO 7.27; EMRA 2019). Thus, Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) offers the potential to establish a coherent strategy for integrating landscape, land use and transportation policies as well as economic, energy policies, etc.

Local authorities create their County Development Plans (CPDs) based on these higher level frameworks, guidelines and strategies. Thus, the plans must be consistent with longer term planning and sustainable development objectives, including those set out in the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies. A County Development Plan sets out a strategic framework for the proper planning and sustainable development of the administrative area of the local authority, over a six year period.

A primary role in planning is to assist in the achievement of sustainable development, in part, by promoting an approach to landscape planning and management, which links objectives and recommendations for landscape character to existing planning policies. The capacity of each landscape character type to absorb new development will largely depend on the sensitivity of the landscape type. Developments which are likely to create a significant environmental and particularly visual impact will best be absorbed in areas where the landscape is robust, i.e., has the capacity to absorb development without significantly changing its character. All developments should be assessed on a site by site basis to avoid, minimise or mitigate any potential environmental or visual impact.

The importance of landscape and visual amenity and the role of planning in its protection are recognised in the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). This requires that development plans include objectives for the preservation of landscape, views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty. It also provides for the designation of Landscape Conservation Areas (LCA), Areas of Special Amenity (ASA) and the assessment of landscape character.

The relevant policies and objectives with respect to landscape in the RSES and Westmeath CDP are given in the Appendix 1, Section 1.4 & 1.5.7 respectively.

11.2.3 GUIDANCE

This chapter of the EIAR has been prepared with regard to the following guidance:

Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002). *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland.* Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, UK.

DoAHG (2011). Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities. Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DoAHG), Dublin, Ireland.

DoEHLG (2000). Landscape and Landscape Assessment: Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), Dublin, Ireland.

DoHPLG (2018c). Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment. Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DoHPLG), Dublin, Ireland.

EPA (2017). Guidelines on the Information to be contained in an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Draft, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Johnstown Castle, Wexford, Ireland.

Irish Landscape Institute (2002). Guidelines on Landscape and Visual Assessment, 2nd ed. Irish Landscape Institute, Dublin, Ireland.

Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2005). *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - 2nd ed.* Spon Press, London, UK.

Landscape Institute (2019). *Visual Representation of Development Proposals*. Technical Guidance Note 06/19. London, UK.

11.3 METHODOLOGY

The landscape and visual baseline study comprised a desktop study with follow-up field survey in the vicinity of the site. Although closely linked, landscape and visual impacts are assessed separately.

Landscape Impact Assessment (LIA) is concerned with changes in the physical landscape brought about by the proposed development, which may alter its character and how this is experienced. This requires a detailed analysis of the individual elements and characteristics of the landscape, which combine to form the overall landscape character. By assessing the quality of the elements in the landscape and identifying the key sensitivities, it is possible to assess the ability of the landscape to absorb the type and scale of change associated with the proposed development, without causing unacceptable adverse changes to its character.

Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) is concerned with changes in the composition of views produced by changes to the landscape, how these are perceived and the effects on visual amenity. Visual impacts are measured on the basis of: (1) visual obstruction due to partial or intermittent blocking of a view; or (2) visual intrusion due to interruption of a view without blocking.

Analysis of the visual baseline information was used to identify the extent and nature of the existing views of the site from the principal representative viewpoints, and the nature and characteristics of the visual amenity of the potentially sensitive visual receptors.

In the EIAR assessment, consideration is given to both the importance of an attribute and the magnitude of the potential environmental impacts as a result of the proposed development. The impact ratings are in accordance with impact assessment criteria provided in guidance from the EPA (EPA 2017) (See also Appendix 3). General Guidance on Baseline Environment & Impacts).

11.3.1 CONSULTATIONS

In accordance with best practice guidelines, the process also involved non-statutory consultation. The list of consultees included the Development Applications Unit (DAU) Dept. of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht; HSE; GSI; Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI); Irish Water; and An Táisce (Refer Chapter 1, Section 1.5 Scoping & Consultation). Although The DAU, IFI, and An Táisce acknowledge receipt of the preconsultation document, only the GSI had responded with an opinion by the time of writing (See Appendix 4).

11.3.2 DESK STUDY

The desk study was used to determine the nature of the visual amenity of the area along with the approximate visibility of the development, which is determined through topographic analysis of map data. Potential receptors of visual effects, including residents and visitors through the area were also identified.

Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) Discovery Series 1:50,000 and OSi 1:5,000 raster mapping and aerial photography were examined (Refer to Figures 1.1 to 1.2). A topographical survey of the existing site was also carried out and modeled using digital terrain modeling software (Refer to Figure 1.3) through which cross sections were produced (Refer to Figure 3.3). LSS

Digital Terrain Modelling software has been used to undertake ZTV (Zones of Theoretical Visibility analysis).

ZTV analysis is a useful desk study that may help to clarify the potential effect of developments in a landscape but it is not an end in itself. In order to get a better understanding of actual visibility, the results of the ZTV must be tested on the ground. As such an extensive field study of the area was also undertaken to identify any significant views that could be observed and to confirm the findings of the ZTV analysis.

For the purpose of this assessment Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2 highlight the study area delineated as the likely zone of visual influence (based on Vertical & Horizontal ZTV analysis).

Visual impacts are best assessed from specific viewpoints. Principal representative viewpoints are mapped within the study area and these views are illustrated by photographs with annotations to describe any important characteristics, and the changes that have arisen as a result of the development (Refer to Plate 11.1 to Plate 11.10).

As part of the assessment an examination of the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Eastern & Midland Region 2019-2031 (EMRA 2019), the Westmeath County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027, which includes a Landscape Character Assessment (Section 13.6), and supporting documentation, was undertaken.

11.3.2.1 Sources of Information

The assessment was carried out in general accordance with the above guidance documents. The main sources of information are listed in Section 11.7 References, while abundant data was sourced online from observations made during virtual tours of the site and surrounding area using Google Maps and Google Earth Pro.

11.3.3 METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE ASPECTS

Landscape effects consist of the changes in the landscape, its character and quality that might result from development. The effect that these changes have on the landscape reflects the sensitivity of that landscape to change and the magnitude of that change.

The assessment methodology was conducted in accordance with Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, Draft (EPA 2017). During the assessment, consideration was given to both the importance of an attribute and the magnitude of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed activities on that cited attribute. These impact ratings are in accordance with impact assessment criteria provided in guidance from the EPA (EPA 2017) (See also Appendix 3 General Guidance on Baseline Environment & Impacts).

For the purpose of assessment, a matrix has been developed (Refer to Table 11.2 below) to define the significance of the landscape impacts. In completing the matrix, the landscape resource is considered in terms of magnitude of change in landscape characteristics and sensitivity of the landscape to accommodate change or intervention without suffering unacceptable effects to its character and values. The significance of impact is the relationship between magnitude and sensitivity.

The sensitivity of the area was devised by consideration of designations such as Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas, by reference to Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 discovery sheet mapping, aerial photography and any distinctive features of interest within the study area.

11.3.4 METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL ASPECTS

Visual impact is the result of a change in view from receptors such as residences, prospects, public pathways and roads with views of the site. The magnitude of impact is assessed according to the scale of the effect, which will depend largely upon the size and type of the development and the distance of the receptor from the site.

Residential properties are considered the most sensitive receptors to changes in view whereas road users are the least sensitive as their experience is transient. The significance of visual impact depends upon the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude and duration of the effect.

The visual study consisted of a number of steps:

1. As part of the assessment an examination of the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Eastern & Midland Region 2019-2031 (EMRA 2019), the Westmeath County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027, which includes a Landscape Character Assessment, and supporting documentation, was undertaken.
2. Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) Discovery Series 1:50,000 and OSi 1:5,000 raster mapping and aerial photography were examined (Refer to Figures 1.1 to 1.3).
3. A UAV survey of the site was conducted by JSPE on 7th April 2021. Multiple aerial photographs taken with the on-board 16 mp camera are digitally stitched together, from which very accurate maps are created using the principle of photogrammetry. The site and immediate environs were surveyed with high horizontal and vertical spatial resolution (i.e., 3 cm per pixel), and produced a topographic survey with accuracy of up to 10 cm. The topographic survey data were modeled using digital terrain modeling software (Refer to Figure 1.3) to produce a DTM, through which cross sections were produced (Refer to Figure 3.3).
4. LSS Digital Terrain Modelling software has been used to undertake ZTV analysis. ZTV analysis tools provide true tests of likely impact because the results reflect the effect that distance has on the apparent size of the object (a large object up-close has more visual impact than the same sized object further away. The visual impact analyses 'bald earth' terrain datasets which do not take into consideration the existence of natural and man-made features which may form a barrier to the 'line of sight'. As such, these analyses are going to produce a **'worst case'** with no account being taken of the influence of buildings and trees on the visibility.

5. The following ZTV analysis tools have been used.

   Vertical ZTV (Visibility Surface(s))

   The visual impact is linked to the vertical angle (VA) subtended at the viewpoint (eyepoint) by the top and bottom extremities of the object being viewed. This in effect gives a measure of how much of a given field of view is occupied by the object when viewed from different receptor locations and automatically takes account of the effect distance would have. Something close is far more intrusive than something hundreds of metres away (Refer to Figure 11.1).

   Horizontal ZTV

   'Horizontal ZTV' measures how much of a receptor's horizontal field of view is taken up by an object (i.e., development). What is produced is a model where the elevation of every grid point represents the chosen Horizontal ZTV in degrees. It is then possible to contour this or display coloured bands in order to highlight potentially problematic areas of high 'impact' (Refer to Figure 11.2).

6. ZTV analysis is a useful **desk study** that may help to clarify the potential effect of developments in a landscape, but it is not an end in itself. In order to get a better understanding of actual visibility, the results of the Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) must be tested on the ground. As such an extensive field study of the area was also undertaken to identify any significant views that could be observed and to confirm the findings of the ZTV analysis.

7. For the purpose of this assessment, Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2 highlight the study area delineated as the likely zone of visual influence (based on Vertical & Horizontal ZTV analysis).

8. Visual impacts are best assessed from specific viewpoints. Principal viewpoints were mapped, and these views illustrated by photographs with annotations to describe any important characteristics, and the changes that have arisen as a result of the development (Refer to Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2 and Plate 11.1 to Plate 11.10).

For the purpose of assessment, a matrix has been developed (Refer to Table 11.3 below) to define the significance of the visual impact with respect to the principal viewpoints identified.

11.3.5 FIELD SURVEY

Site visits were undertaken on 7th April 2021 and 31st May 2021. The purpose of the site visits was to enable familiarisation with the site, establish the general landscape character of the area and identify principal representative viewpoints including residences, prospects, public pathways and roads with views of the site. The actual extent of visibility was also checked in the field due to the localised screening effects of buildings, walls, fences, trees, hedgerows and banks. Potential seasonal screening effects were also identified where necessary and recorded.

The visual survey also includes and is supported by a photographic record from the principal and other relevant viewpoints. The photographs were taken at eye level (i.e., 1.6 metres above ground level) at the point of interest towards the development area using a digital camera. A

panoramic image was produced by the careful 'stitching' together of single-frame images for each identified view.

The analysis of the visual baseline information identifies the extent and nature of the existing views of the site from the principal representative viewpoints, and the nature and characteristics of the visual amenity of the potentially sensitive visual receptors.

Principal viewpoints were mapped, and these views illustrated by photographs with annotations to describe any important characteristics, and the changes that have arisen as a result of the development (Refer to Plate 11.1 to Plate 11.10). The locations of the Principal viewpoints are shown on Figures 11.1 and 11.2.

11.4 BASELINE DESCRIPTION OF RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

11.4.1 LANDSCAPE BASELINE CONDITIONS

11.4.1.1 Site Area Description

The application site is located within the Townland of Deerpark, c. 2 km southeast of Castlepollard, c. 5 km northwest of Collinstown, c. 8.5 km northeast of Multyfarnham, c. 13.5 km northwest of Delvin, c. 13.5 km southwest of Oldcastle, and c. 15.5 km northeast of Mullingar. The application site covers c. 11.4 ha. The quarry is located on the southwest side of, and with direct access onto, the R395 regional road connecting Edgeworthstown, Castlepollard, Collinstown and Delvin (Refer to Figure 1.2 & 1.3). The site is bounded by a copse of trees on both the eastern and western boundaries and by hedgerows on the remaining boundaries, with stock fencing on the boundaries of the access road to the main site entrance.

The site is located in a rural area with a rolling, hilly landform consisting of prominent hills of with cherty limestone with enclosed lakes and areas of peat deposits with consisting predominantly of agricultural lands and afforestation. The townland of Deerpark falls within the large swathe of Westmeath that is identified as Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence, although it lies close to the Structurally Weak Rural Area, which is restricted to a narrow swathe along the northern and northwestern border with Longford; See Westmeath 2021). Structurally Weak Rural Areas generally exhibit characteristics such as persistent and significant population decline as well as a weaker economic structure. These rural areas are more distant from the major urban areas and the associated pressure from urban generated housing. The population density of the Kinturk ED is 112 persons per km^2, which is comparable to the average of 133 persons per km^2 in Leinster, due largely to the population of Castlepollard.

The total application area, including the site infrastructure, covers c. 11.4 ha of land (Refer Figures 1.2 & 1.3). The landholding occurs in a roughly rectangular shape, with the current quarry occupying the northern and central areas of the site. The site is located on lands west of, and with direct access onto, the R395, which connects the N52 in Delvin c. 13.5 km to the southeast with the N55 in Edgeworthstown c. 20.5 km to the northwest. It is also located, via Castlepollard and the R394, c. 13 km north of the N4 as it by-passes north of the county town of Mullingar. Thus, the site has the benefit of being strategically located with links to the most critical transport arteries in northern and central Westmeath. The site location is highlighted on Figure 1.1 at a scale of 1:50,000.

Topography

County Westmeath is known as the Lakeland County, but its landscapes range from rolling hills and lakes to peatlands, grasslands, woodlands, eskers and wetlands. The county consists of lowland limestone terrain containing several prominent lakes, including Lough Ree on the River Shannon, which forms the southwest border of the county, and the northern hills. There are also significant cutaway peatlands in the county, particularly the swathes running along the northwest, southern and eastern borders, while there are prominent esker systems in the southwest of the county between Athlone and Clara.

The topography of northern Westmeath is that of rolling hilly landscape, typically varying from 80 to 150 m AOD, with more prominent hills reaching as high as 295 m (i.e., Hill of Mael). The site is situated near the northern margin of the Irish Midlands, where the limestone lowland terrain gives way to clastic sediments of the Cavan-Down Massif and the southern limit of the Drumlin Belt. The hills are composed of cherty limestones, which is well hardened and hence forms prominent hills, one of which is being quarried at the Castlepollard Quarry. The nearest mountains to Deerpark are the Slieve Bloom Mountains c. 65 km to the south in County Offaly.

The site occurs at a maximum natural elevation of 128 mAOD along the southern boundary and a minimum natural elevation of 88 mAOD along the northern boundary. The surrounding lands are largely agricultural, specifically pasture, with a substantial level of forestry plantation in the wider area, particularly abutting the site to the southwest. The quarry comprises disturbed ground in a large, level processing area located in the northern section of the site and a central horseshoe-shaped extraction area driven into the northern end of the limestone hill or ridge. The extraction area is bordered by copses of trees on the flanks of the hill, which has been stripped of overburden within the area proposed for extraction.

The quarry is located in an area between Lough Lene and Lough Derravaragh that is characterised by NW-SE oriented ridges and a resulting parallel drainage system.

The site position and surrounding topography is such that the site appears to straddle the catchments of two streams (see EIAR Figure 7.8). Each of the streams that drain these small catchment areas flow southwest towards the Yellow (Castlepollard) River, which rises in Collinstown and outfalls into the northern end of Lough Derravaragh. The site and immediate surrounds, the Yellow (Castlepollard) River and Lough Derravaragh are all within WFD Catchment & Hydrometric Area 26: Upper Shannon. No part of the site is hydrologically connected to Lough Lene. The nearest part of the catchment that drains to Lough Lene is 570 m to the northeast of the site under consideration here.

The existing quarry, permitted under P.A. Ref. 01/525, comprises a small-sized (i.e., c. 11.4 ha), hardrock quarry, which has been extensively worked. The asphalt plant has been removed and there are no plans for its reinstatement. The quarry area is largely dominated by bare, exposed ground with stockpiles of aggregate and an area of grassland and scrub that remains undeveloped to the southeast. The overburden has been stripped from the entire proposed extraction area.

Because the quarry has been developed by excavating into the northern flank of the hill, the latter screens all views of the workings in an arc from the northwest anti-clockwise to the east. Presently, there are only intermittent views of the workings along the R395 east of the entranceway with most views of the current quarry workings screened by the copse of trees on the flank of the hill into which the quarry has been excavated. There are limited, middle-distance views further north along the R395, which generally amount to views of the upper quarry face, against the copse of trees defining the rim of the quarry void. However, there will be no significant additional visual intrusion with continuation of quarry operations as the back quarry face progresses southwards. There are also middle-distance intermittent views from rural road L5741. These intermittent views generally amount to views of the upper quarry face.

Overburden stripped to access the underlying resource has been used to construct peripheral screening berms or stored in stockpiles for later restoration. A perimeter earthen berm has

been constructed and seeded on the boundaries of the extraction area at the undeveloped southern end of the site. The site is bounded by a copse of trees on the eastern and western boundaries and by hedgerows on the remaining boundaries, with stock fencing on the boundaries of the access road to the main site entrance.

Land Use

Castlepollard Quarry is located the Townland of Deerpark, c. 2 km southeast of Castlepollard, c. 5 km northwest of Collinstown, c. 8.5 km southeast of Multyfarnham, c. 13.5 km northwest of Delvin, c. 13.5 km southwest of Oldcastle, and c. 15.5 km southwest of Mullingar. The lands occur on the northern end of the Midlands lowland terrain. The Deerpark area is located within Landscape Character Type 1 (LCT1) Northern Hills and Lakes, which consists of prominent hills topped with chert or cherty limestone with enclosed lakes and areas of peat deposits, mostly fen. It is a rural landscape of high scenic quality containing a number of lakes with several preserved views, Lough Lene Area of High Amenity and Fore Special Heritage Area. The area is also of high nature conservation value with many NHAs and SACs. The hills of LCT1 typically limit views to near and middle distances such that the LCT has a moderate ability to absorb development.

The 2018 Corine (CORINE: Co-ORdinated INformation on the Environment) map (Refer to Figure 11.8) shows that the predominant land use within the application site was given as Land principally occupied by agriculture, with significant areas of natural vegetation (243), although by definition it is mineral extraction related to the quarrying of limestone and associated activities. Prior to the commencement of commercial quarrying in 2001, the lands had been kept in agriculture use with broadleaf copse on the flanks of the hill and a small quarry used intermittently. Ultimately, the site will be reclaimed in accordance with the approved quarry restoration scheme, and most probably undergo a change of land use to wildlife amenity.

Land-use in the wider area consists of a patchwork of agricultural fields, which are predominantly held in pasture (231), land principally occupied by agriculture, with significant areas of natural vegetation (243), and non-irrigated arable land (211). There are also significant areas designated forests, including coniferous forest (312), mixed forest (313), and transitional woodland shrub (324). Thus, there are relatively high levels of forest cover in the area, much of which is mono-type afforestation comprising scattered, rectilinear patches of coniferous forest. Mature, overgrown hedgerows are common, while there are a few planned landscapes or parkland of demesnes in the area (Tullynally, Coolure and Kinturk Demesnes). The dominant land use in the wider area of the quarry is clearly agricultural, and is largely devoid of any history of quarrying, except for some quarrying at Ankersland near Fore and at Crookedwood.

Field dimensions vary from small to medium, while hedgerows vary from over-grown to less commonly well-managed. The predominance of smaller field sizes and mature hedgerows, particularly north and east of the site, tends to create a less open rural landscape, with some enclosed road corridors with restricted views. The area is generally characterised by rolling topography, poorer drainage, vigorous hedges and many hedgerow trees. The land is mostly used for stock rearing with minor mixed tillage, with blocks of coniferous forestry and some deciduous and successional woodland.

A tributary of the Yellow River rises c. 350 m west of the site as a drainage ditch that flows in a generally southwesterly direction until it joins the mainstream of the Yellow River. The drainage ditch drains into the mainstream of the Yellow River c. 2 km southwest of the site, which ultimately drains into Lough Derravaragh.

Quarry workings have been a feature of this site since the early 1900s. The proposed development will continue to use the established quarry and associated infrastructure located in the site (Refer Figure 1.3). The development will include provision of new site infrastructure, including Water Management System, wheelwash and other ancillaries.

Access to the site will be from the existing main entrance with direct access onto the R395 Regional Road. As the proposed development will be located within the existing permitted quarry of c. 11.4 ha, there will be no further land take and it is considered that it will result in a minor change in land cover with a commensurate impact on agriculture. The total application area including the site infrastructure covers c. 11.4 ha of lands (Refer to EIAR Figures 1.2 & 1.3).

On completion of site activities, the site of the quarry will be decommissioned and reinstated in accordance with the approved quarry restoration scheme, and thus integrated back into the surrounding landscape. It is envisaged that the land use will change to a beneficial after-use, most probably as a wildlife amenity.

Drainage & Geology

The application site is situated in the Inny (Shannon) Sub-Catchment (SC_030), part of the Upper Shannon Catchment (Hydrometric Area 26F). The site is a hill sitting on the landscape and the topography falls on all sides from the hilltop. The site position and surrounding topography is such that the site appears to straddle the catchments of two streams (see EIAR Figure 7.8). Each of the streams that drain these small catchment areas flow southwest towards the Yellow (Castlepollard) River, which rises in Collinstown and outfalls into the northern end of Lough Derravaragh. The site and immediate surrounds, the Yellow (Castlepollard) River and Lough Derravaragh are all within WFD Catchment & Hydrometric Area 26: Upper Shannon. No part of the site is hydrologically connected to Lough Lene. The nearest part of the catchment that drains to Lough Lene is 570 m to the northeast of the site under consideration here.

Details with respect to the local bedrock geology and soils are provided within Section 6 – Land, Soils and Geology. Based on the GSI bedrock map of the area (McConnell et al. 2001), the application site is underlain by the Derravaragh Chert Limestone Formation, which corresponds to a Mississippian (i.e., Lower Carboniferous) unit that consists mostly of gently dipping, thinly-bedded, unfossiliferous, dark grey, chert-rich calcsilicates and wackestones with thin shales.

The landholding was mapped as being overwhelmingly underlain by Rendzinas/ Lithosols soil types (BminSW). Rendzinas are shallow soils, usually not more than 50 cm deep, derived from parent material containing over 40% carbonates. Lithosols are skeletal stony azonal soils that are predominantly shallow, well-drained soils derived from shallow stony deposits consisting of non-calcareous materials and tend to be stony mineral soils (Gardiner & Radford 1980). However, the overburden has been stripped from the northern and central sections of the site and all of the proposed extraction area in order to allow access to the underlying cherty limestone resource. Narrow strips of overburden remain along boundaries.

Overburden stripped to access the underlying resource has been used to construct an earthen perimeter screening berm. The lands in the southern section of the site, outside the limits of proposed extraction area, appear to be largely undisturbed. The site is bounded by a copse of trees on the eastern and western boundaries, by hedgerows on the remaining boundaries, and with stock fencing on the boundaries of the access road to the main site entrance.

Tourism

Westmeath is a landlocked, inland county in the north midlands—yet is only c. 65 km from the Dublin metropolitan area. Dublin is the primary economic hub and National Gateway, and the largest market in the State, and the southern and eastern half of the county are increasingly coming under its influence. The excellent, multi-modal transport infrastructure provides strong connectivity to Dublin Airport and Dublin Port, as well as to the other former gateways of Galway and Sligo in the West.

Westmeath is known as the Lakeland County, but its landscape includes a diversity of landscape types, ranging from rolling hills and lakes to peatlands, grasslands, woodlands, eskers and wetlands. The county consists of lowland limestone terrain containing several prominent lakes, including Lough Ree on the River Shannon, which forms southwest border

of the county. There are no mountains in the county although the hills in the north of the county are a conspicuous feature. There is a prominent esker landscape in southwestern Westmeath between Athlone and Clara. It is recognised that the landscape and lakes are an important sustainable tourism resource.

Westmeath has considerable heritage and cultural assets, along with a scenic natural environment and vibrant towns and villages. Attractions include the Hill of Uisneach, Belvedere House, Gardens and Park, Kilbeggan Distillery, Athlone Castle Visitor Centre, Moydrum Castle, Tullynally Castle gardens and Fore Abbey and Special Heritage Area—the latter two attraction are located close to Castlepollard. The lakes and waterways of Westmeath are also connected with a rich heritage, including the famous legend of the Children of Lir associated with Lough Derravarragh. The Royal Canal traverses the county, and is open to those who would travel this route by boat, bike or foot.

Westmeath is included in Ireland's Ancient East, an umbrella destination brand that will provide significant tourism opportunities. It is the third regional experience brand from Fáilte Ireland and includes the majority of County Westmeath, from Moate eastwards. Westmeath is also part of Ireland's fourth regional tourism brand, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, which includes Athlone and area surrounding the River Shannon and Lough Ree. Visitors are offered a slow-paced experience, immersed in the natural environment and culture of the region. Activities include walking, cycling, boat tours on the iconic River Shannon, bird-watching, fishing, and watersports.

The growing trend towards activity based or adventure tourism, which can cater to the demand for experiential holidays in a perceived 'wild' setting, also provides a significant opportunity for the county. These adventure activities include walking and cycling; game and coarse angling; kayaking & canoeing; and golf and equestrian pursuits.

Approximately 90 km of greenways have been developed in the county for the enjoyment of walkers and cyclists. The Royal Canal Greenway traverses the county via Mullingar and Old Rail Trail Greenway links Mullingar and Athlone. Both greenways interconnect in Mullingar and will form part of the Galway to Dublin, Coast to Coast Greenway and Eurovelo 2, an international-scale tourism offering, when complete in the coming years.

Deerpark is located in central north Westmeath c. 2 km southeast of Castlepollard, c. 5 km northwest of Collinstown, c. 8.5 km southeast of Multyfarnham, c. 13.5 km northwest of Delvin, c. 13.5 km southwest of Oldcastle, c. 15.5 km southwest of Mullingar, c. 17 km west of Clonmellon, c. 17 km southeast of Granard, c. 20 km east of Edgeworthstown, and c. 75 km from Dublin Airport and Port. The area benefits from the numerous amenities and attractions located within the county, as well as being within easy reach of the vibrant Capital City of Dublin. The wider area around Deerpark contains numerous historical and archaeological sites, with clusters of Protected Structures at Castlepollard, Tullynally Castle Demesne, Fore, Collinstown and Drumcree and Glananea Demesnes. The distribution of Recorded Monuments in the lowlands is largely dispersed but with distinct clusters at Fore, Lough Derravaragh and Loughcrew on Slieve na Calliagh near Oldcastle.

Heritage attractions in Westmeath include: the Hill of Uisneach, Belvedere House, Gardens and Park, Kilbeggan Distillery, Athlone Castle Visitor Centre, Moydrum Castle, Tullynally Castle gardens and Fore Abbey and Special Heritage Area. Other attractions include the

Mullingar Cathedral, Multyfarnham Friary, Dún na Sí Amenity & Heritage Park, Moate, and Mullaghmeen Forest Trails. The lakes and waterways of Westmeath have a rich heritage, particularly Lough Derravarragh, while the River Shannon and the Royal Canal offer miles of navigable waterways for the more leisurely pursuit of cruising.

The natural environment and landscapes of Westmeath contains many natural attractions, such as the northern hills around Castlepollard, the esker landscape in the southwest of the county, and the River Shannon and Lough Ree also in the southwest.

There are numerous walking and cycling trails in the county, particularly the numerous trails at Mullaghmeen Forest—an isolated area of upland forest rising in the northwest of the county, which is the largest planted beech forest in Ireland. There are numerous other trails, including: Esker Bluebell Trail, Kilbeggan; Lough Enell Walk, Carrick; Royal Canal Way between Mullingar and Kinnegad; Portlick Millennium Forest Castle; Old Rail Trail and Mullingar-Athlone Greenway; Delvin to Kilbeggan Trail; Burgess Park; Kilbeggan Greenway Walk, and more.

Golf enthusiasts visiting the area can enjoy a choice of excellent golf courses within a reasonable driving distance. These include: Ballinlough Castle Golf Club, Ballinlough, Mullingar Golf Club, Belvedere Headfort Golf Club, Kells, County Meath Golf Club, Trim, Mount Temple Golf Club, Mount Temple, Moate Golf Club, Moate, Moyvalley Golf Club, Moyvalley, and County Longford Golf Club, Longford. A 9-hole course is available at Virginia, while a pitch & put course is available nearby at Collinstown. Tennis is available at the Mullingar Tennis & Badminton Club, Mullingar, Kells Tennis Club, Kells, and Longford Tennis Club, Longford.

Horse racing is available at Kilbeggan Racecourse, while greyhound racing is available at the Mullingar Greyhound Stadium. There are equestrian activities at numerous nearby equestrian centres, such as Derravara Equine Clinic and Gallop, Crookedwood, Culleen Equestrian, Mullingar, Ladestown Riding & Trekking Stables, Ladestown, the Mullingar Equestrian Centre, Mullingar, Croughal Stables, Loughnavalley, and Catherinestown Riding Stables, Gainestown.

Activity centres are available at Boycey Sports, Castlepollard, Kidz & Co, Mullingar, Rock 'n' Bowl, Mullingar, and Lilliput Adventure Centre, Lough Ennell. A range of other activities are available at: Ambushed Paintball and Laser Tag, Gaybrook Demesne, Mullingar, Lakeland Shooting Centre, Mullingar, Mullingar Gymnastic Club, Mullingar, and Barn Door Creative Studios, Bracklyn. Pollard Karting, Kinturk Demesne, Castlepollard, the Fore Motorcycle Club, Castlepollard, and the Westmeath & District Motor Club offer activities for motor enthusiasts.

Angling is popular on the many lakes and rivers in the county, particularly for trout and pike, but also for salmon, bream, perch and tench.

There are a host of festival and events held throughout the year in the Westmeath, which act as significant visitor attractions (Refer to EIAR Section 4.3.5 for details).

There are seven areas of high amenity in County Westmeath, and these correspond to the six prominent lakes and the Hill of Uisneach. These areas are highly regarded for their amenity and recreational value and are afforded special protection under the County Development Plan. Deerpark lies within the Northern Hills & Lakes Landscape Character Area (LCA), which consists of prominent limestone hills with enclosed lakes and areas of peat deposits. The LCA

has a rural landscape of particularly high scenic quality containing a number of lakes with several preserved views. The site lies outside of the Lough Lene Area of High Amenity and is not within the Fore Special Heritage Area. The plan recognises 35 Protected Views in the county, but none are located near or incorporate the quarry or site.

Residential

The application site is located within the Townland of Deerpark in central north Westmeath c. 2 km southeast of Castlepollard, c. 5 km northwest of Collinstown, c. 8.5 km northeast of Multyfarnham, c. 13.5 km northwest of Delvin, c. 13.5 km southwest of Oldcastle, c. 15.5 km northwest of Mullingar, c. 17 km west of Clonmellon, c. 17 km southeast of Granard, c. 20 km east of Edgeworthstown, and c. 75 km from Dublin Airport and Port. The site is situated immediately adjacent to, and with direct access onto, the R395 Regional Road, which connects the town of Edgeworthstown in the northwest to Delvin in the southeast, via Castlepollard and Collinstown.

The N52 and N55 National Secondary Roads can be accessed at Delvin and Granard, respectively, and thus connect the site to the principal transport arteries in north of the county. The N4 National Primary Road bypasses just north of Mullingar, c. 15 km to the south via the R394 from Castlepollard and traverses the centre of the county and connects with Edgeworthstown in County Longford.

The site is situated at approximately 88-128 m AOD in a predominantly rural area of central north County Westmeath. The surrounding lands are largely agricultural, specifically pasture, with a substantial level of forestry plantation in the wider area. The topography of the region is characterised by a rolling, hilly landform with prominent hills topped with chert or cherty limestone with enclosed lakes and areas of peat deposits. Outside of the immediate environs of the towns, urban areas, and rural villages of Collinstown, Multifarnham, Crossakiel, and Coole, the settlement pattern in the area can be described as low-intensity rural settlement. Residential property in the area typically comprises a significant number of detached single residences occurring as a more diffuse ribbon development along the road network, while individual farmsteads generally occur at the end of lanes off the public roads. Each house fronts onto the road with its own separate entranceway, typical of ribbon development.

While residential development in the rural area consists of individual, one-off residences, there are distinct clusters of residences that do not qualify as villages, but might constitute hamlets, craigs or small settlements, such as at Taghmon, Drumcree, Fore. The nearest large residential settlement to the site is the town of Castlepollard c. 2 km to the northwest. The roads in the wider area (i.e., < 5 km), apart from the R395 Regional Road, are generally of a local character and typical of a rural location.

There are a number of residences within 1 km of the application site boundary, with 10 residences within 250 m, 16 within 500 m, and 42 within 1 km of the site planning application boundary (Refer Figure 4.1). There are several clusters of residential dwellings located near the site. A cluster of 6 residences are located within 250 m on the east side of the R395 across from the site entrance and north along the L5743 (i.e., nos. 5-10), while another cluster of 4 residences are located within 250 m west of the site, on the west side of an intervening minor topographic ridge that obscures any views of the site (i.e., nos. 1-4).

There are no occupied residences within the application site or landholding, and the closest is located c. 270 m northeast of the quarry extraction area. There has been a long historical association with quarrying at this location and consideration has been given to screening of the development, phasing and direction of working with respect to receptors so as to reduce visual impact, while impacts due to noise and dust are substantially attenuated.

11.4.1.2 Landscape & Landscape Character Assessment

Ireland ratified the European Landscape Convention in 2002 and agreed to implement national measures to promote landscape planning, protection and management. The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended requires every planning authority to include objectives in their Development Plan for the preservation of the character of the landscape insofar as proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest.

It is the aim of the Westmeath County Development Plan to improve the understanding of the county's landscape and lakelands, and enhance the overall characteristics, qualities and diversity of landscape character, its sense of place and local distinctiveness in recognition of the amenity potential of the county (Refer to Chapter 13 of CDP 2021-2027).

In terms of the landscapes within the County, the interplay between solid geology, glacial processes, soil formation, hydrology and ecology has formed the basic materials upon which human activities have impacted. This is an ongoing inter-relationship with topography, access to water and soil conditions influencing the spatial distribution and types of human activities practiced within the county over the past several millennia. Human habitation is the most recent and profound landscape influence, whereby patterns of land ownership, settlement development, agricultural and ritual activities have all been modified in response to local variations of biotic and abiotic elements and constraints.

Following publication of Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities in respect of landscape assessment in 2000, County Councils adopted a new method of landscape assessment that allowed for a more proactive approach with the county divided into a number of landscape character areas. The Landscape Character Areas are single unique areas, which are geographical areas of a particular landscape type or types.

A Landscape Character Assessment of the county was undertaken which provides an understanding of the value and sensitivity of the county's landscapes and its future management needs. The key objectives of the Assessment were to:

(1) Improve the understanding of the landscape in the county in terms of its inherent and unique character and to identify the key elements that should be preserved, conserved or enhanced;

(2) Devise policies and objectives as guidance to planners and other parties to ensure that change is complimentary to landscape character. Sensitivity and capacity should be given due consideration in all aspects of decision-making;

(3) Assist in the achievement of sustainable development by promoting a unified approach to landscape planning which links policies and recommendations for landscape character to planning policies.

Landscape Character Assessment is a process that objectively describes, maps and classifies the landscape character of the entire county. Defining landscape character enables an understanding to be formed of the inherent value and importance of individual landscape elements and the processes that may alter landscape character in the future. The cultural and ecological aspects of the landscape cannot be separated from the physical and visual characteristics, such that all these elements are considered.

The Assessment focuses on characterisation of the landscape based on: (1) physical elements - landform, land cover, geology, vegetation cover, hydrology and ecology; (2) visual characteristics - type and extent of views, enclosure and patterns formed by physical elements; and (3) less tangible aspects such as historical and cultural associations, archaeology, remoteness, tranquility, aesthetic quality and other understandings of the landscape. The process identifies specific areas that are characterised by sensitive landscapes. Sensitive areas include upland areas, visually open and expansive areas and areas in the vicinity of natural heritage or built heritage assets or scenic views. It is a mechanism to identify those features that give specific areas their 'sense of place' and also provides policy recommendations relating to each landscape type. This will inform decision making in relation to the protection of the environment, natural resources and heritage and will be used to guide development.

The LCA defined 11 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), of which the Northern Hills and Lakes LCA contains the application site, landholding and town of Castlepollard.

The Landscape Character Assessment established 11 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) that are relatively homogeneous in character and share similar combinations of geology, topography, land cover and historical land use (Refer to Figure 11.3).

Landscape Character Area LCA1: Northern Hills and Lakes

This Landscape Character Area consists of prominent hills topped with chert or cherty limestone with enclosed lakes and areas of peat deposits, mostly fen. The LCA has a rural landscape of particularly high scenic quality containing a number of lakes with several preserved views, Lough Lene Area of High Amenity and Fore Special Heritage Area.

The area is also of high nature conservation value with many NHAs and SACs and there is an extensive beech plantation at Mullaghmeen. Dispersed glacial deposits occur and there are a number of quarries operating in the area.

Settlements within this landscape area include Finnea, Castlepollard, Collinstown and Drumcree. The historic settlement of Fore is of high cultural significance due to its monastic origins including many features of built and cultural interest around the site.

As the quarry was developed on the northern flank of a hill, it is only visible from vantages to the north and northeast, but all of these views are limited to near and middle distance views, mostly of the quarry upper back face. The quarry is located in a relatively shallow narrow valley, such that distant views of the site are screened by intervening vegetation and topography.

Policies in respect of Landscape Character and Lake Management that are relevant to the proposed development are given below. It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 13.2 Protect the distinctiveness, value and sensitivity of County Westmeath's landscapes and lakelands by recognising their capacity to sustainably integrate development.

CPO 13.4 Conserve and enhance the high nature conservation value of the Landscape Character Areas in order to create/protect ecologically resilient and varied landscapes.

CPO 13.6 Require that development is sensitively designed, so as to minimise its visual impact on the landscape, nature conservation, archaeology and groundwater quality.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 13.8 Protect the landscapes and natural environments of the County by ensuring that any new developments do not detrimentally impact on the character, integrity, distinctiveness or scenic value of their area. Any development which could unduly impact upon such landscapes will not be permitted.

CPO 13.9 Ensure the preservation of the uniqueness of a landscape character type by having regard to the character, value and sensitivity of a landscape in new development proposals.

CPO 13.10 Ensure development reflects and, where possible, reinforces the distinctiveness and sense of place of the landscape character types, including the retention of important features or characteristics, taking into account the various elements which contribute to their distinctiveness.

CPO 13.12 Require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for proposed developments with the potential to impact on significant landscape features within the County.

CPO 13.17 Minimise impact on the ecological, archaeological, biodiversity and visual amenity surrounding quarry sites and quarrying of sensitive sites within the Landscape Character Areas including the lake valley landscape, eskers and canal corridor.

11.4.1.3 Areas of Significance or Special Importance

11.4.1.3.1 Areas of High Amenity (High Landscape Value)

Much of Westmeath's landscape, particularly its lake landscape is highly regarded for its amenity and recreational value and should be protected. Westmeath is uniquely positioned given its majestic lakes, the River Shannon and the Royal Canal. Internationally renowned as the 'Lake County' the lakes of Westmeath are of local, national and international status and are a significant asset and resource to the county. In recognition of this, the Council have specifically designated the following lakes and the Hill of Uisneach as Areas of High Amenity (HAA):

- Lough Ree High Amenity Area;
- Lough Lene High Amenity Area;
- Lough Owel High Amenity Area;
- Lough Ennell High Amenity Area;
- Lough Derravaragh High Amenity Area; and
- Lough Sheelin High Amenity Area.

The high amenity areas are mapped in Map 42 in Volume 2 of the CDP (Refer Figure 11.4). The five most important lakes in Westmeath are Lough Ennell, Lough Owel, Lough Derravaragh, Lough Lene and Lough Ree. All of the identified lakes are within designated High Amenity Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Natural Heritage Areas.

The following objective of the Council with respect to High Amenity Areas is relevant:

CPO13.19 Protect High Amenity Areas from inappropriate development and reinforce their character, distinctiveness and sense of place.

Only the Lough Lene and Lough Sheelin HAAs are located within the Landscape Character Area LCA1, but as Lough Sheelin is located c. 13.5 km north of the site, it is not considered further. Lough Derravaragh is located outside of LCA1 but is only c. 4 km west of the site, and may receive waters from the site via a proposed discharge into a tributary of the Yellow River.

Lough Lene is located in the highly scenic, undulating, hilly landscape in the north of the county, and is designated as a Special Area of Conservation. Its associations with the nearby historic monastic settlement of Fore and location on an existing tourist trail (i.e., the Táin Trail) require its future development to be considered sensitively. Lough Lene is also an important public water supply source for the county.

The lake is particularly known for its clear waters. Recreation in the form of angling is well renowned on Lough Lene. There is a bathing area and combined boat access slip way at 'The Cut' on the eastern shore of the lake. Lough Lene is considered to be located in a sensitive tourist landscape as it lies within the Fore Special Heritage Area.

Lough Derravaragh provides one of the enduring images of County Westmeath. It has associations with the Legend of Lír, where four children were banished as swans for 300 years to Derravaragh. The lake is located on the identified Táin Trail (tourist driving/cycling route) and along the proposed northern sector of the Westmeath Way (walking route) and is scenically important. Leisure activities associated with the lake include fishing, canoeing and water sports, while more passive recreational areas are important as more reclusive retreats for writers, artists and walkers. The landscape around the lake has not been subject to undue development pressures and in general retains its rural character.

Importantly however, none of the policy objectives in the CDP with respect to the High Amenity Areas of Lough Lene and Lough Derravaragh is considered to have a bearing on the proposed development.

11.4.1.3.2 Views & Prospects

The Council undertook a review of Protected Views within the County. There are 35 Protected Views designated in the county, which are categorised according to their significance, at a regional, county and local level (Refer Appendix 5 of CDP 2021-2027). It is Council policy to sustain the established character of existing views and protect against development that would adversely impact upon such views. A number of different and distinctive types of scenic routes categorised as both road-based and off-road have been identified as follows:

- Lough Ree Driving Route;
- Mullingar Cycling Hub;
- The Táin Trail;
- Old Rail Trail/ Greenway;
- Royal Canal Way;
- Fore Walking Routes; and
- Westmeath Way.

Planning policy objectives will ensure the future protection of these views and amenity designations for existing lakes, designated scenic routes (both road and off-road routes) and the heritage areas of the Hill of Uisneach and Fore Special Heritage Area.

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO13.81 Protect and sustain the established appearance and character of views listed in Appendix 5 of this plan that contribute to the distinctive quality of the landscape from inappropriate development.

The standoff distance from any of the identified protected views attenuates any visual impact, while intervening topography and vegetation, particularly forests, obscure all possible views such that the development will not have any significant visual impact on the views and prospects in the county.

11.4.1.3.3 Designated Sites

The proposed development site is not located within a European Site, including Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), or any other designated ecological site (i.e., NHA, pNHA, RAMSAR, etc.).

Most of these Natura 2000 sites are too distant (> 5 km) from the site and/or occur either upstream of in different subcatchments, such that there is no reasonable pathway by which the quarry at Deerpark could impact their habitats or species.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) was carried out with respect to the proposed development, and a copy of this report is included (Refer to Appendix 8). There are eight SACs and six SPA within 15 km, and these are:

SACs:

Lough Lene SAC (Site Code 002121); Lough Bane and Lough Glass SAC (Site Code 002120); River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (Site Code 002299); Lough Owel SAC (Site Code: 000688); White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC (Site Code: 001810); Garriskil Bog SAC (000679); Derragh Bog SAC (Site Code: 002201); and Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs SAC (Site Code: 002340).

SPAs:

Lough Derravaragh SPA (Site Code: 004043); Garriskil Bog SPA (Site Code 004102); Lough Owel SPA (Site Code: 004047); Lough Iron SPA (Site Code 004046); Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA (Site Code: 004061); and Lough Sheelin SPA (004065).

The nearest European sites to the Proposed Development are associated with Lough Lene and include the Lough Lene SAC (Site Code 002121), which is located just over 1.18 km to the east. However, this site is located in a different hydrological catchment.

The proposed development is located within the hydrological catchment of two unnamed streams and the Castlepollard stream, approximately 320 m, 353 m and 391 m to the north, south and east of the streams, respectively, and in the rural environment of Deerpark, Castlepollard.

Downstream, the waters of the three streams enter the Yellow River, which in turns flows west into Lough Derravaragh with its European site, the Lough Derravaragh SPA (Site Code 004043), which is located approximately 4 km to the west of the Proposed Development and c. 7 river km downstream of the quarry discharge point.

Only Lough Derravaragh lies downstream of the quarry site at Deerpark, and thus could be potentially impacted by the proposed development. The findings of the assessment were that the potential for significant adverse effects on the Lough Derravarragh SPA (004043) is uncertain in the absence of control on potential pollution of discharge water during operation. The proposed development will require a Water Management Plan to avoid potential impacts on the receiving environment of the Yellow River and Lough Derravaragh downstream. In the absence of mitigation measures for the control of surface water discharge, it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site

and as such Stage 2 AA is required. A copy of the Stage 2 Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is included in Appendix 9.

This NIS has reviewed the predicted impacts arising from the Proposed Development and found that with the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures, specifically with regard to surface water, significant effects on the integrity of the Lough Derravaragh SPA can be ruled out.

It is the conclusion of this NIS, on the basis of the best scientific knowledge available, and subject to the implementation of the proposed mitigation measures, that the possibility of any adverse effects on the integrity of the European Sites considered in this NIS, or on the integrity of any other European Site (having regard to their conservation objectives), arising from the proposed development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, can be excluded beyond a reasonable scientific doubt.

The designated natural heritage sites (NHA) within 15 km of the Deerpark site are Lough Derravaragh NHA (Site Code 000684) c. 4 km to the west; Lough Garr NHA (Site Code 001812); Wooddown Bog NHA (Site Code 000694); and Lough Kinale And Derragh Lough NHA (Site Code 000985). The nearest pNHA is the Lough Glore pNHA (Site Code 000686) c. 3 km to the northeast, followed by Aghalasty Fen pHNA (Site Code 000672) c. 3.75 km to the east. Other pNHA's within 15 km of the site are: White Lough, Ben Loughs And Lough Doo pNHA (Site Code 001810); Lough Naneagh pNHA (Site Code 001814); Hill Of Mael And The Rock Of Curry pNHA (Site Code 000681); Lough Bane pNHA (Site Code 001721); Ballynafid Lake And Fen pNHA (site Code 000673); Scragh Bog pNHA (Site Code 000692); Lough Sheever Fen/Slevin's Lough Complex pNHA (Site Code 000690); Lough Owel pNHA (Site Code 000688); Garriskil Bog pNHA (Site Code 000679); Lough Iron pNHA (Site Code 000687); Lough Sheelin pNHA (Site Code 000987); and Lough Shesk pNHA (Site Code 000556). As noted above, the nearest NHA or pNHA site is a segment of the Lough Glore NHA at c. 3 km.

An analysis of the proposed Natural Heritage Areas and designated Natural Heritage Areas in terms of their role in supporting the species using Natura 2000 sites was undertaken (Refer to EIAR Appendix Section 9.3.4.4). These supporting roles mainly relate to mobile fauna, such as mammals and birds, that may use pNHAs and NHAs as "stepping stones" between Natura 2000 sites.

Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and the Habitats Regulations 2011 place a high degree of importance on such non-Natura 2000 areas as features that connect the Natura 2000 network. Features such as ponds, woodlands and important hedgerows were taken into account during the AA process.

There are no Natural Heritage Areas or proposed Natural Heritage Areas that will be affected by the proposed Project.

The proposed development was the subject of an assessment that involved the investigation of the cultural heritage including the archaeological, structural and historical background of both the application area and the surrounding area (i.e., 1 km radius) using a wide range of existing information as well as a field assessment (Refer to EIAR Section 12).

No sites of archaeological importance, National Monuments, or protected structures listed in the Westmeath Development Plan 2021-2027 are located within the proposed development area.

Examination of the Record of Monuments and Places for Co. Westmeath indicated that there are no Recorded Monuments located within the application area (see EIAR Figure 12.1 and Appendix 12.1). There are several Recorded Monuments in the study area outside the application area.

The closest Recorded Monument to the application externally is WM007-035----a Hilltop enclosure in Ballany townland. This monument is located 0.58 km to the south-east of the application area and is considered too far distant to be directly or indirectly impacted by the proposal.

The remaining Recorded Monuments in the study area located at further distances from the application area and are considered to be too far distant to be directly or indirectly impacted by the proposal.

Examination of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) indicated that there are no SMR sites in the application area. There is one SMR in the study area outside the application area. WM007-134---- is an earthwork enclosure in Deerpark townland. This monument is located 0.6 km to the south-east of the application area and is considered too far distant to be directly or indirectly impacted by the proposal.

11.4.1.4 Characteristics of the Development

The proposed development will consist of the continued use and operation of the existing quarry (permitted under P.A. Ref. 01/525), including deepening of the quarry, along with minor amendments to the permitted quarry layout comprising an extraction area of c. 4 ha within an overall application area of c. 11.4 ha. The development will include provision of new site infrastructure including water management system, wheelwash and other ancillaries.

The asphalt plant has been removed and there are no plans for its reinstatement.

The predominant land use within the application site is by definition that of quarrying activities related to the extraction of rock. The area has an established history of quarry working and ancillary activities, and these activities have co-existed with other predominantly agricultural-based land uses. On completion of site operations, the site of the quarry will be decommissioned and reinstated in accordance with the approved quarry restoration scheme, and thus integrated back into the surrounding landscape. It is envisaged that the land use will change to a beneficial after-use, most probably as a wildlife amenity.

The overburden has already been stripped by mechanical excavation, in order to access the underlying rock, and was used to construct peripheral screening berms or embankments or stored for later re-use in landscaping and restoration.

The working method at the quarry utilises explosive techniques. The quarry uses a “drill and blast” method to break the quarry rock face, and the extracted rock is processed on the floor of the quarry using mobile crushing and screening equipment to produce saleable aggregates.

Because the quarry has been developed by excavating into the northern flank of the hill, the latter screens all views of the workings in an arc from the northwest anti-clockwise to the east. Presently, there are only intermittent views of the workings along the R395 east of the entranceway with most views of the current quarry workings screened by the copse of trees on the flank of the hill into which the quarry has been excavated. Intervening hedgerows reduces the viewshed of the quarry site from the north, such that there are only limited, middle-distance views further north along the R395. These generally amount to views of the upper quarry face, against the copse of trees defining the rim of the quarry void. However, there will be no significant additional visual intrusion with continuation of quarry operations as the back quarry face progresses southwards. There are also middle-distance intermittent views from rural road L5741. These intermittent views generally amount to views of the upper quarry face. (Refer to Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2 and Plate 11.1 to Plate 11.10).

The site has a long history of quarrying, and these activities have co-existed with other land uses in the area, particularly medium intensity agriculture. Consideration has been given to screening of the development, phasing and direction of working and restoration of the upper quarry face with respect to receptors so as to reduce the visual impact, while impacts due to noise and dust are substantially attenuated. Continuance of the quarry operations has the benefit of enabling an appropriate final restoration of the quarry, which will allow full reinstatement of the land to beneficial after-use as a wildlife amenity.

11.4.2 VISUAL BASELINE CONDITIONS

As detailed above the desktop study was used to determine the nature of the visual amenity of the area along with the approximate visibility of the development, which is determined through topographic analysis of map data. Potential receptors of visual effects, including residents and visitors through the area were also identified. The desk study provided the basis for subsequent field surveys and was used to delineate the likely zone of visual influence, identify the principal viewpoints and highlight sensitive visual receptors.

For the purpose of this assessment refer to Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2, which highlight the study area delineated as the likely zone of visual influence, principal viewpoints and sensitive visual receptors identified.

Site visits were undertaken on 7th April 2021 and 31st May 2021. Principal viewpoints were mapped, and these views illustrated by photographs with annotations to describe any important characteristics, and the changes that may arise as a result of the development (Refer to Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2 and and Plate 11.1 to Plate 11.10).

11.4.3 SENSITIVE RECEPTORS

Landscape Receptors

The landscape receptors are the components of the landscape that could potentially be affected by the proposed development, and these are:

- Northern Hills and Lakes (LCA1);

- Lough Lene High Amenity Area (HAA);
- Fore Special Heritage Area; and
- Individual landscape elements affected such as:
    - Minor scrub vegetation along the periphery of the area of overburden stripping in the southern area of the proposed extraction area, which will be removed to access the underlying rock resource.
    - the top of the southern flank, of the hill will be reduced to c. 110 m AOD, as the extraction area pushes progressively further south into the hill in which the quarry is being excavated.

It is proposed that the copse of trees that cover the east flank of the hill and obscure the extraction area are preserved so as to visually screen the workings from vantages particularly to the southeast along the R395.

Visual Receptors

The receptors with views of the site consist of road users of the R395 regional road and two local roads (e.g., L5741, L5743), as well as local residents. These two types of receptors experience quite different views in terms the significance of the visual impact, which depends upon the sensitivity of the receptor and the nature, magnitude and duration of the effect.

There are a number of residences within 1 km of the application site boundary, with 10 residences within 250 m, 16 within 500 m, and 42 within 1 km of the site planning application boundary (Refer Figure 4.1). There are several clusters of residential dwellings located near the site. A cluster of 6 residences are located within 250 m on the east side of the R395 across from the site entrance and north along the L5743 (i.e., nos. 5-10), while another cluster of 4 residences are located within 250 m west of the site, on the west side of an intervening minor topographic ridge that obscures any views of the site (i.e., nos. 1-4).

There are no occupied residences within the application site or landholding, and the closest is located c. 270 m northeast of the quarry extraction area.

There are partially open views of the quarry workings from the R395, particularly at the site entrance, although these tend to be transient momentary views to passing traffic, and further north along the R395.

11.5 ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

The following Impact Assessment matrix provides an indication of the significance of potential effects arising during the life cycle of the development not accounting for any mitigation measures.

Table 11.1 Landscape - Impact Matrix

'Do Nothing' Impacts	●		
Factors	**Construction**	**Operation**	Decommissioning
Direct Impacts	●	●	X
Indirect Impacts	X	X	X
Cumulative Impacts	X	X	X
Residual Impacts	X	X	●
`Worst Case' Impacts	X	●	X

None/imperceptible: X; Slight: ●; Moderate: ●; Significant/Very significant: ●.

Refer to Appendix 3 for definition of Significance

The proposed development is situated within the Northern Hills and Lakes Character AREA (i.e., LCA1), which probably has a medium landscape sensitivity. Thus, LCA1 has a moderate capacity to absorb development, which can have a disproportionate visual impact. This arises from the limited capacity of this rural landscape to physically or visually absorb development, and the sensitivity of the adjoining areas of high amenity. There are no scenic views sufficiently near the site (< 2.5 km) to suffer any adverse visual impact due to the development. The quarry site is also not included in any area with an ecological designation (SAC, SPA, NHA or pNHA). Furthermore, the hilly landform, substantial forested lands, and intervening hedgerows with mature trees, provide for partly enclosed road corridors and views that are predominantly limited to the near and middle-distances.

Sensitive development and conservation of the landscape resource is essential to the underpinning of the rural economy and quality of life of the area. However, it is recognised that areas where there is existing development probably have a much higher potential to absorb new development. Thus, the continuance of an existing quarry is more readily absorbed than activation of a new quarry in a greenfield site.

11.5.1 'DO NOTHING' IMPACTS

The existing site permitted under P.A. Ref. 01/525 comprises comprises an extraction area of c. 4 ha within an overall application area of c. 11.4 ha that has been extensively worked. Under the 'Do Nothing' scenario, all quarrying and ancillary activities would cease. The site would be restored as per the requirements of the existing planning permission (P.A. Ref. 01/525). However, the substantial aggregate resource would remain in situ, necessitating that another site, possibly a greenfield site, would have to be worked to make-up the shortfall in aggregate supply.

11.5.2 DIRECT IMPACTS

Landscape Impacts

The principal attributes (and impacts) to be assessed include *inter alia* the following:

- Change of landform with respect to the top of the southern flank, which will be reduced to c. 110 m AOD, as the extraction area pushes progressively further south into the hill in which the quarry is being excavated;
- Change of land use from scrubland to quarrying/extraction to wildlife amenity with restoration of the land and appropriate screening and planting;
- As the proposed extraction area has already been stripped of overburden, the loss of ecological habitat in the form of grassland will eventually be reversed and improved upon by the establishment of the wildlife amenity;
- As the proposed extraction area has already stripped of overburden, no loss of any cultural heritage features due to the quarry activity is expected;
- Views of perimeter earthen berm at the southeastern boundary of property from the R395 travelling towards Castlepollard;
- Middle and distance views, mostly of the quarry upper back face along the R395, L5743 and L5741; and
- Views of infrastructure and plant, mostly from site entrance.

The results of the impact assessment are presented in Table 11.2 below.

11.5.2.1 Visual Impacts

The results of the visual field survey have shown that due to intervening topography, screening, and vegetation, views towards the quarry site are generally limited to restricted middle distance views from elevated ground and residences to the northeast (Refer to Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2 and Plate 11.1 to Plate 11.10). These intermittent views generally amount to views of the upper quarry face.

The existing visual impact with respect to the quarry from these vantages is considered to be moderate, medium to long term, negative as extraction extends to southeast.

However, there will be no significant additional visual intrusion with continuation of quarry operations as the back quarry face progresses southwards.

Consideration has been given to screening of the development, phasing and direction of working and restoration of the upper quarry face with respect to receptors so as to reduce the visual impact. Plans and sections of the design and associated restoration are shown on Figure 3.1 to 3.3. The visual impact following restoration is considered to be significant, long term, positive as site is progressively restored to beneficial after-use.

11.5.2.2 Indirect Impacts

There are no indirect impacts associated with the proposed development and the surrounding areas.

11.5.2.3 Cumulative Impacts

The only other land use activities visible in the surrounding rural area are existing farming operations and residential use by numerous single dwelling houses, while residential and commercial uses both exist in the town of Castlepollard.

There are no other significant commercial, industrial or extractive developments or projects within c. 2 km of the site at Deerpark, although the Innova Business Park is located in Castlepollard, the Decotek automotive manufacturing facility located in Collinstown, and minor quarrying activities located at Ankersland, near Fore.

There will be no significant in combination landscape impacts resulting from this project, and other local existing developments, quarries, projects and plans.

11.5.2.4 Transboundary Impacts

The EIA Directive 2014-52-EU invokes the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, 1991, and applies its definition of transboundary impacts (Refer Appendix 8.1). Given the location (c. 50 km from the border with N. Ireland), nature, size and scale of the proposed development, it is expected that the impacts of the development would have no significant transboundary effects on landscape, given the local or at most regional nature of landscapes.

11.5.2.5 Residual Impacts

As a result of the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures incorporated in the design, no significant, adverse residual impacts are predicted in terms of Landscape during the operational phase.

It is considered that following full restoration and closure of the site that there will also be no significant, long-term, adverse impacts in terms of Landscape. The restored quarry will provide a more sustainable, long-term environment than is currently the case, but with a change in land-use from the original agricultural use to mineral extraction to ultimately a future beneficial use as a wildlife amenity.

11.5.2.6 'Worst Case' Impacts

The worst case impact would be significant in the medium term, if the quarry was to be developed in an uncontrolled manner with no consideration given to screening of the development, phasing and direction of working and restoration of the upper quarry face with respect to receptors so as to reduce the visual impact.The receptors with views of the site consist of road users of the R395 regional road and two local roads (e.g., L5741, L5743), as well as local residents.

Consideration has been given to screening of the development, phasing and direction of working and restoration of the upper quarry face with respect to receptors so as to reduce the visual impact. Plans and sections of the design and associated restoration are shown on Figure 3.1 to 3.3. The visual impact following restoration is considered to be significant, long term, positive as site is progressively restored to beneficial after-use.

Table 11.2 Landscape Impact Assessment Matrix

Topic area	Description of impact	Magnitude[1]	Sensitivity[1]	Level of importance[1]					Quality[2]			Duration[2]					Significance[2]	Mitigation
				I	N	R	C	L	Positive	Neutral	Negative	ST	MT	LT	P	T		
Landform	Change of landform with respect to the top of the southern flank which will be reduced to c. 110 m AOD, as the extraction area pushes progressively further south into the hill in which the quarry is being excavated	L	L														Slight to Moderate	Area will be restored to secure wildlife amenity use. – Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south. – Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3. – The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges. – Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face. – Existing Copse planting on Eastern & Western flanks to pe preserved.
Land use	Change of land use from scrubland to quarrying/extraction to wildlife amenity with restoration of the land and appropriate screening and planting	L	L														Slight	
Loss of ecological habitat	As the proposed extraction area has already been stripped of overburden, the loss of ecological habitat in the form of grassland will eventually be reversed and improved upon by the establishment of the wildlife amenity	L	L														Slight	
Loss of cultural heritage	As the proposed extraction area has already stripped of overburden, no loss of any cultural heritage features due to the quarry activity is expected	N	N														Imperceptible	As the proposed development will have no direct or indirect impact on the archaeological, architectural or cultural heritage resource, it is considered mitigation measures are not required.
Views of screening berms	Views of perimeter earthen berm at southeastern boundary of property from the R395 travelling towards Castlepollard	L	L														Slight	– The screening berms and existing mature planting will be maintained. – Plant existing screening mounds with native tress and shrub species as necessary.
Views of quarry workings	Middle and distance views, mostly of the quarry upper back face along the R395, L5743 and L5741	ML	ML														Moderate	Mitigation Measures as per Landform & Land use above
Views of infrastructure and plant	Views of Plant and Machinery including proposed from outside views.	L	L														Slight	All Plant and Machinery to be sited on existing quarry floor being screened by intervening screening berms and perimeter landscaping

Key

Level of importance I = International; N = National; R = Regional; C = County; L = Local

Magnitude and sensitivity N = Negligible; VL = Very Low; L = Low; ML = Medium–Low; M = Medium; MH = Medium–High; H = High; VH = Very High

Notes

1 Criteria used based on The Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, (2005) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - 2nd Ed.

2 The terminology used based on Table 3.3 EPA (2017) Guidelines on the Information to be contained in an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Draft, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Wexford.

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Table 11.3 Predicted Visual Impacts with Mitigation

NATURE OF IMPACT				Level of importance[1]					Quality[2]			Duration[2]					Magnitude[1]	Receptor Sensitivity[1]	Significance[2]	Mitigation
Viewpoint	Plate	Location	Description	I	N	R	C	L	Positive	Neutral	Negative	ST	MT	LT	P	T				
1	11.1	View from L5739 640m to south of quarry	Intervening topography, hedgerows and western copse screens quarry workings from this vantage.														VL	L	Slight	- Plant existing screening mounds with native tress and shrub species as necessary. - Favourable direction of working to ensure working face is screened from outside views as quarry is developed southwards
2	11.2	View from L5739 c. 270m west of quarry	Quarry workings not open to view. Flank of hill screen quarry workings from this vantage														N	N	Imperceptible	None considered necessary from this vantage.
3	11.3	View from Junction of L5743 with R395 130m to north	Upper quarry face open to view. Partially screened by intervening trees and buildings														ML	ML	Moderate	– Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south. – Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3. – The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges. – Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face.
4	11.4	View from Landowners Residence c. 220m Northeast	Upper quarry face open to partial view. Eastern flank of hill and copse largely screens quarry workings from this vantage														ML	ML	Moderate	– Favourable direction of working to ensure working face is screened from outside views as quarry is developed southwards – Eastern Flank of Hill & Copse to pe preserved.
5	11.5	View from Regional Road R395 c. 500m Southeast	Limited partial views of soil stripping along southern boundary. Favourable direction of working ensures working face not open to view. Intervening copse woodland effectively screens views from this vantage.														VL	VL	Not significant	– Plant existing screening mounds with native tress and shrub species as necessary. – Favourable direction of working to ensure working face is screened from outside views as quarry is developed southwards – Eastern Flank of Hill & Copse to pe preserved.
6	11-6	Distant view from minor unnamed County Road c. 1.9 km SE	Soil stripping along southern boundary open to view. Favourable direction of working ensures working face not open to view.														VL	L	Slight	
7	11.7	View from L5741 c. 690m north of quarry	Upper quarry face open to partial view. Eastern flank of hill and copse largely screens quarry workings from this vantage.														ML	ML	Moderate	– Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south. – Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3. – The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges. – Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face. – Existing Copse planting on Eastern & Western flanks to pe preserved.
8	11.8	View from L5741 c. 750m north of quarry	Upper quarry face open to view.														ML	ML	Moderate	
9	11.9	View from L5741 c. 890m north of quarry	Upper quarry face open to view.														ML	ML	Moderate	
10	11.10	View from L5741 c. 1.1 km north of quarry	Upper quarry face open to view.														ML	ML	Moderate	

Key

Level of importance I = International; N = National; R = Regional; C = County; L = Local

Magnitude and sensitivity N = Negligible; VL = Very Low; L = Low; ML = Medium–Low; M = Medium; MH = Medium–High; H = High; VH = Very High

Notes

1 Criteria used based on The Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, (2005) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - 2nd Ed.

2 The terminology used based on Table 3.3 EPA (2017) Guidelines on the Information to be contained in an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Draft, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Wexford.

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11.6 MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation measures include avoidance, reduction, compensation and remedy of potential impacts. The primary means of mitigation involves an efficient design and layout for the quarry that optimises use of existing infrastructure, screening using hedgerows and trees, topography and the full restoration of the quarry site, once operations at the site cease.

Cross sections through the site illustrate the effectiveness of working the quarry top-down in successive benches, with progressive restoration of the upper back western face to further reduce the visual impact of the development on the surroundings (Refer to Figures 3.1 to 3.3). The proposed development will enable the operator to fully complete the restoration of both the existing quarry and the proposed development to beneficial after-use. Plans and sections of the design and associated restoration are shown on Figure 3.1 to 3.3.

All crushing and processing will be carried out on the quarry floor being screened by the quarry face and perimeter screening berms. The working scheme has been phased with consideration given to implementation of landscaping proposals and restoration of worked out areas (in particular the upper quarry face) to further reduce the visual impact of the development on the surroundings.

The main aim of the landscaping & restoration plan is to minimise the impact of quarrying on the existing landscape of the area both now and into the future. A restoration and landscaping plan has been prepared as part of the application (Refer to Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Site restoration allows vegetation to become established during the course of the development, thereby reducing the overall impact of the development (i.e., visual impact, dust impact, flora and fauna impact, etc.). It also has the added benefit to the operator of spreading out the cost of restoration over the life of the development.

A well-coordinated restoration process (in consultation with the GSI, Refer to EIAR Section 6.6.2) will ensure that representative areas of quarry faces are left unvegetated. Parts of the upper benches will also be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges. Vegetation and natural colonisation on these benches will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the natural harshness of the exposed rock face.

Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by Figures 3.2 to 3.3. The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges. Vegetation and natural colonisation on these faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the natural harshness of the exposed rock face. This will occur in a progressive manner as quarrying advances.

A further 2 years will be required to implement and complete final restoration of the site to a secure wildlife amenity use. The proposed development will also enable the operator to fully complete the restoration of both the proposed and existing quarry to beneficial after-use.

Redundant structures, plant equipment and stockpiles will be removed from site on cessation of quarry activity. The former plant areas will be restored using topsoil/overburden and planted with a mixture of native trees and shrubs.

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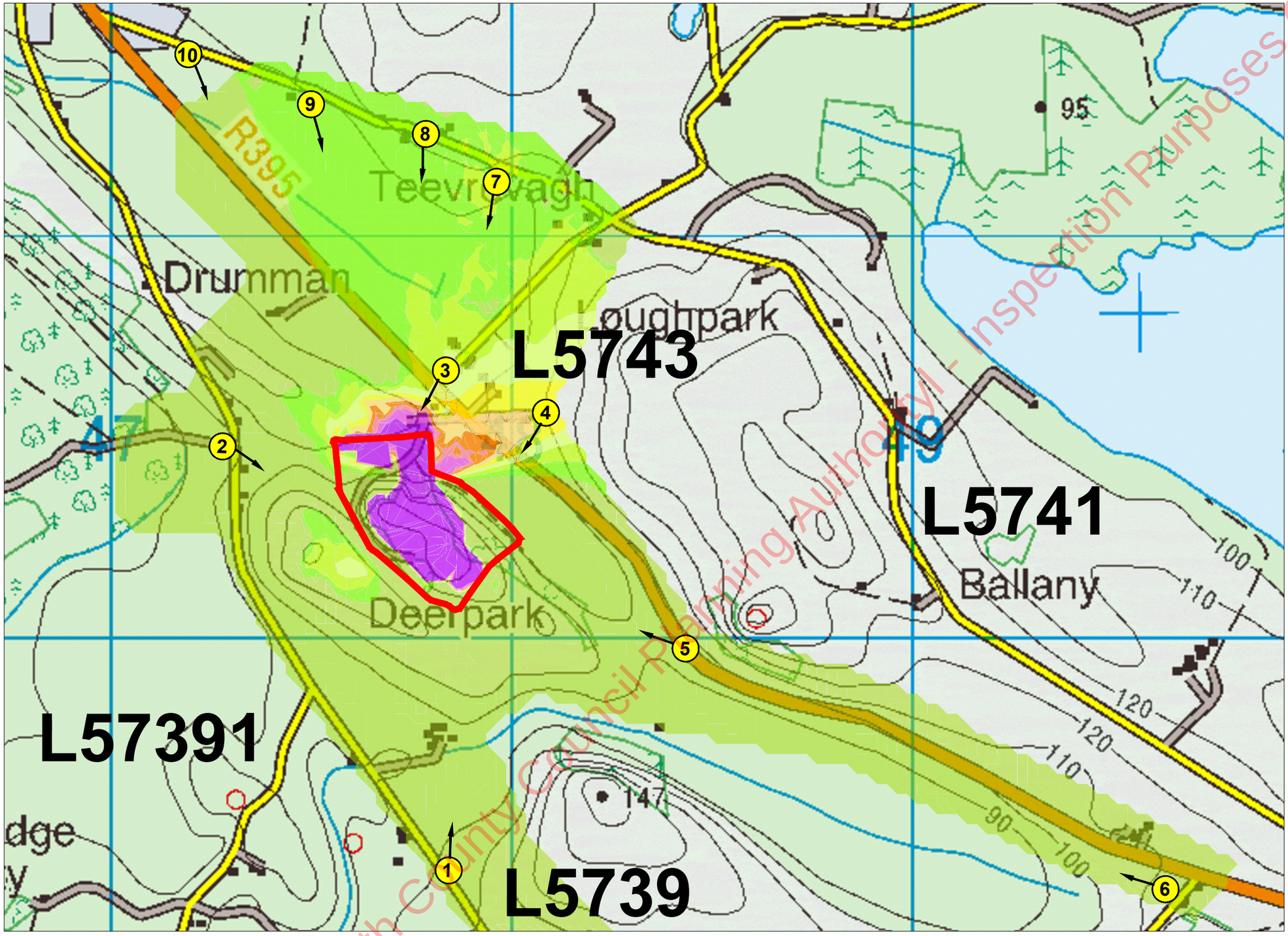
11.8 FIGURES



Legend

Application Area *(c. 11.4 ha)*

- >10 degrees
- Between 8 & 10 degrees
- Between 7 & 8 degrees
- Between 6 & 7 degrees
- Between 5 & 6 degrees
- Between 4 & 5 degrees
- Between 3 & 4 degrees
- Between 2 & 3 degrees
- Between 1 & 2 degrees
- <1 degrees

1 Principle Views
(Refer to corresponding Plates 11.1 to 11.10 for details)

L5741 Local Roads

CLIENT	**Lagan Materials Ltd**
DRAWING	**Vertical ZTV Analysis**
LOCATION	**Deerpark, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath**

NOTES:

1. All Dimensions in metres (m)
2. Elevation Levels - metres Above Ordnance Datum (mAOD)
3. Extract from 1:50,000 OSI Discovery Series Map No. 41

Scale 1:10,000

0m 500m 1km

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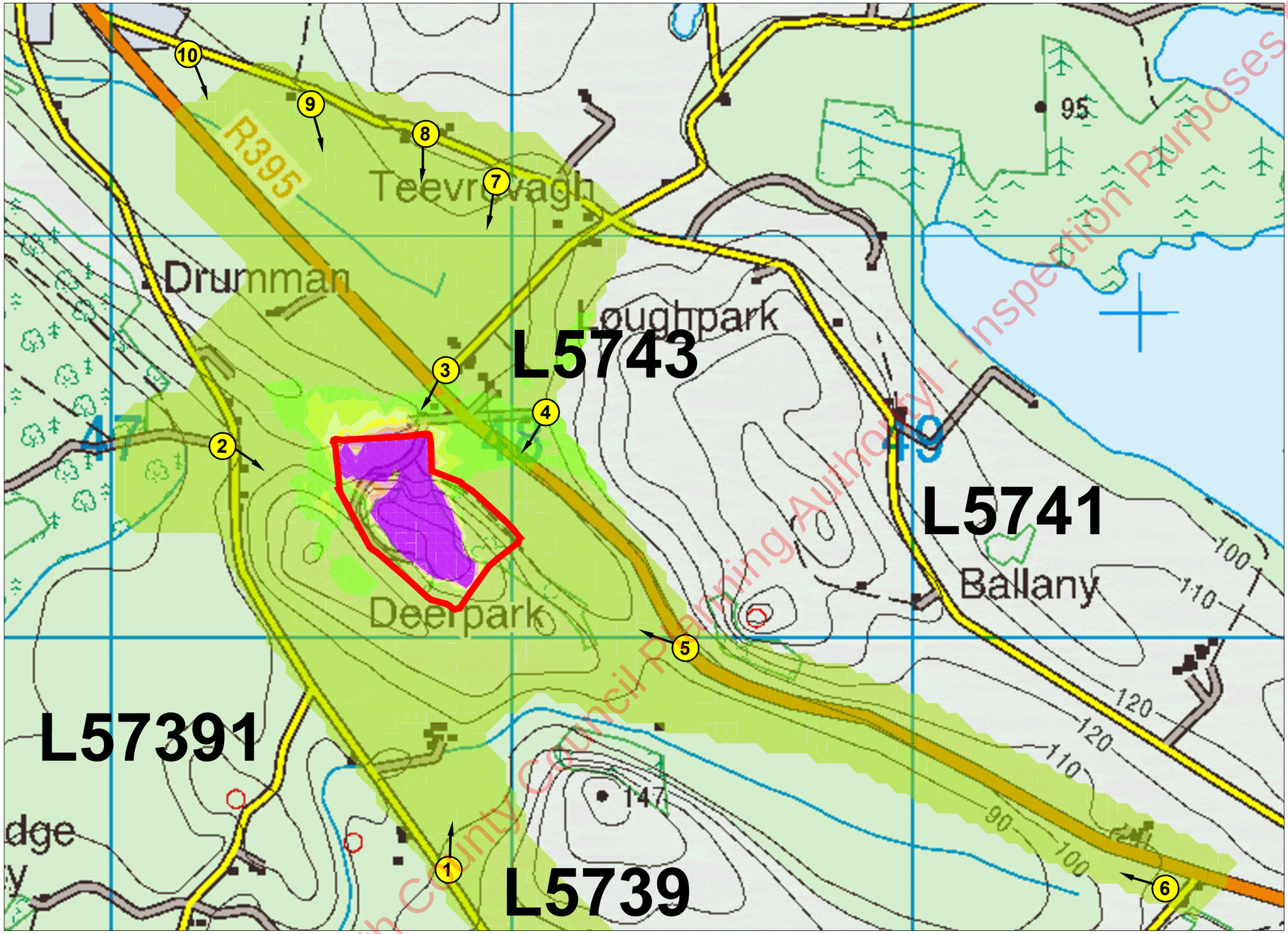
Drawn by **John Sheils**		Scale **1:10,000**	
Checked by **John Sheils**		Job No. **JSPE 277**	
Date **20/12/2021**		Figure No. **11.1**	Rev. **00**



Legend

Application Area *(c. 11.4 ha)*

- >180 degrees
- Between 160 & 180 degrees
- Between 140 & 160 degrees
- Between 120 & 140 degrees
- Between 100 & 120 degrees
- Between 80 & 100 degrees
- Between 60 & 80 degrees
- Between 40 & 60 degrees
- Between 20 & 40 degrees
- < 20 degrees

1 Principle Views *(Refer to corresponding Plates 11.1 to 11.10 for details)*

L5741 Local Roads

CLIENT **Lagan Materials Ltd**

DRAWING **Horizontal ZTV Analysis**

LOCATION **Deerpark, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath**

NOTES:

1. All Dimensions in metres (m)
2. Elevation Levels - metres Above Ordnance Datum (mAOD)
3. Extract from 1:50,000 OSI Discovery Series Map No. 41

Scale 1:10,000

0m 500m 1km

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Date	Figure No.	Rev.
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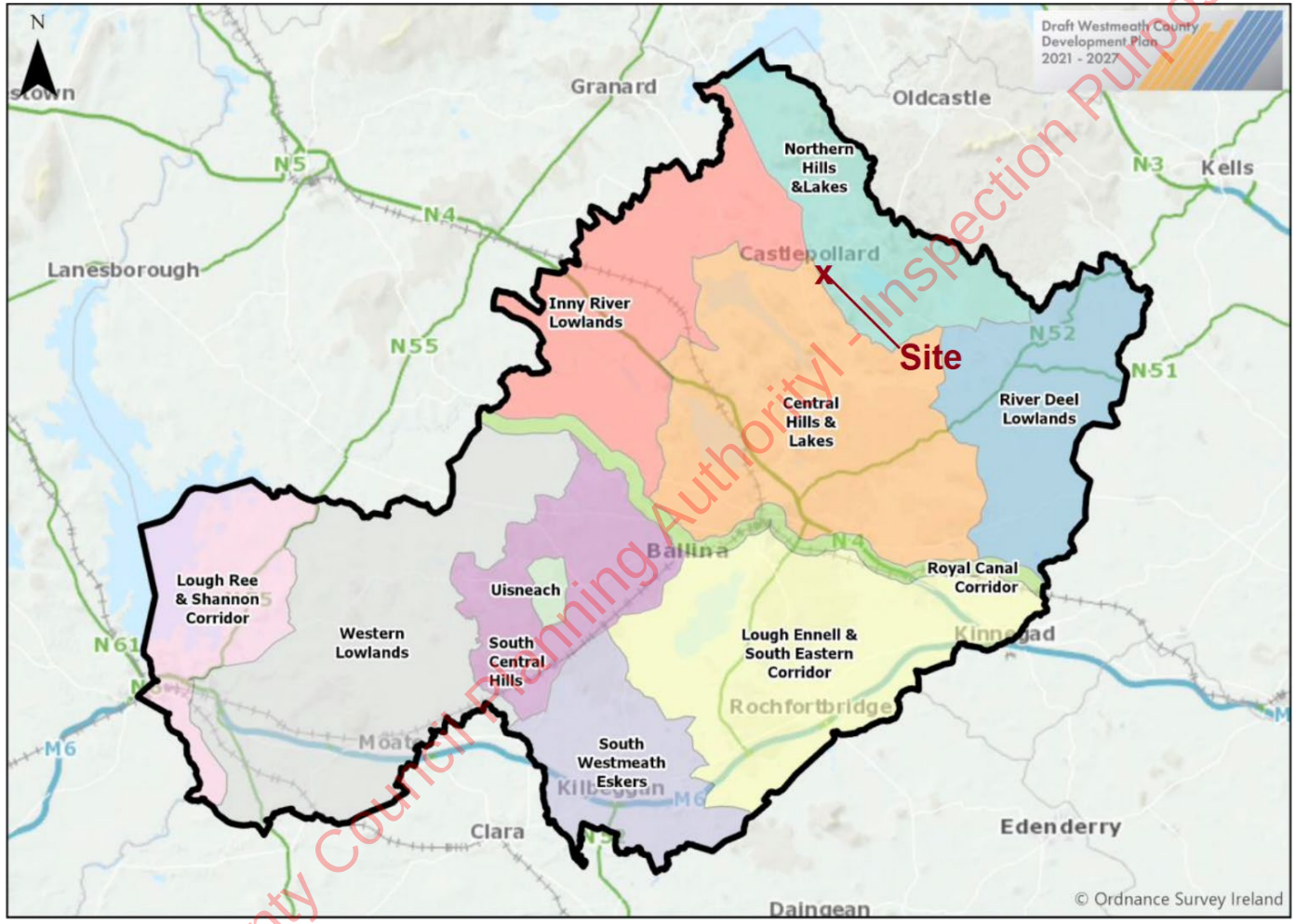


Figure 11.3 Map of Landscape Character Types of County Westmeath.

Map of Westmeath showing Landscape Character Types (LCTs). Location of site within LCT1: Northern Hills & Lakes is marked by an "X". Horizontal width = c. 65 km. Modified from Westmeath County Council (2021).

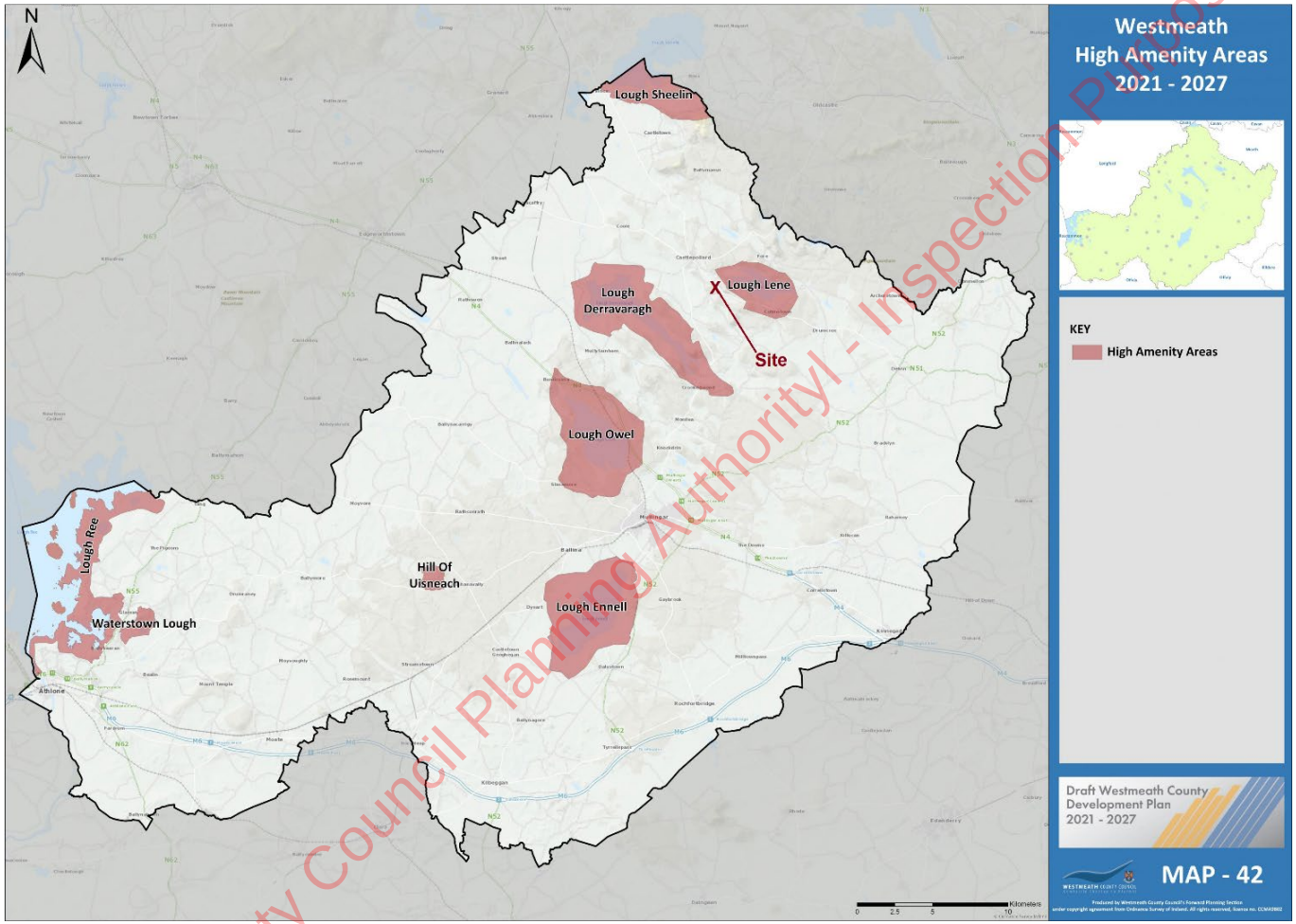


Figure 11.4 Map of High Amenity Areas in County Westmeath.

Map of Westmeath showing High Amenity Areas (HAA). Location of site within LCT1: Northern Hills & Lakes is marked by an "X". Horizontal width = c. 65 km. Modified from Westmeath County Council (2021).

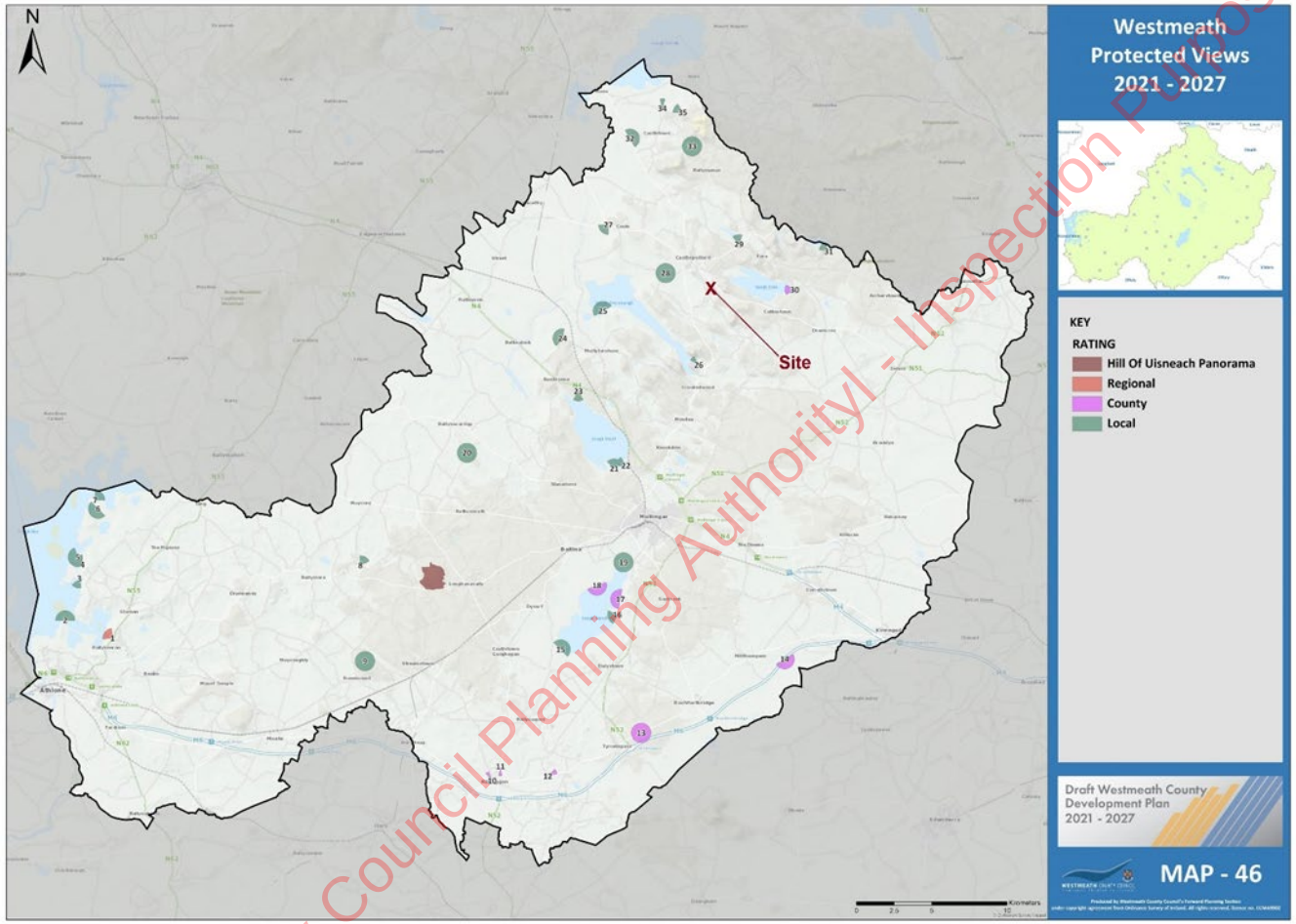


Figure 11.5 Map of Scenic Views across County Westmeath

There are 35 designated points, but there are none within 2.5 km of Deerpark. The site at Deerpark is sufficiently remote from these sites (>2.5 km), and lies outside of the viewshed due to intervening topography, such that the development is not open to views from these designated points. Scale Bar at right. Redrawn from Westmeath (2021).

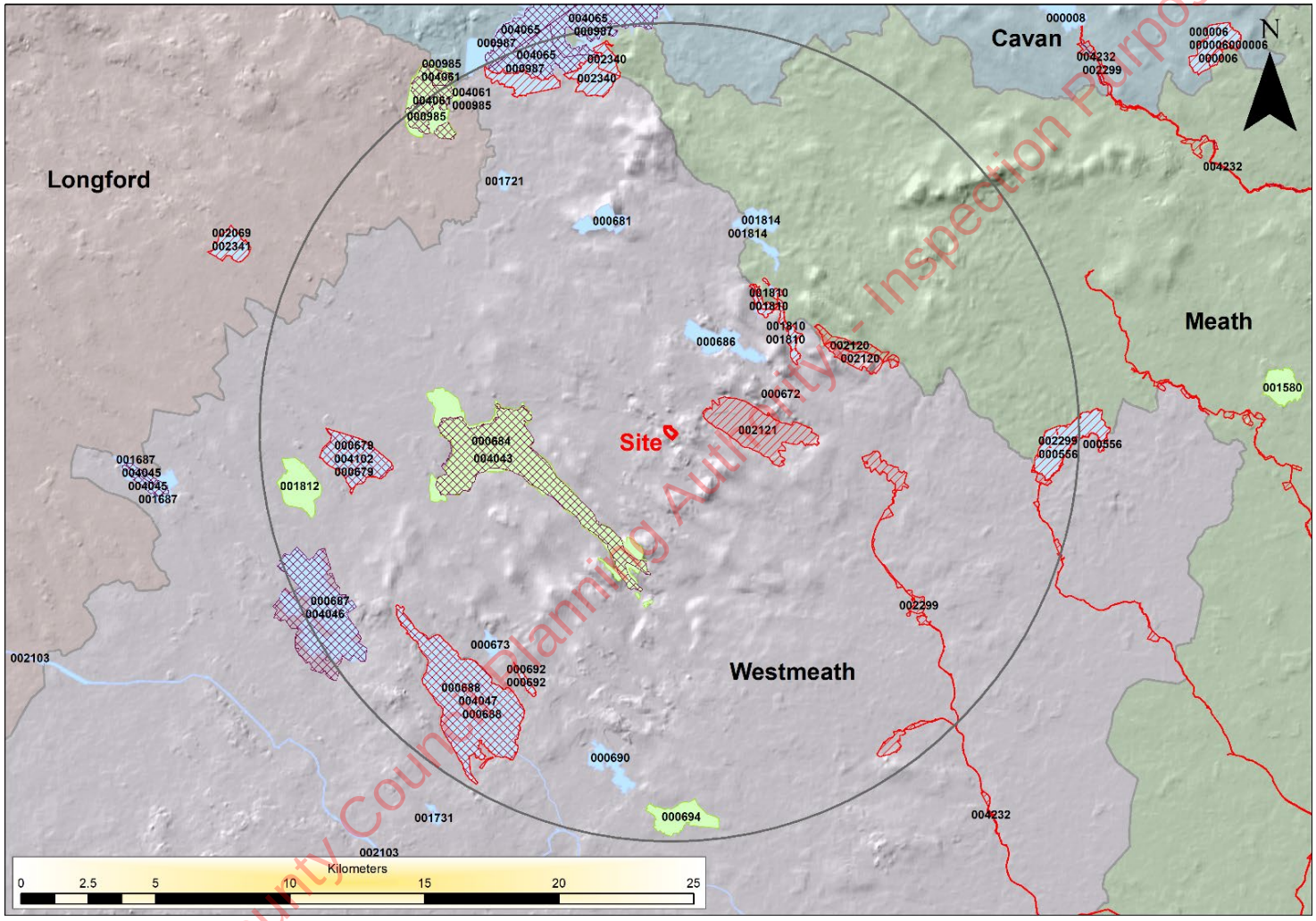


Figure 11.6 Map of SACs, SPAs, NHAs and pNHAs in North Westmeath and Surrounding Region.

Rendered in ArcGIS 10.3 using data from the NPWS (2021) overlain on image from ESRI's world imagery.

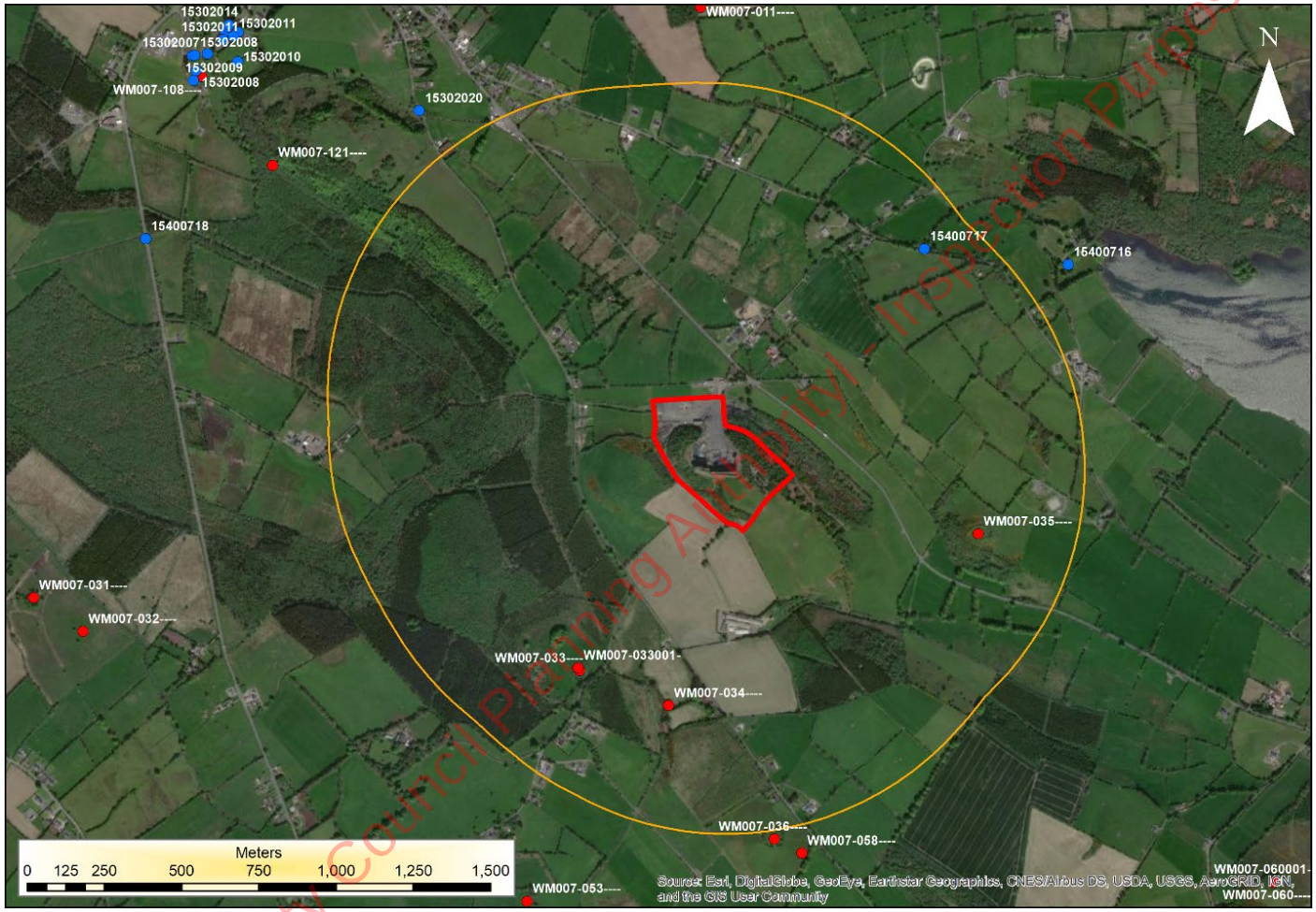


Figure 11.7 Monuments (RMPs) and Protected Structures (SMPs) in the Deerpark Area

Aerial image of the Deerpark area, showing 1 km buffer around the application site (orange line). There are 4 RMPs, denoted by red dots. Note none of these is located on the landholding or application site. There is one SMP, denoted with blue dot, within the 1 km study area. Boundary of application site shown in red. Rendered in ArcGIS 10.3 using data from the DoCHG (2021) overlain on image from ESRI's world imagery.

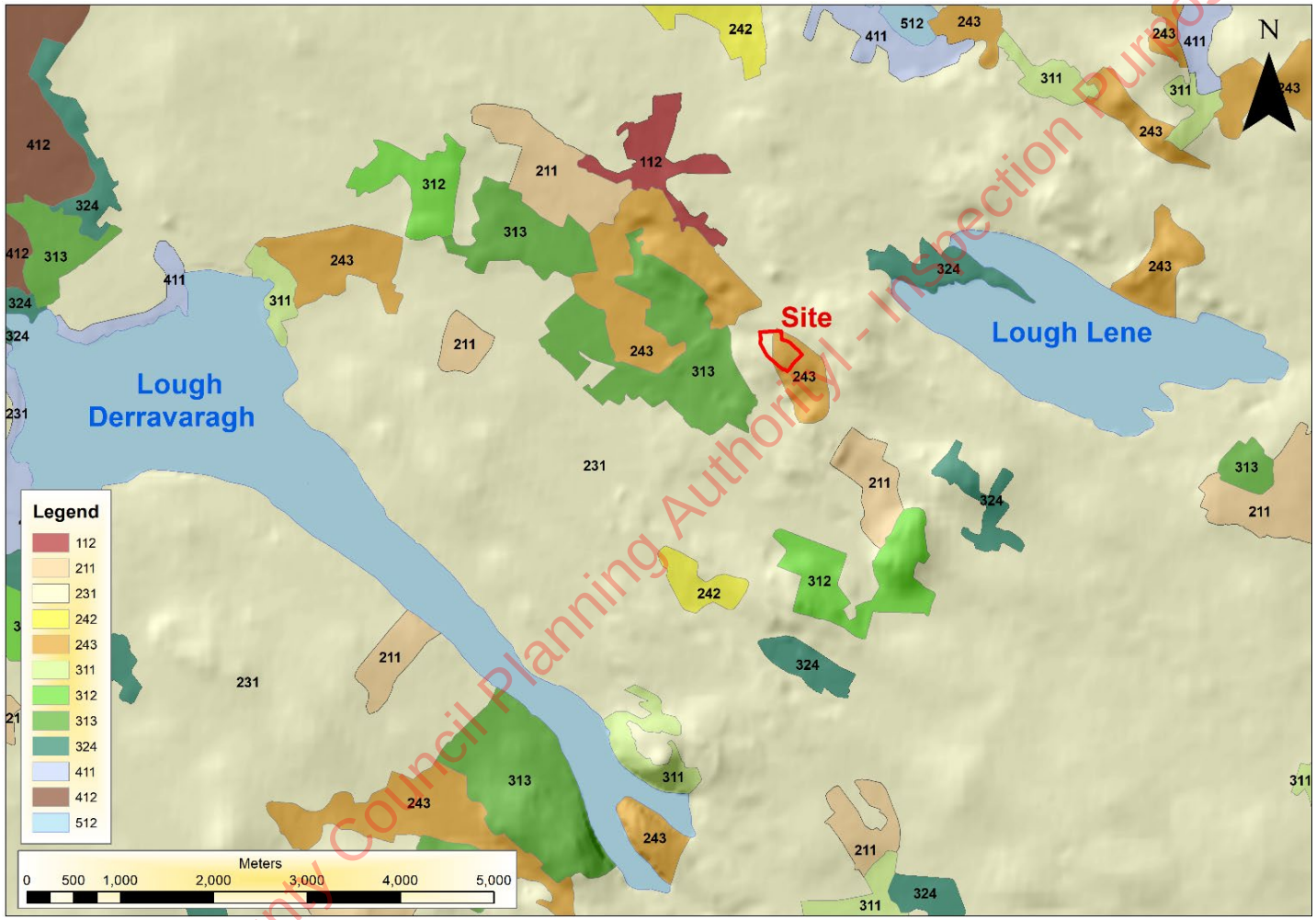
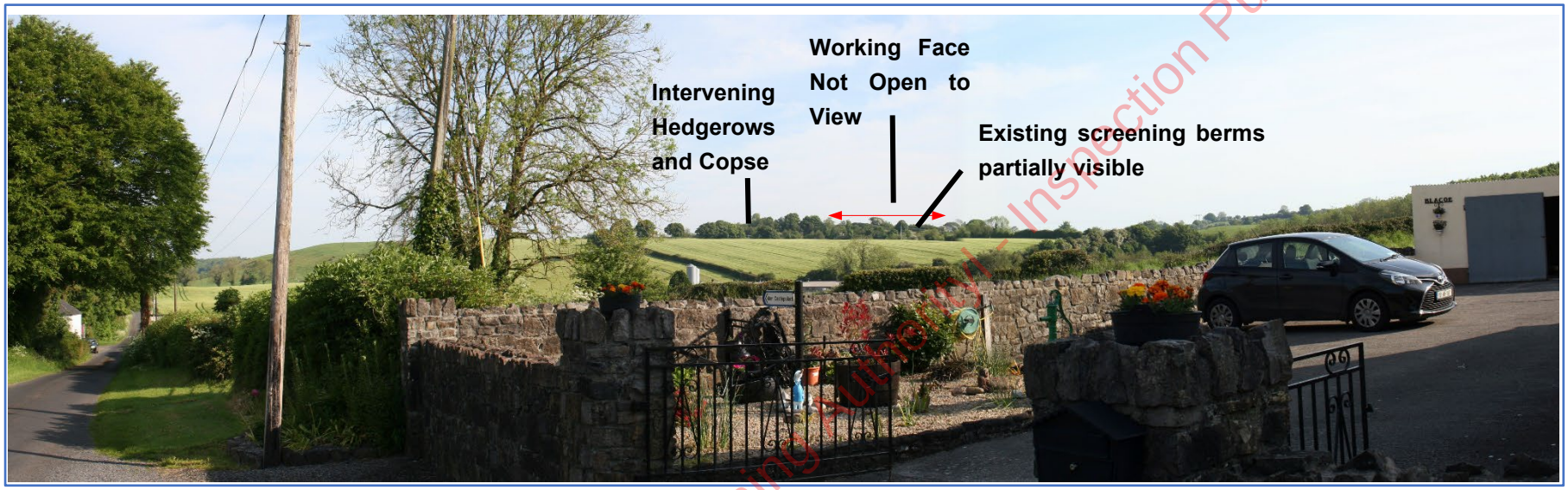


Figure 11.8 The 2018 Corine Land Use Map of the Deerpark Area.

Note: Pastures (231); Land principally occupied by agriculture, with significant areas of natural vegetation (243); Coniferous forest (312); mixed forest (313); and transitional woodland scrub (324) are dominant land covers. Application site indicated by a red line. Rendered in ArcGIS 10.3 using data from EPA

11.9 PLATES

Plate 11.1 View from L5739 640m to south of quarry

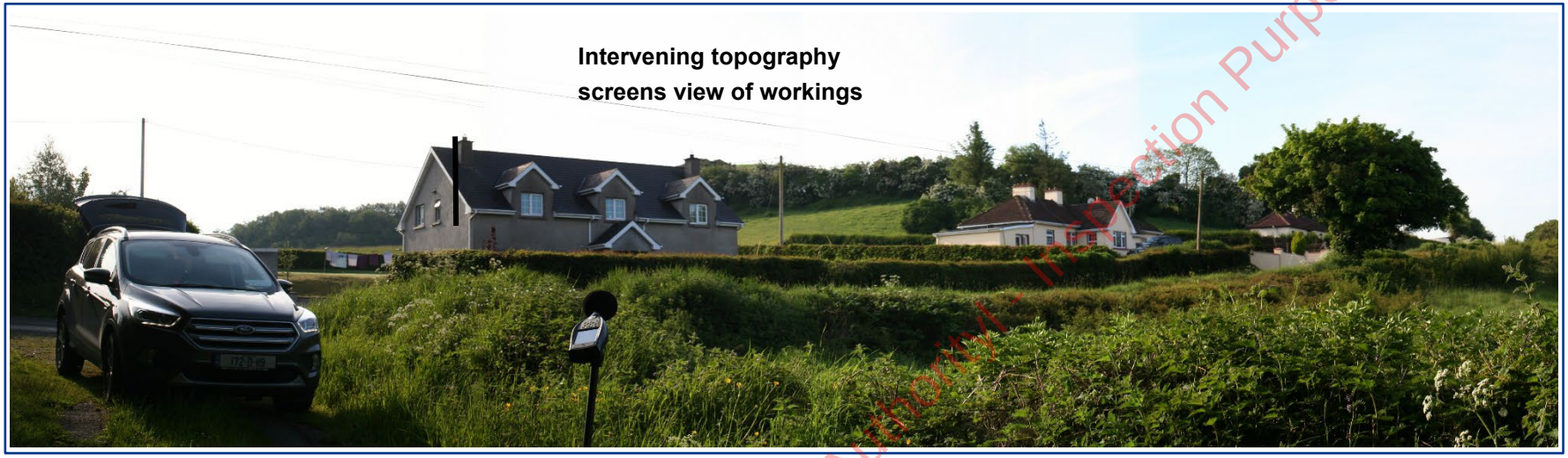


Description: Intervening topography, hedgerows and western copse screens quarry workings from this vantage.

Mitigation: - Plant existing screening mounds with native tress and shrub species as necessary.

- Favourable direction of working to ensure working face is screened from outside views as quarry is developed southwards.

Plate 11.2 View from L5739 c. 270m west of quarry



Description: Quarry workings not open to view. Flank of hill screen quarry workings from this vantage.

Mitigation: - None considered necessary from this vantage.

Plate 11.3 View from Junction of L5743 with R395 130m to north

Description: Upper quarry face open to view. Partially screened by intervening trees and buildings.

Mitigation:

- Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south.
- Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3.
- The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges.
- Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face.

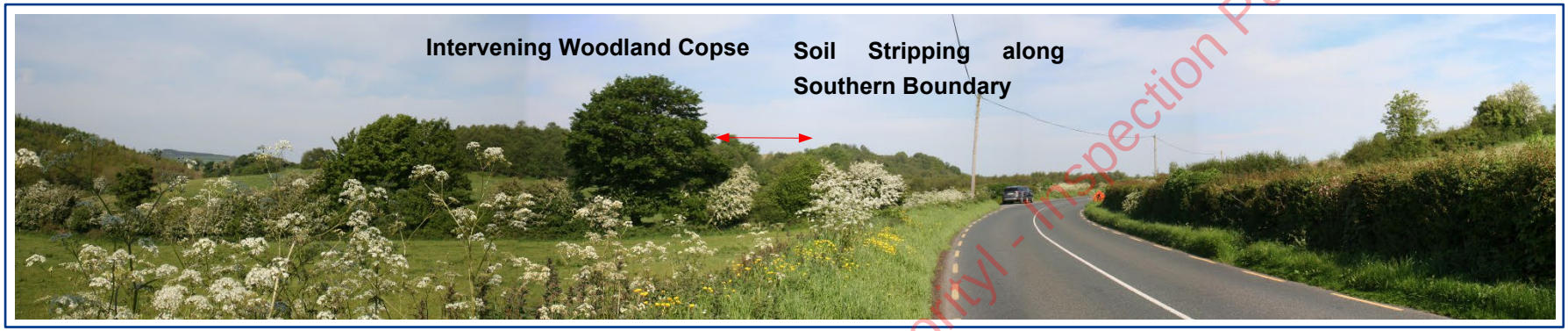
Plate 11.4 View from Landowners Residence c. 220m Northeast

Description: Upper quarry face open to partial view. Eastern flank of hill and copse largely screens quarry workings from this vantage.

Mitigation:

- Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south.
- Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3.
- The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges.
- Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face.
- Favourable direction of working to ensure working face is screened from outside views as quarry is developed southwards.
- Eastern Flank of Hill & Copse to be preserved.

Plate 11.5 View from Regional Road R395 c. 500m Southeast



Description: Limited partial views of soil stripping along southern boundary. Favourable direction of working ensures working face not open to view. Intervening copse woodland effectively screens views from this vantage.

Mitigation:

- Plant existing screening mounds with native tress and shrub species as necessary.
- Favourable direction of working to ensure working face is screened from outside views as quarry is developed southwards.
- Eastern Flank of Hill & Copse to pe preserved.

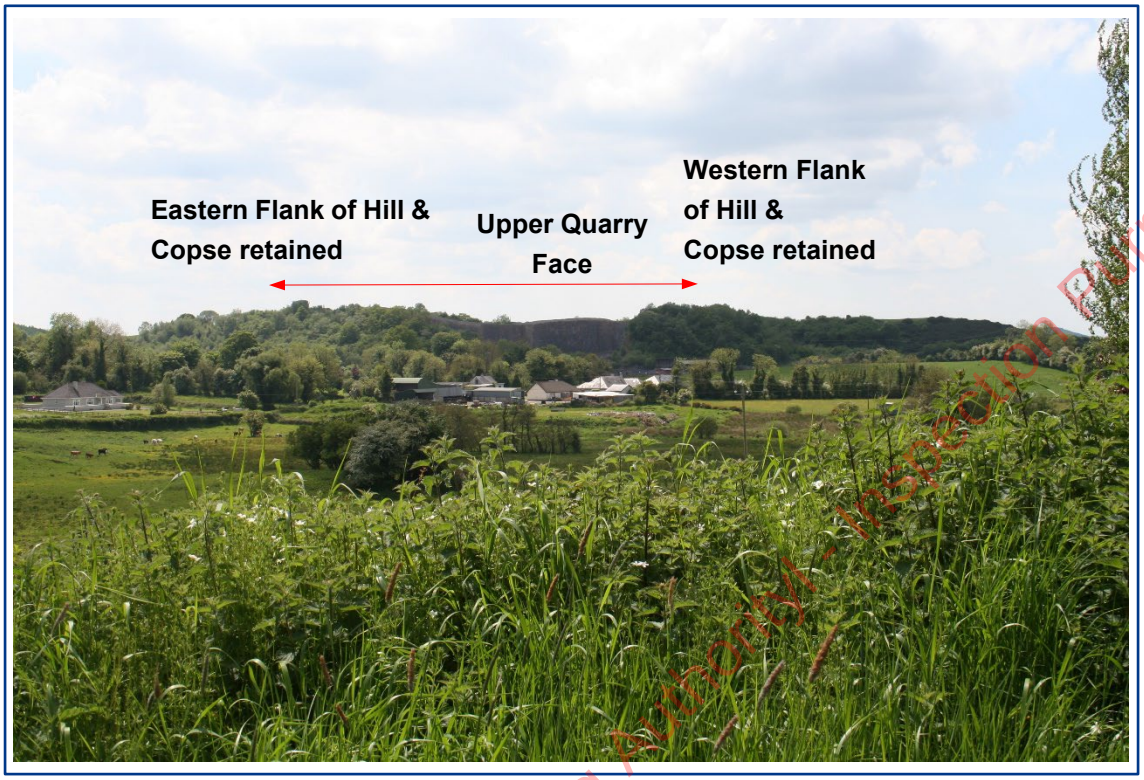
Plate 11.6 Distant view from minor unnamed County Road c. 1.9 km Southeast of site

Description: Soil stripping along southern boundary open to view. Favourable direction of working ensures working face not open to view.

Mitigation:

- Plant existing screening mounds with native tress and shrub species as necessary.
- Favourable direction of working to ensure working face is screened from outside views as quarry is developed southwards.
- Eastern Flank of Hill & Copse to pe preserved.

Plate 11.7 View from L5741 c. 690m north of quarry

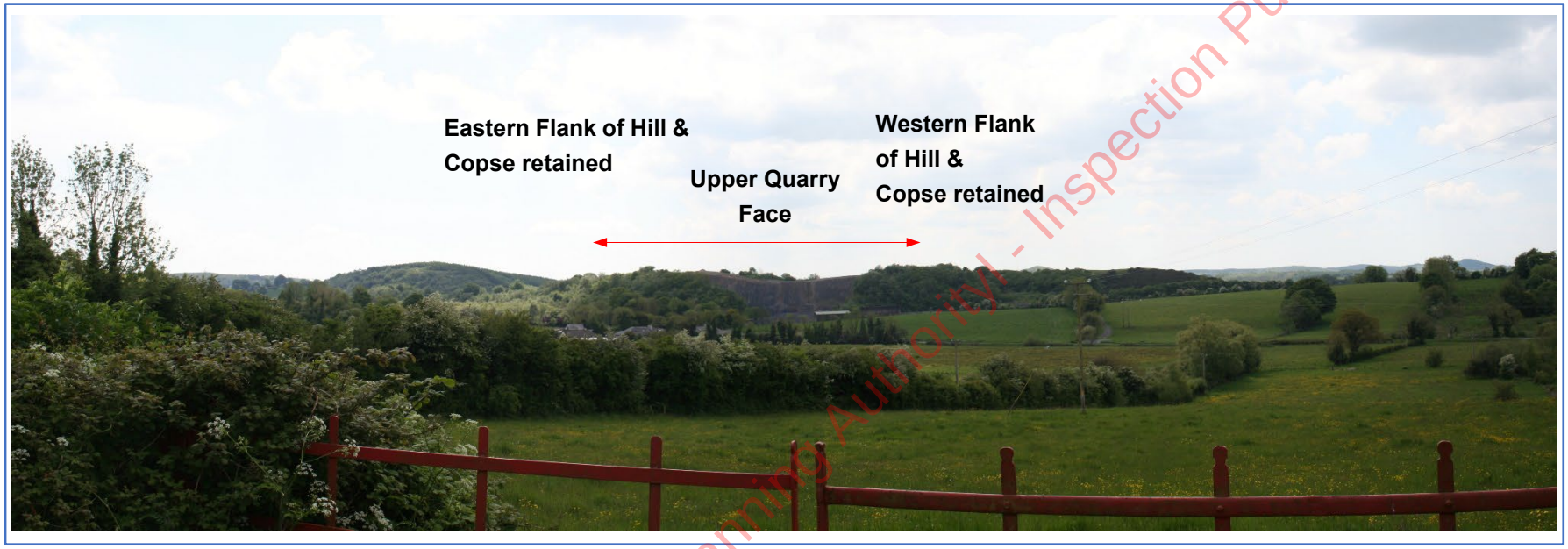


Description: Upper quarry face open to partial view. Eastern flank of hill and copse largely screens quarry workings from this vantage.

Mitigation:

- Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south.
- Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3.
- The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges.
- Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face.
- Existing Copse planting on Eastern & Western flanks to pe preserved.

Plate 11.8 View from L5741 c. 750m north of quarry

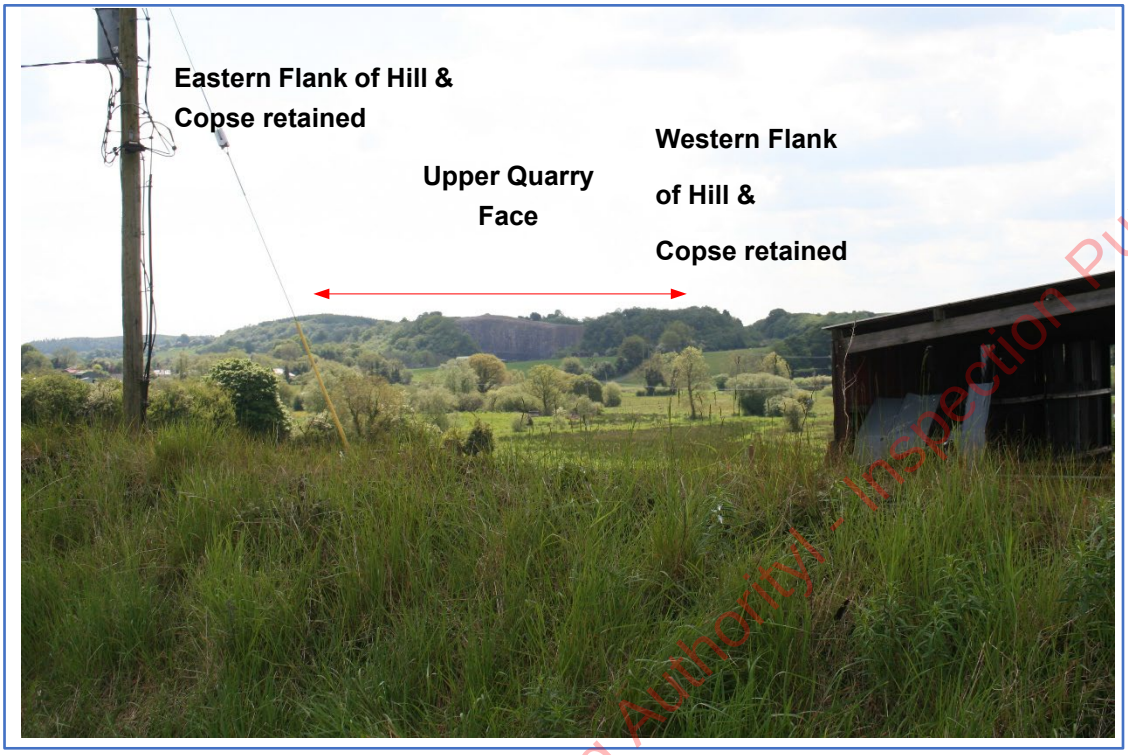


Description: Upper quarry face open to view.

Mitigation:

- Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south.
- Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3.
- The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges.
- Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face.
- Existing Copse planting on Eastern & Western flanks to be preserved.

Plate 11.9 View from L5741 c. 890m north of quarry

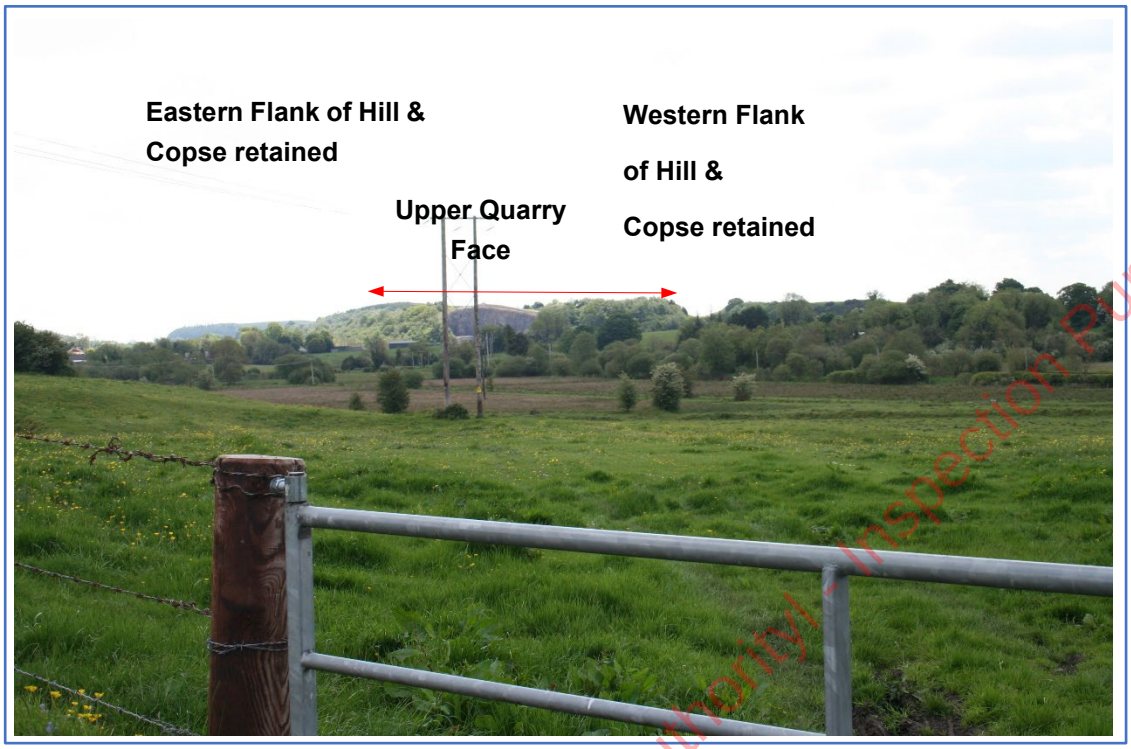


Description: Upper quarry face open to view.

Mitigation:

- Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south.
- Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3.
- The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges.
- Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face.
- Existing Copse planting on Eastern & Western flanks to be preserved.

Plate 11.10 View from L5741 c. 1.1 km north of quarry



Description: Upper quarry face open to view.

Mitigation:

- Residual quarry face to be benched as quarry is developed to the south.
- Grading and planting on completed sections of the upper quarry face will be carried out as shown by EIAR Figures 3.2 to 3.3.
- The upper benches will be seeded with suitable species of shrubs and climbers to create vegetated ledges.
- Natural colonisation on the residual faces will encourage growth on the faces and will subsequently break up the harshness of the exposed rock face.
- Existing Copse planting on Eastern & Western flanks to be preserved.