16. SEASCAPE / LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

16.1 Introduction

This chapter of the EIAR consists of an assessment of effects from the Offshore Site relating to Seascape, Landscape and Visual factors during its construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning phases.

Where the 'Project' is referred to, this encompasses both the 'Offshore Site' and the 'Onshore Site'. Where the 'Offshore Site' is referred to, this includes the Offshore Array Area (OAA), Offshore Substation (OSS), Offshore Export Cable (OEC), Offshore Export Cable Corridor (OECC) and the Landfall. Further details in relation to the Offshore Site elements are set out below:

Although closely linked, seascape / landscape and visual impacts are assessed separately. Collectively, the assessment of these impacts is referred to throughout as SLVIA. Descriptions of the seascape / landscape and visual assessment, as well as the cumulative assessment, is detailed below.

Seascape / Landscape Impact Assessment (S/LIA) relates to changes in the physical seascape 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 a seascape / landscape that go together to make up the overall character of that area. By understanding the aspects that contribute to seascape / landscape character, it is possible to make assessments in relation to its quality (integrity) and to identify key sensitivities. This, in turn, provides a measure of the ability of the seascape in question to accommodate the type and scale of change associated with the proposed Offshore Site without causing unacceptable adverse changes to its character.

Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) relates to assessing effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people. This deals with how the surroundings of individuals or groups of people may be specifically affected by changes in the content and character of views as a result of the change or loss of existing elements of the landscape and/or introduction of new elements. Visual impacts may occur from; Visual Obstruction (blocking of a view, be it full, partial or intermittent) or; Visual Intrusion (interruption of a view without blocking).

Cumulative seascape / landscape and visual impact assessment relates to additional changes to the seascape/ landscape or visual amenity caused by the proposed Offshore Site in conjunction with other developments (associated or separate to it), or actions that occurred in the past, present or are likely to occur in the foreseeable future. Such projects will include other existing, permitted or proposed offshore and onshore wind energy projects as well as notable scale projects within the relevant study areas for the Onshore Site.

It should be noted that the Landscape and Visual Assessment, related to the Onshore Site, is detailed in Chapter 29 of this EIAR.

16.1.1 Statement of Authority

This SLVIA was prepared by Richard Barker (BA-Env, PG Dip Forestry, MLA, MILI) Divisional Director at Macro Works Ltd (part of APEM group); a consultancy firm specialising in Landscape and Visual Assessment and the preparation of associated maps and graphics. Relevant experience includes over 19 years of assessing a broad range of infrastructural, industrial and commercial projects, incorporating over 100 onshore wind farms and numerous coastal development projects including the planning and pre-planning stages of five offshore wind farms. Richard has presented guest lectures on LVIA to the UCD EIA Management course and also presented two conference papers to the Irish

Landscape Institute relating to best practice in LVIA and a case study on the use of relevant guidelines (GLVIA-3) for a large onshore wind farm.

16.2 Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

Including and in addition to those listed in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter of the EIAR is informed by the following documents.

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2022). Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports' hereafter referred to as the 'EPA Guidelines'
- Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, Guidelines of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Third Edition (2013 – August 2024 Clarification Notes) (GLVIA3);
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (now known as NatureScot), Offshore Renewables – Guidance on assessing the impact on coastal landscape and seascape, Guidance for Scoping an Environmental Statement (SNH, 2012);
- SNH (NatureScot), Visual Representation of Wind Farms Guidance (SNH, 2017a);
- SNH (NatureScot), Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape (SNH, 2017b);
- SNH (NatureScot), NatureScot (2021) Guidance - Assessing the cumulative landscape and visual impact of onshore wind energy developments (also identified as applicable to the cumulative effects of offshore wind energy developments);
- National Marine Planning Framework (2021)
- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG), Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006 / 2019 Draft Revised).
- Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland (Marine Institute – 2020)
- Galway County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 (including Appendix 1 Renewable Energy Strategy and Appendix 4 Landscape Character Assessment)
- Clare County Development Plan (2023-2029)
- Mayo County Development Plan (2022-2028)
- Failte Ireland, EIAR Guidelines for the Consideration of Tourism and Tourism Related Projects

16.3 Consultation

Consultation relevant to the SLVIA for the Project includes the Planning Authority, An Bord Pleanála, as well as statutory bodies of, Galway County Council, Clare County Council and Failte Ireland through the scoping process and direct meetings. In addition to direct feedback from consultation meetings, relevant and detailed scoping responses were received from both Galway County Council and Failte Ireland (see Chapter 2 Table 2-9 for details). Public consultation was undertaken for the Project in the form of media engagement, meetings, public consultation events and a dedicated Project website. The Public consultation undertaken is detailed in Appendix 2-3 Community Report. Photomontages of the Project were available for viewing at the public consultation events and via an online viewer accessed through the Project website.

16.3.1 Consultation Feedback from An Bord Pleanála and Galway County Council

An Bord Pleanála feedback predominantly related to the scope and methodology of the assessment as well as the extent of the SLVIA Study Area. Galway County Council feedback related to due

consideration of the Galway County Development Plan and particularly scenic designations, landscape sensitivity ratings, SLVIA related policies and the Renewable Energy Strategy.

The above points are addressed within the methodology (Section 16.4), baseline (Section 16.5 and the Assessment of Significant Effects (Section16.7).

16.3.2 Consultation Feedback from Failte Ireland

Failte Ireland highlighted tourism / wind energy related visitor attitude studies, the sensitive characteristics of the Connemara Coast and Islands from a cultural and tourism perspective. They also highlighted the presence of the Wild Atlantic Way & EuroVelo 1 – Atlantic Coast Routes and the Wild Atlantic Way Coastal Path in addition to flagging their own EIAR Guidelines for the Consideration of Tourism and Tourism Related Projects as a document that needs to be considered.

The above points are addressed within the Baseline (Section 16.5), Visual Receptors (Section 16.6) and the Assessment of Significant Effects (Section 16.7).

16.4 Assessment Methodology

16.4.1 Outline Methodology

The Seascape / Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (SLVIA) methodology, which is based on relevant guidance and industry best practice, consists of a desktop baseline study followed by fieldwork and then assessment aided by maps and verifiable photomontage images. It should be noted that GLVIA3 deliberately avoids the use of standardised assessment criteria.

The desktop study comprised of the following:

- Review of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map, which indicates areas from which the development is potentially visible in relation to terrain within the SLVIA Study Area.
- Review of Route Screening Analysis (RSA) mapping.
- Review of the Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland (2020).
- Review of relevant County Development Plans, particularly with regard to sensitive landscape and scenic view/route designations.
- Online review of tourism, recreational and heritage features within the study area that may be potential visual receptors.
- Selection of potential Viewshed Reference Points (VRPs) from key visual receptors to be investigated during fieldwork for actual visibility and sensitivity.
- Production of wireframe images of the development at each potential viewpoint (illustrating the Wind Turbine Generators in a bare-ground context) to aid fieldwork / viewpoint selection.

Fieldwork comprised of the following:

- Examination of the salient landscape/ seascape character of the Offshore Site and its immediate surrounds as well as the wider study area.
- Investigation of potential viewpoint locations identified at the desk study stage and selection / rejection of each.
- Selection of other relevant viewpoints that may not have been apparent from the desk study (local monuments, walkways etc.).
- Capture of high-quality base photography in clear viewing conditions from which to prepare photomontages of the proposal during both daytime and night time.

- Examine the route of the proposed OEC
- Preparation of a viewpoint (VP) selection report and associated map for consultation purposes (Statutory Consultees) indicating the intended VP selection set and study area to be used for the preparation of photomontages to support the visual impact assessment.

Assessment will comprise of the following:

- Assessment of landscape / seascape sensitivity
- Assessment of the magnitude of landscape / seascape effects
- Assessment of the significance of landscape / seascape effects
- Assessment of visual receptor sensitivity
- Assessment of visual impact magnitude at representative viewpoint locations (using verifiable photomontages)
- Assessment of visual impact significance
- Assessment of cumulative landscape and visual effects

The sensitivity of Landscape / Seascape and Visual receptors is derived from combining susceptibility and value assessments to determine overall sensitivity. Similarly, the magnitude of effects is derived from combining judgements in respect of the size, scale and nature of the effect with considerations of duration and reversibility. Sensitivity and magnitude assessments are then combined / weighed against each other to determine the overall significance of effect.

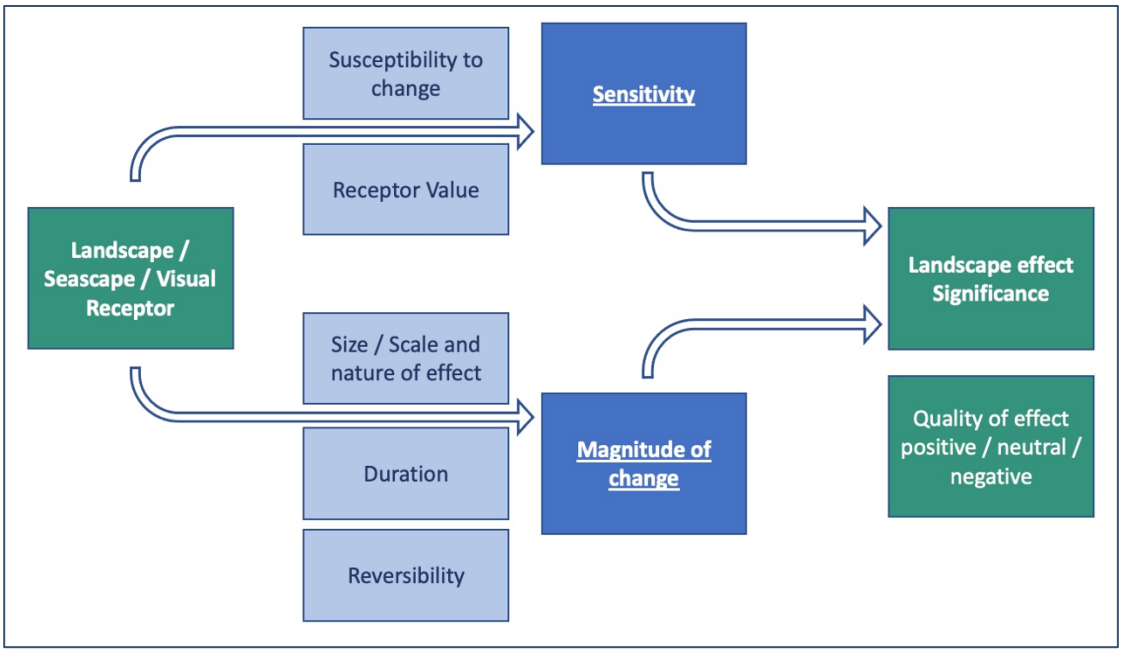


Plate 16-1 Overview of Landscape / Seascape and Visual process derived from GLVIA3

16.4.2 SLVIA Study Area

On the basis of the Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) Guidance on Assessing the Impact on Coastal Landscape and Seascape (2012), a 60km radius 'Search Area' is initially used, however, this is generally in relation to identifying relevant cumulative developments i.e. that might be seen at distances of up to 30km when the Project is also within 30km. Whilst a smaller principal study area might sometimes be refined from the initial 60km radius search area, in this instance there are some sensitive receptors along the Burren coastline to the south of Galway Bay that are over 40km away with views afforded in the direction of the proposed OAA, being that area that contains the 30 no. Wind Turbine

Generator (WTGs). Consequently, it is deemed appropriate to retain a 60km radius study area in the interests of a cautiously robust assessment.

Figure 16-1 Offshore Site Study Area

16.4.3 Assessment Criteria

The assessment of seascape / landscape effects is separate to that of visual effects and thus, the criteria also differ. Nonetheless, both forms of appraisal rely on the weighing of receptor sensitivity against impact magnitude. Although not identical to the sample criteria used in the EPA Guidelines (2022), because it avoids using the term 'significant' within the categories themselves, the criteria contained in Tables 16-4, 16-5 and 16-6 is consistent with LVIA best practice in Ireland and the UK and corresponds closely with the EPA Guidelines criteria. As identified in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013), the critical factor is to clearly identify which categories of assessment equate to significant effects in EIA terms.

The assessment SLVIA criteria set out herein are all based on a combination of assessment principles from GLVIA3 and best practice for SLVIA in Ireland and the UK.

16.4.3.1 Seascape / Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the seascape/landscape to change relates to susceptibility and value, determining the degree to which a particular landscape receptor (Seascape/Landscape Character Area (LCA) or feature) can accommodate changes or new features without unacceptable detrimental effects to its essential characteristics.

Seascape / Landscape Susceptibility relates to the ability of the receptor to accommodate change and this relates to the scale and nature of the development in question rather than simply intrinsic susceptibility. Factors to be considered include the naturalistic qualities of the receptor and its quality / condition (pristine or degraded) as well as cultural and social associations to the seascape / landscape. Also considered are perceptual aspects such as remoteness / tranquilly, degree of enclosure / openness, movement and aesthetic qualities.

Table 16-1 Seascape/Landscape Susceptibility

Higher Susceptibility Criteria	Lower Susceptibility Criteria
Perceptual Qualities: The seascape / landscape has strong scenic qualities associated with naturalness and tranquilly	The seascape / landscape has a high degree of contemporary development associated with settlement, industry and primary production
Condition: The seascape / landscape has a high degree of integrity and utility indicating care and management.	The seascape / landscape is degraded with unutilised or waste areas apparent and with little sign of care or management
Scale / Simplicity: The seascape / landscape is intricate and complex where large scale development could generate scale conflict	The seascape / landscape is of a broad scale with simple legible elements that can accommodate large development without a sense of scale conflict
Intensity and scale of existing development: The seascape / landscape has low levels of existing development and that which exists is of small scale and static in nature	The seascape / landscape has high levels of existing development of considerable scale and with associated movement
Openness / enclosure: The seascape / landscape is strongly enclosed with limited viewsheds that can be readily influenced by new and large-scale development	The seascape / landscape is broad and open with a vast viewsheds that can readily accommodate new and large-scale development

Seascape / Landscape Value relates to societal recognition of the receptor at a designated or non-designated level. It often relates to the rarity or representativeness of the receptor as well as its quality and condition. Recreational, conservation, tourism and scenic value are also key considerations. Higher order value is likely to be associated with landscapes / seascapes that are designated for protection at a national or international level, whereas lower order value might be associated with rural or coastal productivity.

Table 16-2 Seascape/Landscape Value

Higher Value Criteria	Lower Value Criteria
Designation: The landscape / seascape is protected by National / international level policy in relation to its natural and scenic beauty.	The landscape / seascape does not have a formal designation of protection or cautious management

Higher Value Criteria	Lower Value Criteria
Rarity: The landscape / seascape is rare or unique at a national or regional level	The landscape / seascape type is commonly found throughout the local, regional and national context
Cultural Associations: The landscape / seascape is strongly associated with cultural traditions, historic events or myth and legend	The landscape / seascape is not recognised as being associated with cultural traditions, historic events or myth and legend
Scenic / Perceptual: The landscape / seascape has a high degree of scenic value associated with naturalistic, conservation value and tranquillity.	The landscape / seascape has no recognised scenic value and is associated with settlement, cultivation development and production.
Tourism, recreation and amenity: The landscape / seascape is strongly associated with tourism recreation and amenity and attracts high number of visitors	The landscape / seascape is not associated with tourism recreation and amenity and is not recognised as a draw for visitors

Taking consideration of susceptibility and value attributes, overall Landscape Sensitivity is classified using the following criteria (Table 16-3).

Table 16-3 Seascape/Landscape Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Description
Very High	Areas where the seascape/landscape character exhibits a very low capacity for change in the form of development. Examples of which are high value seascapes and iconic sections of the coastline, protected at an international or national level (World Heritage Site/National Park), where the principal management objectives are likely to be protection of the existing character.
High	Areas where the seascape character exhibits a low capacity for change in the form of development. Examples of which are high value landscapes and iconic sections of the coastline, protected at a national or regional level, where the principal management objectives are likely to be considered conservation of the existing character.
Medium	Areas where the seascape character exhibits some capacity and scope for development. Examples of which are seascapes and/or landscapes which have a designation of protection at a county level or at non-designated local level where there is evidence of local value.
Low	Areas where the seascape character exhibits a higher capacity for change from development. Typically, this would include lower value, non-designated seascapes and/or landscapes that may also have some elements or features of recognisable quality but are generally utilitarian in nature.
Negligible	Areas of seascape character that are highly industrialised and utilitarian in nature where there would be a reasonable capacity to embrace change. Management objectives in such areas could be focused on change, creation of seascape/landscape improvements and/or restoration to realise a higher seascape value.

16.4.3.2 Seascape / Landscape Impact Magnitude

The magnitude of a predicted seascape/landscape impact is a product of the size / scale of change as a result of the Project in the context of the receptor, as well as the geographical extent across which it is likely to be experienced and to a lesser extent the duration and reversibility of the effect.

The **size / scale** of the effect is the degree of change that will occur as a result of existing elements being lost and/or new ones introduced and is a measure of the degree to which these changes alter the prevailing character of the seascape / landscape receptor. Higher order judgements are likely to result from dramatic change to a substantial proportion of the receptor in question. However, this could be in the context of large-scale change at a single coastal inlet that would be experienced as a smaller effect for the broader seascape character area it is contained within.

The **Geographical Extent** of the effect is not how large or distinctive the physical development is, but the extent across which its effects are experienced. Using the same example above, distinct change to a small coastal inlet might be experienced as very localised effects with a confined geographical extent. The loss or introduction of other elements might have effects experienced across a number seascape / landscape character areas i.e. with a large geographical extent.
Taking consideration of the size / scale of the effect and its geographical extent, overall magnitude of seascape / landscape effects is determined on the basis of the criteria contained in (Table 16-4).

Table 16-4 Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts

Sensitivity	Description
Very High	Change that would be large in extent and scale with the loss of critically important seascape/landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an overall change of the seascape/landscape in terms of character, value and quality.
High	Change that would be more limited in extent and scale with the loss of important seascape/landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an overall change of the seascape/landscape in terms of character, value and quality.
Medium	Changes that are modest in extent and scale involving the loss of seascape/landscape characteristics or elements that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that would lead to changes in seascape/landscape character, and quality
Low	Changes affecting small areas of seascape/landscape character and quality, together with the loss of some less characteristic seascape/landscape elements or the addition of new features or elements
Negligible	Changes affecting small or very restricted areas of seascape/landscape character. This may include the limited loss of some elements or the addition of some new features or elements that are characteristic of the existing seascape/landscape or are hardly perceivable.

16.4.3.3 Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Unlike landscape sensitivity, the sensitivity of visual receptors has an anthropocentric basis. It considers factors such as the perceived quality and values associated with the view, the landscape context of the viewer, the likely activity they are engaged in and whether this heightens their awareness of the surrounding landscape.

A list of the factors considered by the assessor in estimating the level of sensitivity for a particular visual receptor is outlined below (Section 16.4.3.3.1 and 16.4.3.3.2 and used to establish visual receptor sensitivity at each Viewshed Reference Point (VRP – described in section 16.4.3.4):

16.4.3.3.1 *Susceptibility of Receptors*

In accordance with GLVIA3, visual receptors most susceptible to changes in views and visual amenity are:

> *"Residents at home;*
>
> *People, whether residents or visitors, who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focussed on the landscape and on particular views;*
>
> *Visitors to heritage assets, or to other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;*
>
> *Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area; and*
>
> *Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes where such travel involves recognised scenic routes and awareness of views is likely to be heightened".*

Visual receptors that are less susceptible to changes in views and visual amenity include;

> *"People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation, which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape; and*
>
> *People at their place of work whose attention may be focussed on their work or activity, not their surroundings and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life".*

16.4.3.3.2 *Values Associated with Views*

The value attached to a view is determined by considering the following:

1. ***Recognised scenic value of the view*** *(County Development Plan designations, guidebooks, touring maps, postcards etc). These represent a consensus in terms of which scenic views and routes within an area are strongly valued by the population because in the case of County Developments Plans, for example, a public consultation process is required.*
2. ***Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas****. Again, highly sensitive landscape designations are usually part of a county's Landscape Character Assessment, which is then incorporated within the County Development Plan and is therefore subject to the public consultation process. Viewers within such areas are likely to be highly attuned to the landscape around them.*
3. ***Primary views from dwellings****. A proposed development might be seen from anywhere within a particular residential property with varying degrees of sensitivity. Therefore,*

this category is reserved for those instances in which the design of dwellings or housing estates, has been influenced by the desire to take in a particular view. This might involve the use of a slope or the specific orientation of a house and/or its internal social rooms and exterior spaces.

4. ***Intensity of use, popularity**. This relates to the number of viewers likely to experience a view on a regular basis and whether this is significant at county or regional scale*
5. ***Provision of elevated panoramic views**. This relates to the extent of the view on offer and the tendency for receptors to become more attuned to the surrounding landscape at locations that afford broad vistas.*
6. ***Sense of remoteness and/or tranquillity.** Receptors taking in a remote and tranquil scene, which is likely to be fairly static, are likely to be more receptive to changes in the view than those taking in the view of a busy street scene, for example.*
7. ***Degree of perceived naturalness**. Where a view is valued for the sense of naturalness of the surrounding landscape it is likely to be highly sensitive to visual intrusion by distinctly manmade features.*
8. ***Presence of striking or noteworthy features.** A view might be strongly valued because it contains a distinctive and memorable landscape feature such as a promontory headland, lough or castle.*
9. ***Historical, cultural and / or spiritual significance.** Such attributes may be evident or sensed by receptors at certain viewing locations, which may attract visitors for the purposes of contemplation or reflection heightening the sense of their surroundings.*
10. ***Rarity or uniqueness of the view**. This might include the noteworthy representativeness of a certain landscape type and considers whether the receptor could take in similar views anywhere in the broader region or the country.*
11. ***Integrity of the landscape character**. This looks at the condition and intactness of the landscape in view and whether the landscape pattern is a regular one of few strongly related components or an irregular one containing a variety of disparate components.*
12. ***Sense of place**. This considers whether there is special sense of wholeness and harmony at the viewing location; and*
13. ***Sense of awe**. This considers whether the view inspires an overwhelming sense of scale or the power of nature.*

The same categories of sensitivity used for seascape / landscape sensitivity in Table 16-3 (Very High down to Negligible) are also used to classify visual receptor sensitivity. Those locations which are deemed to satisfy many of the above viewer susceptibility and view value criteria are likely to be of higher sensitivity, whilst those that satisfy few of those criteria are likely to be considered of a lower overall sensitivity. No relative importance is inferred by the order of listing. Overall sensitivity may be a result of a number of these factors or, alternatively, a strong association with one or two in particular (see Table 16-5).

Table 16-5 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Viewer Susceptibility	View Value
Very High	Viewers who have sought out a particular view due to its remarkable scenic qualities and who are likely engaged in active or passive recreation. Minimal tolerance for change.	Unique views of remarkable scenic quality involving distinct, naturalistic or historic features that are designated for protection and/or obtained from landscapes / seascapes protected by policy at a national or international level. Minimal tolerance for change.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Viewer Susceptibility	View Value
High	Viewers travelling on designated scenic routes or engaged on active or passive recreation where views of the surrounding landscape / seascape are important to the experience and residents of areas where views contribute to the landscape / seascape setting. Low tolerance for change.	Views of considerable scenic quality involving distinct, naturalistic or historic features that are designated for protection and/or obtained from landscapes / seascapes protected by policy at a Regional / County level. Low tolerance for change.
Medium	Viewers travelling on routes that have some scenic quality or sense of tranquillity. Recreationalists engaged in activities where scenic amenity is appreciated, but not key to the experience and residents of areas where views do not contribute strongly to the landscape / seascape setting. Medium tolerance for change.	Views with some scenic quality that might involve notable, naturalistic or historic features that are not designated for protection and are not obtained from landscapes / seascapes identified for protection. Medium tolerance for change.
Low	Viewers engaged in recreation that does not involve an appreciation of scenic amenity, those travelling on busy roads with little scenic quality within the surrounding landscape / seascape setting. People at their place of work where visual setting in not key to the working experience. High tolerance for change.	Views without recognised scenic quality that are typical in nature and without naturalistic and historic features present, but likely with utilitarian features present. High tolerance for change.
Negligible	Viewers engaged in activities or present at locations where visual amenity is not a consideration or where the visual setting is a detraction. High tolerance for change.	Views without any amenity value where the visual setting may be degraded. High tolerance for change.

16.4.3.4 Representative Viewpoint Selection

The results of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV – described in Section 16.6.1) analysis provide a basis for the selection of representative viewpoints also known as Viewshed Reference Points (VRPs), which are the locations used to study the visual impact of the Project features from sensitive visual receptor locations.

GLVIA3 suggests that to include each and every location that provides a potential view of a proposed Project would result in an unwieldy assessment and make it extremely difficult to draw out the key impacts arising from the Project. Instead, a variety of visual receptor locations are selected that are likely to provide views of the OAA from different distances, different angles and different contexts whilst representing sensitive visual receptors (viewers/ groups resident at particular locations or engaged in particular activities). Occasionally VRPs at highly sensitive receptors are included where visibility of the OAA is highly unlikely in order to confirm the absence of impact. In accordance with GLVIA3, these are defined as 'illustrative' views.

The visual impact of a Project is assessed using up to 6 categories of receptor type as listed below:

- Key Views (from features of national or international importance);
- Designated Scenic Routes and Views;
- Local Community views;
- Centres of Population;
- Major Routes; and
- Amenity, heritage and tourism features.

Where a VRP might have been initially selected for more than one reason it will be assessed according to the primary criterion for which it was chosen. The characteristics of each receptor type vary as does the way in which the view is experienced. These are described below.

Key Views

These VRPs are at features or locations that are significant at the national or even international level, typically in terms of heritage, recreation or tourism. They are locations that attract a significant number of viewers who are likely to be in a reflective or recreational frame of mind, possibly increasing their appreciation of the landscape around them. The location of this receptor type is usually quite specific.

Designated Scenic Routes and Views

Due to their identification in the County Development Plan, this type of VRP location represents a general policy consensus on locations of high scenic value within the SLVIA Study Area. These are commonly elevated, long distance, panoramic views and may or may not be mapped from precise locations. They are more likely to be experienced by static viewers who seek out or stop to take in such vistas.

Local Community Views

This type of VRP represents those people who live and/or work in the locality of a Project, usually within a 5km radius of proposed turbines in an onshore wind farm scenario. However, this is not a defined distance and in the context of the Project can be extended to include those that live in the nearest coastal communities within approximately 5-10km of the OAA. Although the VRPs are generally located on local level roads, they also represent similar views that may be available from adjacent houses. The precise location of this VRP type is not determinative; however, clear elevated views are preferred, particularly when closely associated with a cluster of houses and representing their primary views. Coverage of a range of viewing angles using several VRPs is necessary in order to sample the spectrum of views that would be available from surrounding sensitive receptors.

Centres of Population

VRPs are selected at centres of population primarily due to the number of viewers that are likely to experience that view. The relevance of the settlement is based on the significance of its size in terms of the SLVIA Study Area or its proximity to the OAA. The VRP may be selected from any location within the public domain that provides a clear view either within the settlement or in close proximity to it.

Major Routes

These include national and regional level roads and rail lines and are relevant VRP locations due to the number of viewers potentially impacted by the Project.

The precise location of this category of VRP is not critical and might be chosen anywhere along the route that provides clear views towards the Offshore Site, but with a preference towards close and/or elevated views. Major routes typically provide views experienced whilst in motion and these may be fleeting and intermittent depending on screening by intervening vegetation or buildings.

Tourism, Recreational and Heritage Features

These views are often one and the same given that heritage locations can be important tourist and visitor destinations and amenity areas or walking routes are commonly designed to incorporate heritage features. Such locations or routes tend to be sensitive to development within the landscape as viewers are likely to be in a receptive frame of mind with respect to the landscape around them. The sensitivity of this type of visual receptor is strongly related to the number of visitors they might attract and, in the case of heritage features, whether these are discerning experts or lay tourists. Sensitivity is also heavily influenced by the experience of the viewer at a heritage site as distinct from simply the view of it. This is a complex phenomenon that is likely to be different for every site. Experiential considerations might relate to the sequential approach to a castle from the car park or the view from a hilltop monument reached after a demanding climb. It might also relate to the influence of contemporary features within a key view and whether these detract from a sense of past times. It must also be noted that the sensitivity rating attributed to a heritage feature for the purposes of a landscape and visual assessment is not synonymous with its importance to the Archaeological or Architectural Heritage record (see Chapter 17 Marine Archaeology and Cultural Heritage).

16.4.3.5 Visual Impact Magnitude

The criteria used to assess visual impact magnitude are included in Table 16-6.

Table 16-6: Magnitude of Visual Impact

Magnitude of Impact	Description
Very High	The proposal obstructs or intrudes into a large proportion or critical part of the available vista and is without question the most noticeable element. An extensive degree of visual change will occur within the scene completely altering its character, composition and associated visual amenity
High	The proposal obstructs or intrudes into a significant proportion or important part of the available vista and is one of the most noticeable elements. A considerable degree of visual change will occur within the scene substantially altering its character, composition and associated visual amenity
Medium	The proposal represents a moderate intrusion into the available vista and is a readily noticeable element. A noticeable degree of visual change will occur within the scene perceptibly altering its character, composition and associated visual amenity
Low	The proposal intrudes to a minor extent into the available vista and may not be noticed by a casual observer and/or the proposal would not have a marked effect on the visual amenity of the scene
Negligible	The proposal would be barely discernible within the available vista and/or it would not influence the visual amenity of the scene

The assessment of visual impacts at each of the selected viewpoints is aided by spatially accurate wireframe images and photomontages that have been produced in accordance with Scottish Natural

Heritage (SNH) Visual representation of wind farms: Best Practice Guidelines (version 2.2 - 2017). The presented images for each viewpoint (Volume 7B of the EIAR) include;

1. *Existing View (Contextual 90° included angle)*
2. *Wireframe view - proposed and cumulative turbines (Contextual 90° included angle)*
3. *Montage View (Contextual 90° included angle)*
4. *Wireframe view (53.5° included angle)*
5. *Montage View (53.5° included angle)*

NatureScot guidance is used for the production of verifiable photomontages because it is specifically developed for Wind Energy developments and has become the industry standard for onshore and offshore wind farms in the UK and Ireland

16.4.3.6 Significance of Seascape/Landscape and Visual Effects

The significance of both a seascape/landscape effect and a visual effect is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the seascape/landscape receptor and the magnitude of the impact. The significance of seascape/landscape impacts is arrived at using the following matrix (Table 16-7):

Table 16-7: Seascape / Landscape and Visual Matrix

Parameter	Sensitivity of Receptor				
Scale / Magnitude	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Very High	Profound	Profound-major	Major	Moderate	Slight
High	Profound-major	Major	Major - moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight-imperceptible
Medium	Major	Major - moderate	Moderate	Slight	Imperceptible
Low	Moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible
Negligible	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible

** Shaded cells are considered to equate with 'significant' impacts in EIA terms where that impact is also deemed to be of a 'Negative' quality.*

It is important to note that the significance matrix (Table 16-8) is only a framework within which the experienced professional judgment of the Landscape Specialist is applied. The assessment of significance may be marginally higher or lower than indicated by the matrix where professional judgement is employed. This is generally in instances where it is not deemed appropriate to alter either of the constituent sensitivity or magnitude judgements, but their combination is resulting in a significance of effect that is deemed to be higher or lower than would be otherwise dictated by the matrix.

Table 16-8: Indicative significance of effect criteria descriptions

Magnitude of Impact	Landscape	Visual
Profound	There are notable changes in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or a very intensive change over a more limited area.	The view is entirely altered, obscured or affected.
Substantial	An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the landscape. There are notable changes in landscape characteristics over a substantial area or an intensive change over a more limited area.	An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the visual environment. The proposal affects a large proportion of the overall visual composition, or views are so affected that they form a new element in the physical landscape.
Moderate	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends. There are minor changes over some of the area or moderate changes in a localised area.	An effect that alters the character of the visual environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging trends. The proposal affects an appreciable segment of the overall visual composition, or there is an intrusion in the foreground of a view.
Slight	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the landscape without affecting its sensitivities. There are minor changes over a small proportion of the area or moderate changes in a localised area or changes that are reparable over time.	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the visual environment without affecting its sensitivities. The affected view forms only a small element in the overall visual composition or changes the view in a marginal manner.
Imperceptible	An effect capable of measurement but without noticeable consequences. There are no noticeable changes to landscape context, character or features.	An effect capable of measurement but without noticeable consequences. Although the development may be visible, it would be difficult to discern resulting in minimal change to views.

16.4.3.7 Quality and Timescale of Effects

In addition to assessing the significance of landscape effects and visual effects, the EPA Guidelines requires that the quality of the effects is also determined. This could be negative/adverse, neutral, or positive/beneficial. In the case of new energy / infrastructure developments within coastal and rural settings, the seascape/landscape and visual change brought about by an increased scale and intensity of built form is not traditionally considered to be positive / beneficial.

Landscape and Visual effects are also categorised according to their duration:

- Temporary – Lasting for one year or less
- Short Term – Lasting one to seven years
- Medium Term – Lasting seven to fifteen years
- Long Term – Lasting fifteen years to sixty years; and

- Permanent – Lasting over sixty years

16.4.3.8 Assessment of Cumulative Effects

The NatureScot Offshore Renewables – Guidance on assessing the impact on coastal landscape and seascape, Guidance for Scoping an Environmental Statement (SNH, 2012) identifies that Cumulative Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be carried out with reference to the GLVIA-2013 and to SNH guidance Cumulative Effect of Windfarms 2005 (now updated to 2012), which set out the background for this aspect of assessment - "*Although initially compiled in response to onshore windfarm developments, the basic assessment methodology is the same".*

A key consideration in the Guidance is the nature of cumulative visibility as described below;

'Combined visibility occurs where the observer is able to see two or more developments from one viewpoint. Combined visibility may either be in combination (where several wind farms are within the observer's arc of vision at the same time) or in succession (where the observer has to turn to see the various wind farms).

Sequential effects occur when the observer has to move to another viewpoint to see different developments. The occurrence of sequential effects may range from frequently sequential (the features appear regularly and with short time lapses between, depending on speed of travel and distance between the viewpoints) to occasionally sequential (long time lapses between appearances, because the observer is moving very slowly and / or there are large distances between the viewpoints.)'

The GLVIA (2013) define cumulative landscape and visual effects as those that 'result from additional changes to the landscape and visual amenity caused by the proposal in conjunction with other developments (associated with or separate to it), or actions that occurred in the past, present or are likely to occur in the foreseeable future.' In this instance cumulative effects could occur between the various Project elements, both onshore and offshore and throughout the construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning phases of the development in a whole Project scenario. Cumulative effects could also occur in relation to other existing, permitted or planned developments both onshore and offshore. Whereas the relationship with other existing projects is captured within the main assessment as part of the baseline context, future permitted or proposed developments will be the focus of the cumulative effects assessment herein.

The principal focus of offshore cumulative effects assessment is generally the relationship between the OAA and other planned (priority) offshore wind energy developments for which indicative design details have been published within the SLVIA Study Area (60km radius). Key considerations are;

- The location of the proposed OAA relative to other cumulative arrays
- The extent of developed sea horizon from the combined arrays
- The number of other visible arrays and their relative distance / scale, viewing angle, lateral extent and layouts configuration.
- Relative Seascape context

In this instance, there are no other planned or permitted offshore wind energy developments within the SLVIA Study Area and thus, the main consideration will be cumulative effects with other onshore wind energy developments.

16.5 Baseline Conditions

16.5.1 Seascape / Landscape Baseline

The OAA is predominantly located on the landward side of the Sceirde Rocks formation which lies to the southwest of the complex Connemara coastline of rocky shorelines and a labyrinth of islands and inlets, which extend well over 10km inland in some areas. The closest part of the OAA is also around 12km to the northwest of Inishmore, which is the northernmost of the Aran Islands occupying the mouth of Galway Bay. In combination with Inishmore to the southeast, the Connemara coastline serves to wrap around the OAA to the north so that the open seaward horizon only extends to about 180 degrees in the southwestern quarters. There are a number of coastal promontory hills which punctuate the otherwise low-lying coastline and coastal bogs.

Notwithstanding the considerable length of coastline that is proximal and indeed envelopes the OAA to the northeast, there is relatively sparse and dispersed population inhabiting this area, which tends to be served by narrow local roads and causeways that link each island to the mainland. Views tend to be quite enclosed with surprisingly few opportunities for open seaward views. It is, however, a distinct section of coastline associated with the nostalgic landscape of Connemara, which is popular with tourists and holiday makers and traversed by the Wild Atlantic Way tourist driving route. Though not a specific visual receptor, it is important to acknowledge the Galway Gaeltacht, described in the Galway CDP as *"the single largest and most populated Gaeltacht area in the country, occupies much of Coastal Galway, with most of that population being concentrated close to the shore, both as dispersed housing and as a number of smaller settlements. The landscape is the context for nationally significant concentrations of place-names, folklore, craft and literary associations"*.

Inland from the complex coastline is a broad area of coastal bog interspersed with lakes which transitions seamlessly from the enclosed sea inlets closer to the coast. The coastal bog is enclosed further inland by the Connemara Mountains, which sweep up steeply to form a dramatic backdrop and containment to the Connemara coastal context. Further east is a less remarkable upland area that lies between the south Connemara coastline and Lough Corrib. This upland area is defined by undulating hills of marginal grazing, vast conifer plantations, the Galway Wind Park and a sparse population.

The outer eastern portion of the SLVIA Study Area is dominated by Galway Bay which on its northern side has a gentle transition from a coastline of rocky outcrops and sandy beaches to uplands of blanket bog, marginal grazing, forestry and wind farms. The southern side of Galway Bay is defined by the more dramatic and iconic limestone area of the Burren with its distinctive promontory headland of Blackhead. Further southwest is an equally dramatic and iconic sequence of sea cliffs, which include the renowned tourist attraction of the Cliffs of Moher.

Slyne Head perceptually divides the northern Connemara coastline from its central and southern reaches. Beyond Slyne Head to the north is a series of prominent peninsulas and headlands, as well as an indented coastline of rocky outcrops and sandy inlets. Further off the coast are the notable islands of Inisbofin, Inisturk and Clare Island. The northern Connemara coastline is divided from County Mayo by the steep and narrow Killary Harbour which is one of few coastal fjords to be found around Ireland's coastline.

Plate 16-2 Exposed section of the Connemara coastline

Plate 16-3 Enclosed section of the Connemara coastline

Plate 16-4 View from the Connemara Mountains (Twelve Bens) overlooking the Connemara coastal bog and complex coastline.

Plate 16-5 View across a flaggy shore from the Aran Islands towards the Connemara coastline backed by the Connemara Mountains.

In this instance the evaluation of baseline conditions for the landscape and seascape context is informed by pre-existing character assessments. These include the Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland (2020) and the Galway Landscape Character Assessment contained within the Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028).

16.5.1.1 Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland (2020)

The Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland was produced in 2020 by the Department of the Marine. This divides the country's seascapes into 13 Seascape Character Types (SCT). These *"are distinct types of seascapes that are relatively homogeneous in character..." "...may occur in different locations but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, bathymetry, ecology, human influences and perceptual and aesthetic attributes"*.

The majority of the coastline adjacent to the OAA is identified as being Seascape Character Type (SCT) 5 – *'Complex metamorphic & igneous indented coastline small bays & small islands'*. There are also offshore islands to the north (Inisbofin and Inishark) and south (Aran Islands) that are substantial enough to fall into STC 11 – Large Islands'. Galway Bay is largely contained in its own SCT 1- '*Large limestone Bay with low-lying / undulating hinterland & coastal wetlands'*. Killary Harbour, in the northern portion of the SLVIA Study Area, is one of few seascapes contained in SCT 3 – *'Sea Lough / Fjord with raised hinterland'*. Finally, the very southern extents of the SLVIA Study Area encompass SCT 6 – *'High Granite/ Sandstone Cliffs & Plateau'* (See Figure 16-2).

The most relevant of the SCTs identified above, based on physical distance and intervisibility with the OAA, as identified by the ZTV map (Figure 16-9 in Appenidx 16-2), is SCT 5. This SCT is described in terms of Key Drivers;

- Diverse geology comprising metamorphic and igneous rocks.
- Complex coastline. Shallow inlets.
- Numerous small bays and islands.
- Lowlying landform often framed by mountains.
- Beaches and inlets vary between white sandy shores or rocky, indented inlets

... and key Characteristics;

- Indented and diverse SCT that reflects geological variety and influences.
- This SCT comprises a large number of islands, often very close to the shore but also larger Islands such as Achill.
- Sand dunes, and sand beaches are a common feature, interspersed with more rugged, indented, rocky shorelines with green and brown seaweed.
- Frequently quite low lying though mountain ranges frame the hinterland views, particularly the Nephin, Sheeffry, and Twelve Bens mountains.
- The complex seascape includes numerous bays that offer shelter and comprise usually small settlements around piers or harbours.
- Views range from exposed ocean views of the Atlantic along the western coastal fringe to more intimate, diverse views associated with the south and east facing shorelines and indented coast.

In addition to generic Seascape Character Types, the Regional Seascape Character Assessment (2020) also identifies geographically specific Seascape Character Areas (SCA). These are described as;

> *"A unique geographical area of land, intertidal and marine area with a recognisable sense of place and identity.*
>
> *Seascape Character Areas provide a good framework within which to draw out patterns of local distinctiveness and those factors influencing sense of place. They can be used to develop more tailored policies or strategies, reflecting the things that make a particular area of seascape different, distinctive or special. SCAs may also be more recognisable and identifiable for non-specialists (e.g. local communities)"*

The two most relevant SCA in this instance are SCA 5 'Atlantic North Mayo & Galway' and SCA 6 'Atlantic Galway Bay and Islands'. Whilst a sea portion of SCA 7 'Atlantic Clare Cliffs' is also contained in the distant southern portion of the SLVIA Study Area, due to vast distance and general westerly to south-westerly orientation of the coastline, it is not considered relevant and is not considered further for the purposes of this assessment.

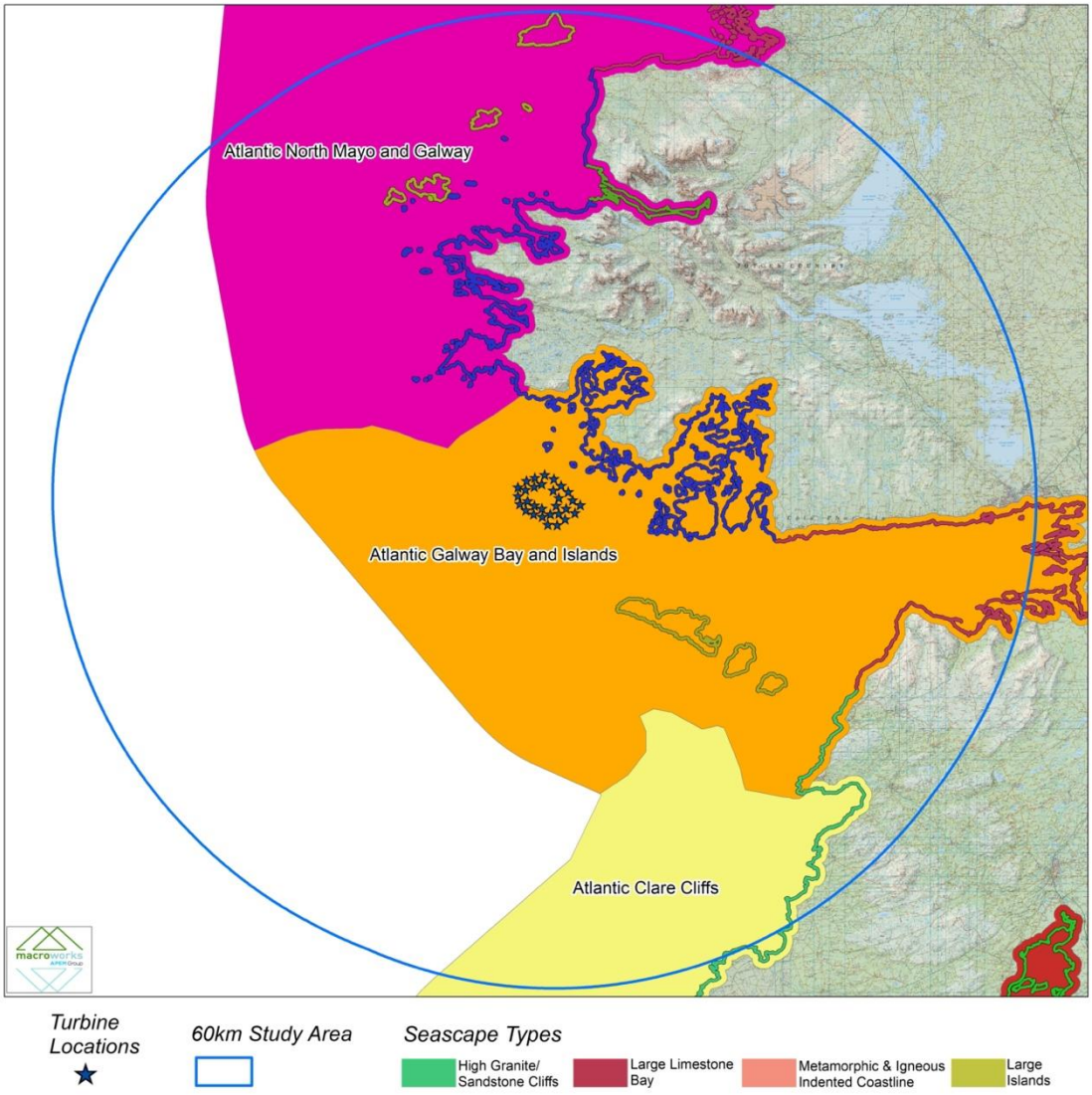


Figure 16-2 Relevant Seascape Character Types and Seascape Character Areas from Regional Seascape Character Area Assessment for Ireland (2020)

16.5.1.1.1 SCA 6 - Atlantic Galway Bay and Islands

The northern portion of SCA 6 - Atlantic Galway Bay and Islands is the host SCA in this instance and is described in the following manner in the Regional Seascape Character Assessment;

> *A large limestone bay (Galway Bay) is framed by two distinctive and very different coastlines, north (Connemara) and South (Burren); this SCA extends to encompass the Aran Islands. A coherent SCA, there is considerable diversity associated with it, due to the changing geology, influence of the ocean and the presence of Galway city at the mouth of the River Corrib. The north-western part the SCA is characterised by Slyne Head, itself an island formed from a series of fragmented islets and rocks extended southwest from a peninsula that is bounded by Mannin Bay to the north and Ballyconneely Bay to the south. The coastline retains the rugged, extremely indented character associated with SCA 4 with rocky shorelines clad in brown seaweeds, intertidal zones, smaller headlands, numerous inshore islands, some of which are connected by bridges/roads such as Lettermore , Goruma, and Mweenish Islands. East of Inverin this coastline becomes more regular and no bays are present until closer to Galway; though numerous quays occur. At this stage Galway City and Docks influence the coastal*

seascape and can be seen across the bay from Tawin Island and the Flaggy Shore on the Clare coast.

The limestone becomes more visible on the Clare coastline and the classic karst scenery becomes increasingly dominant further west with the limestone hills of Turlough Hill, Moneen Mountain and Gleninagh visible across the bay. The escarpment and limestone pavement increasingly hugs the coast after Ballyvaughan Bay and at Blackhead Co. Clare the character becomes more exposed with strong Atlantic winds and waves; however the view retains the islands of Aran at the horizon ...

... The Cliffs of Moher form the southern part of this SCA and comprise high sandstone/metasedimentary cliffs and plateaus, similar to the coast nearer Loop Head and Sliabh Leagues in Co. Donegal. This [sic] are very well known and promoted with a popular visitor centre, and coastal walk.

Art and literature have strong links to this SCA, the Aran islands and Galway Bay as well as the landscapes of Connemara and the Burren having inspired a significant number of writers ....

The presence and influence of the sea on the landscape is largely consistent within this SCA; the network of minor roads and connectivity to islands, the frequently long coastal views allows for almost constant views to the sea and across Galway Bay. Closer to Galway City the visual aspect of the seascape character becomes less expansive.

Relevant key characteristics of SCA 6 include;

- *Broad sweeping bay with diverse and iconic coastline*
- *... a number of inshore islands particularly associated with Connemara coastline, connected with many of the causeways and bridges joining the islands of Lettermullan built between 1886 -1891*
- *Tourism and particularly strong associations with art and folk music and seafood are identified for this SCA.*
- *Distinctive boating tradition of the Galway hookers as well as particular fishing communities associated with this area*
- *The density of islands, islets and skerries/carraigs provides a particular character concentrated on the northern part of this SCA but also present around Blackhead Bay*
- *Principal towns include Roundstone, Carna, Carraroe, Galway, Oranmore, Kinvara and Ballvaughan, sited to take advantage and provide haven from the Atlantic*
- *The coastal hinterland varies from the exposed peninsula around Slyne Head, to rocky indented shorelines with small harbours, urban and industrial landuse around Galway City and Docks and the limestone coastal shelf and pavement of the Burren*

In terms of cultural and historic influences, this SCA has evidence of human habitation for millennia with some of the most overt being the coastal promontory fort of Dun Aonghasa on the island of Inis Mor as well as ecclesiastical sites including monasteries on some of the islands which served as places of Pilgrimage.

Views and vistas are an important aspect of the seascape character of SCA 6 and descriptions include;

- *Views of land and the Aran Islands often frame the horizon and again the level of detail and variation is highly dependent on weather conditions and visibility.*
- *Views from the Slyne Head westwards along the indented coastline and islands is smaller in scale and the numerous small headlands, bays, and predominantly rocky shores provide for a diverse, interesting aspect; The low-lying topography means*

views are often at, or close to, sea level with a horizontal character to the scene, and the eye drawn to the detail at, or close to, the shoreline. The numerous nearshore islands and indented coast enable some perception of scale and distance to sea views. Their frequent proximity to the shore and visibility can create a more intimate seascape view.

In terms of 'Sense of Place' SCA 6 includes some of the following descriptions;

- *This SCA has a strong sense of place; the relationship and connections to the Bay and thereafter the Aran Islands and sea is a long historical connection, reflected in place names and cultural ties between the Aran Islands and both coasts*
- *A remote and wilder character, creating by greater exposure to the elements is found around Slyne Head and past Blackhead where the bay opens up and the power of the ocean is very present*
- *The Aran Islands essentially protect Galway Bay from some of the force of the Atlantic and the islands themselves have a significant influence on perceptions of place; being variously seen as at the edge of the World, with a strong tradition of Gaelic identity*
- *The numerous islands and close connections between the islands and coastline has created a distinctive identity and cultural associations in this SCA*

16.5.1.1.2 SCA 5 - Atlantic North Mayo & Galway

The southern boundary of SCA 5 is around 15km to the north of the OAA and the southern portion of the SCA, below Inishbofin and Killary Harbour is within the SLVIA Study Area and considered relevant in this instance. The relevant aspects of SCA 5 - Atlantic North Mayo & Galway are described in the following manner in the Regional Seascape Character Assessment;

This SCA includes some of the best known and iconic coasts and seascapes of Ireland. There is a broad consistency of coast and seascape character across this SCA. Seascapes are frequently framed by mountains that creates a highly scenic views, reflected this area's popularity for recreation and tourism.

The predominant Seascape Character Type is SCT 5 (Complex metamorphic and igneous indented coastline, small bays and small islands). This comprises the western coastline from Slyne Head, West Connemara and extends northwards to Belmullet. This creates a varied seascape, frequently quite close to sea level and comprising a distinctive rocky shoreline and inter tidal zone, interspersed with generally small sandy beaches. Islands contribute to seascape character; many small islands are present close to shore, as well as more substantial islands such as Achill and Clare Islands...

.... The area around Slyne Head at Ballinaleama retains a relatively remote and exposed character, due to the elevated landform and plateau. Slyne Head itself being the largest and most westerly of a cluster of islands off this peninsula.

The presence and influence of the sea on the landscape is diverse within this SCA; the low-lying parts of the Mayo area such as eastern Achill, Mulranny, Ballycroy and Belmullet comprise a close visual link to the sea with small sandbars and beaches present and the interplay of tidal sea inlets a relatively frequent occurrence, particularly around Ballycroy. This alters with more exposed parts particularly those facing west where the full power of the Atlantic again comes to the fore.

Views likewise vary from the views frequently framed by headlands associated with the eastern bays, and expansive sea and sky views with panoramas of the ocean from the exposed heads and cliffs facing west and north

16.5.2 Policy Context

In this instance the key policy context includes the National Marine Planning Framework (2021) as an overarching document, followed by policies and designations of the Galway County Development Plan. The Clare County Development plan is also relevant, but to a lesser extent due to the large separation distances to the Clare Coastline (>42km) from the OAA. The Mayo County Development Plan has little relevance due to distance and lack of intervisibility.

16.5.2.1 National Marine Policy Framework

The NMPF includes one Seascape and Landscape Policy as set out below;

Seascape and Landscape Policy 1 - Proposals should demonstrate how the likely significant impacts of a development on the seascape and landscape of an area have been considered. Proposals will only be supported if they demonstrate that they, in order of preference:

a) avoid

b) minimise, or

c) mitigate

significant adverse impacts on the seascape and landscape of the area.

d) If it is not possible to mitigate significant adverse impacts, proposals must set out the reasons for proceeding.

This policy should be included as part of statutory environmental assessments.

NMPF Seascape and Landscape Policy 1 is addressed in the context of this assessment in Section 16.7 in the context of the assessment of potential significant effects and mitigation and monitoring measures.

16.5.2.2 Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028)

The Galway County Development Plan (2002-2028) contains a landscape character assessment. The associated Landscape Character Type (LCT) map identifies that the most relevant LCTs are 'Coastal Landscape' covering the Connemara coastline and northern side of Galway Bay with the 'Uplands and Bog Landscape' further inland. The other relevant LCT is 'Island Landscape' covering the Aran Islands (see Figure16-3). Although the 'Lake Environs' LCT is also contained within the SLVIA Study Area, it is concentrated around Lough Corrib, well over 30km from the OWF and with no material visibility indicated by the ZTV map. The LCTs are further broken down into Landscape Character Areas (LCA), and the most relevant coastal landscape in this instance is divided into five such units; Connemara Coastal Islands; Connemara Sea Loughs; Hard Shore Coastal; Soft Shore Coastal; Cois Fharriage. The Island Landscape type is divided between the Oileáin Árainn and Inishbofin LCAs (see Figure16-5). Relevant inland LCAs are shown in Figure 16-4.

In terms of landscape sensitivity, the Connemara coastline and coastal bog area is identified as being 'Class 3 – Special' – the second highest of four categories. The Aran Islands are identified as being in the highest category; 'Class 4 - Iconic'. The broad upland bog landscape to the north of Spiddal is assigned the second lowest landscape sensitivity class, but this is still classified as 'Class 2 - High'. Notably, there is not a medium classification and the Class 1 landscapes are deemed to be of Low sensitivity. This is just an observation in terms of the upward weighting of the classification system, as there are no Class 1 landscapes contained within the SLVIA Study Area.

Seascape is also covered in the Galway County Landscape Character Assessment. This tends to deal with the coastal environment in terms of the degree of enclosure / openness by identifying the various zones from Offshore to Enclosed Sea Loughs. The OAA straddles the boundary between the 'Open Coast' and 'Offshore' seascape zones. Whilst the various vulnerabilities / sensitivities / robustness of these zones is discussed, there are no specific seascape sensitivity designations beyond those associated with the overriding Landscape Character Assessment (See Figure 16-6)

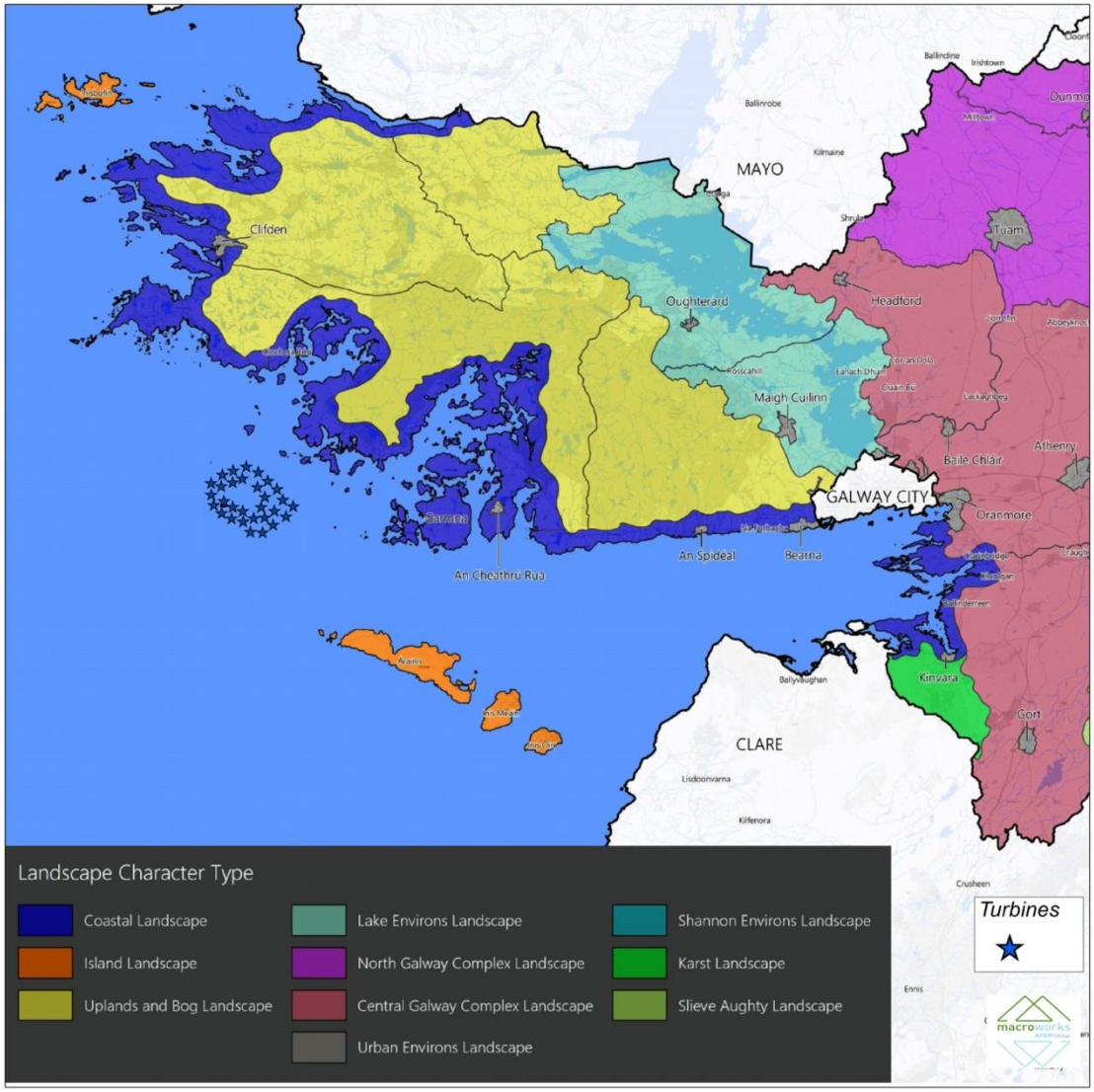
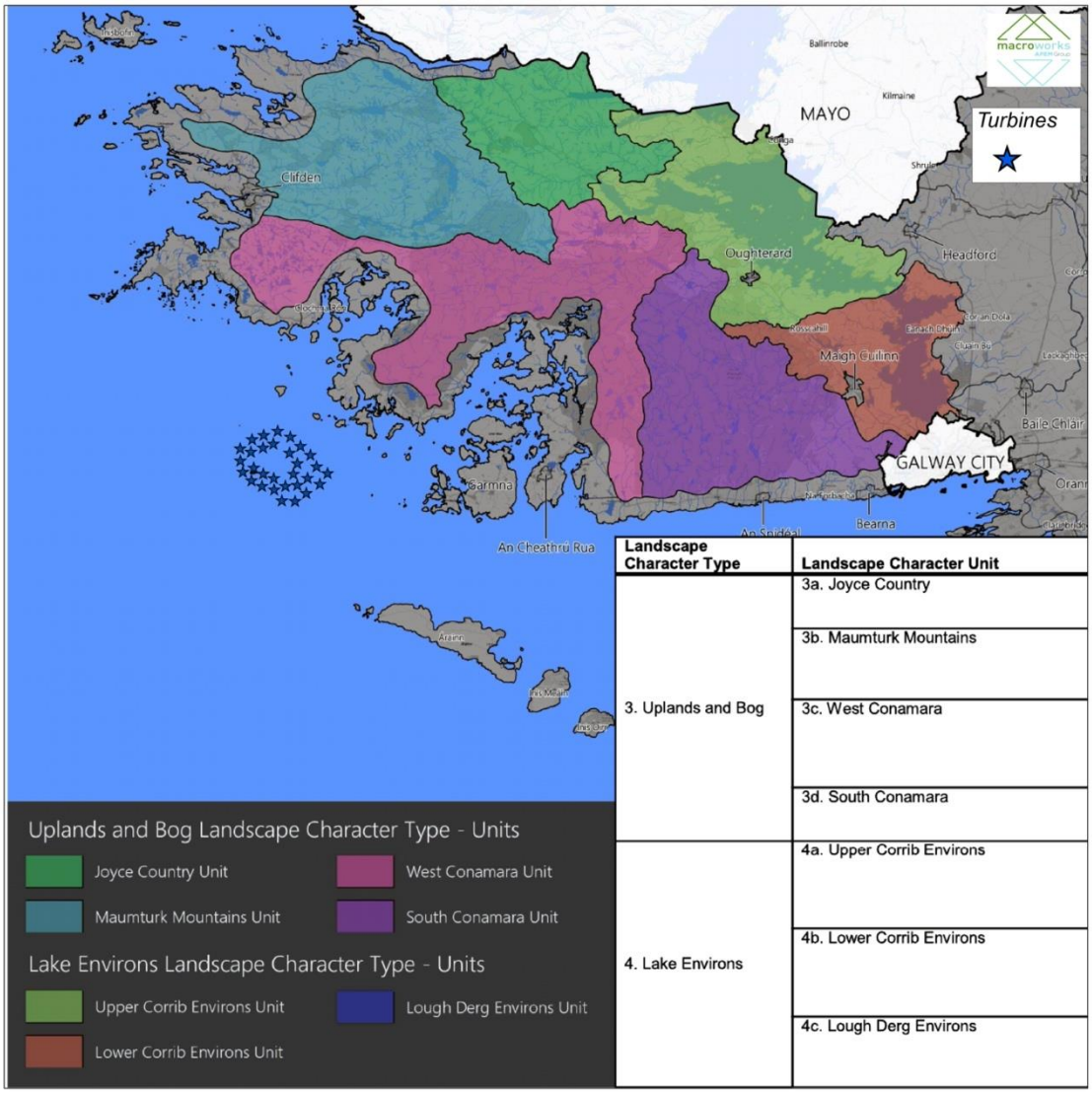


Figure 16-3 Landscape Character Types from Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028)



Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Unit
3. Uplands and Bog	3a. Joyce Country
	3b. Maumturk Mountains
	3c. West Conamara
	3d. South Conamara
4. Lake Environs	4a. Upper Corrib Environs
	4b. Lower Corrib Environs
	4c. Lough Derg Environs

Figure 16-4 Landscape Character Units from Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028)

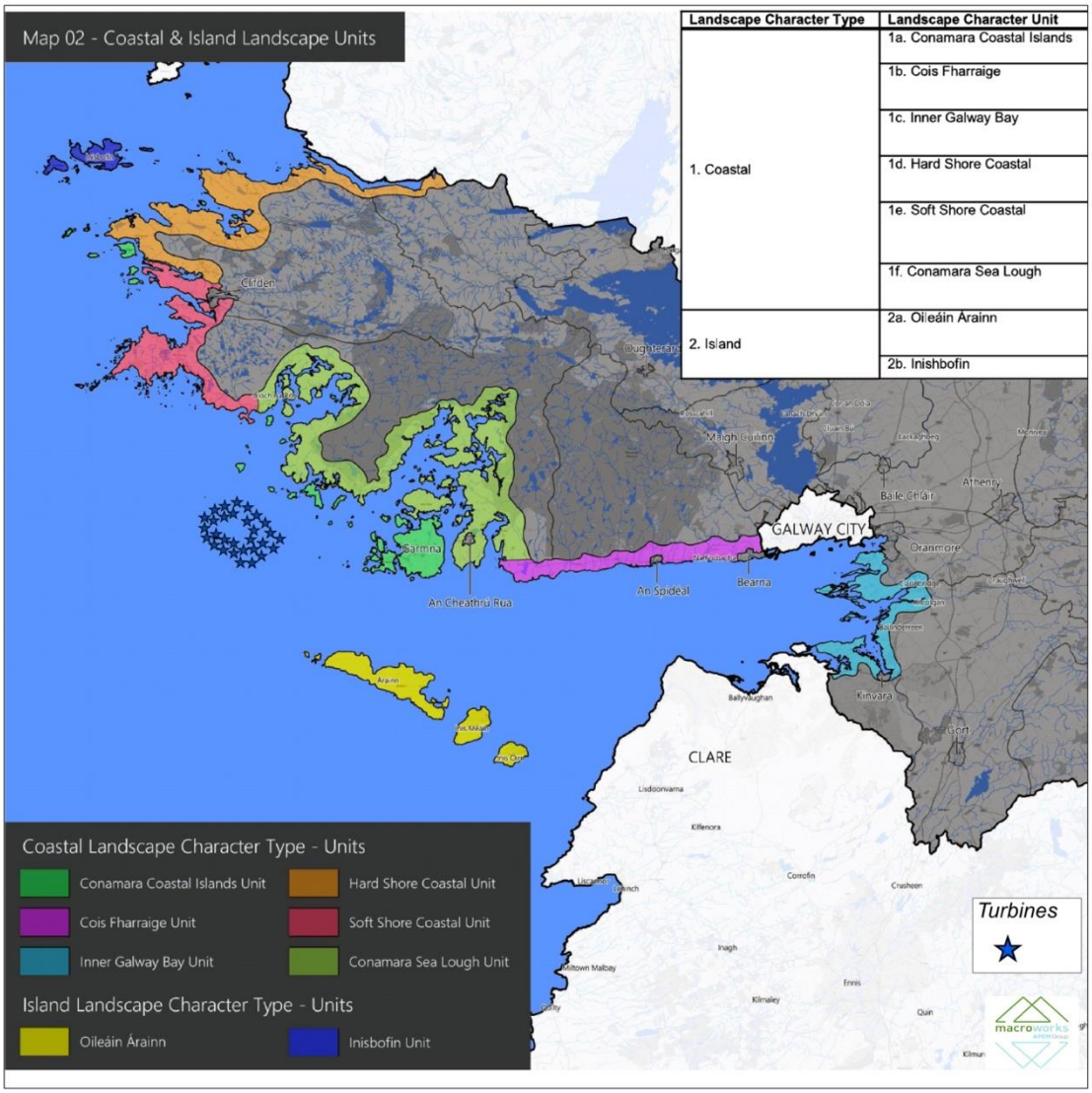


Figure 16-5 Seascape Areas from Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028)

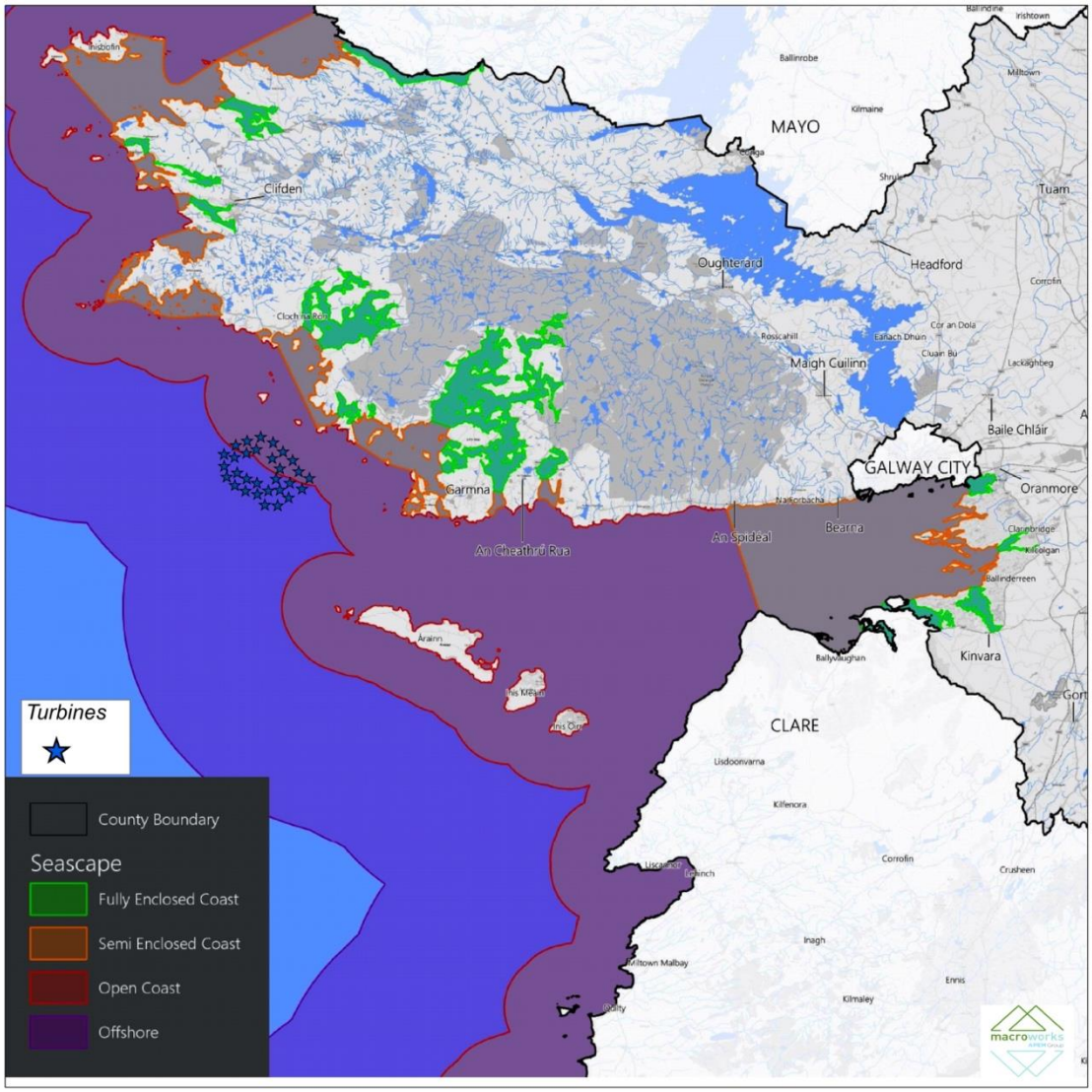


Figure 16-6 Seascape Areas from Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028)

In terms of scenic designations, the Galway County Development Plan contains both designated scenic routes and designated scenic views. The most relevant scenic route is the 'Maritime Scenic Route' which follows a series of coastal roads around the peninsulas of the Connemara coastline. There is also the Galway Bay Scenic Route that follows the northern side of Galway Bay, but views across the bay are southwards rather than westwards in the direction of the OAA and this is only contained in sporadic ZTV pattern indicating very limited potential for visibility. Further inland is the Galway to Clifden Scenic Route. The Lough Corrib Scenic Route also follows the Galway to Clifden Scenic route for its eastern section before veering north at Maam Cross. Neither of these scenic routes are contained within ZTV pattern, indicating no potential for visibility of the OAA.

There are a number of scenic views identified within the Galway County Development Plan that are potentially relevant to this assessment. These include;

- VP1 Omey Island
- VP2 Bunowen Bay
- VP3 Sky Road
- VP4 Alcock and Brown Memorial
- VP5 Derrigimlagh Bog
- VP8 Gorteen bay

- VP10 Cloch na Ron
- VP12 Coonisle Quay
- VP13 Glynsce Pier
- VP18 Droichead Charraig an Logáin, Leitir Móir
- VP19 Coral Strand

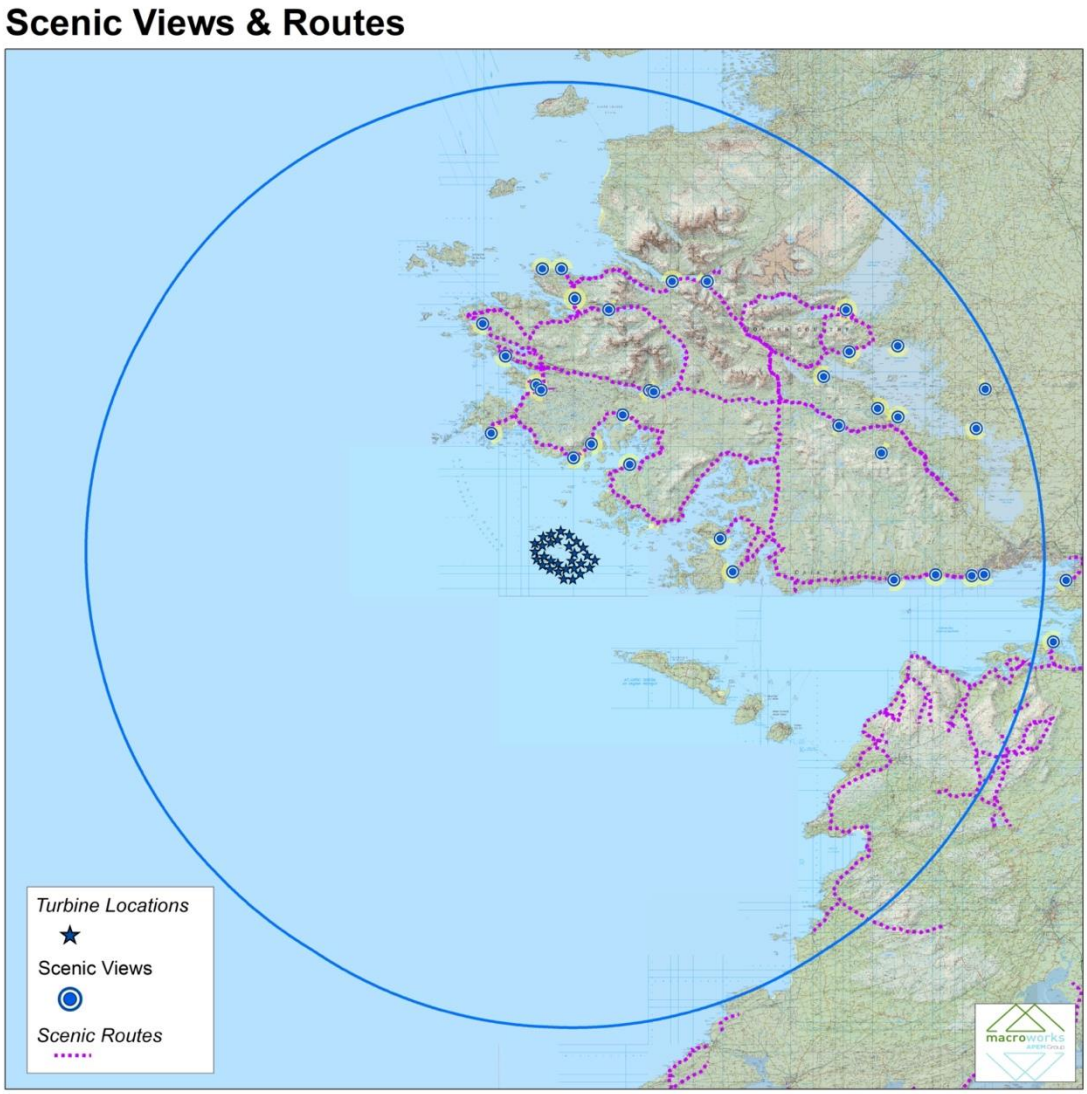


Figure 16-7 Designated Scenic Routes and Views from Galway and Clare County Development Plans

Relevant landscape and seascape policy is contained in Chapter 8 Tourism and Landscape of the Galway County Development Plan, and specifically Policy Objectives relating to "Landscape Conservation and Management" LCM 1 to LCM 3 (set out below). Protected Views are covered by the single Policy Objective PVSR 1. These are set out below and addressed in Section 16.7 of this Chapter;

LCM 1 - Preservation of Landscape Character

Preserve and enhance the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation and enhancement, where possible of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest.

LCM 2 - Landscape Sensitivity Classification

The Planning Authority shall have regard to the landscape sensitivity classification of sites in the consideration of any significant development proposals and, where necessary, require a Landscape/Visual Impact Assessment to accompany such proposals. This shall be balanced against the need to develop key strategic infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan.

LCM 3 - Landscape Sensitivity Ratings

Consideration of landscape sensitivity ratings shall be an important factor in determining development uses in areas of the County. In areas of high landscape sensitivity, the design and the choice of location of proposed development in the landscape will also be critical considerations.

PVSR 1 – Protected Views and Scenic Routes

Preserve the protected views and scenic routes as detailed in Maps 8.3 and 8.4 from development that in the view of the Planning Authority would negatively impact on said protected views and scenic routes. This shall be balanced against the need to develop key infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan.

In relation to the last point of objective PVSR 1, there are numerous objectives that support Offshore Renewable Energy as a strategic aim of the Galway County Development Plan. These relate to Climate Change (CC1); Renewable Energy (RE1, RE5 and RE7); Marine Planning Framework (NMPF1); and, Maritime Economy (MCE1). See Chapter 2 Background and Planning Policy for further detail.

16.5.2.3 Clare County Development Plan (2023 – 2029)

The Clare County Development Plan (2023-2029) contains a Landscape Character Assessment for the County. This first identifies Landscape Character Types (LCT) and then geographically specific Landscape Character Areas (LCA). The nearest coastal LCT to the OAA are nearly 42km away. These consist of 'Coastal Limestone Slopes', 'Limestone Uplands', 'Dunes' and 'Coastal Farmland and Islands'. Together these combine to form the single 'LCA 1 - Burren Uplands' and just to the south of that, 'LCA 3 – Cliffs of Moher and Lahinch'.

In terms of landscape sensitivity/ robustness and to help formulate landscape policy, the Clare CDP assigns a parallel set of landscape classifications to the Landscape Character Assessment, which is called Clare's Living Landscapes. These are divided into;

- Settled Landscapes
- Working Landscapes
- Heritage Landscapes

The most relevant of the Living Landscape classifications for the Project is Heritage Landscapes because this covers the whole of 'LCA 1 – Burren Uplands' and the coastal aspects of 'LCA 3 - Cliffs of Moher and Lahinch'. Heritage landscapes are described as;

"...those areas within the County where sensitive environmental resources – scenic, ecological and historic - are located. These landscapes are envisioned as the most valued parts of the County, that are important to the people of County Clare as well as to wider national and international communities. The principal role of these landscapes is to sustain natural and cultural heritage. The word 'sustain' is used to convey the idea of keeping something alive, as opposed to 'conserve' or 'preserve' which might imply that something is static."

- The Clare CDP also contains a Seascape Character Assessment and within this, the most relevant Seascape Character Areas (SCA) are 'SCA 1 – Blackhead Bay', SCA 2 Burren', and SCA 3 – Cliffs of Moher'.

- Relevant Landscape and seascape policy is contained in Chapter 14 of the CDP, specifically Objective 14.5 relating to Heritage Landscapes and Objective 14.6 relating to Seascape Character Areas.

CDP14.5 – Heritage Landscapes

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

To require that all proposed developments in Heritage Landscapes demonstrate that every effort has been made to reduce visual impact. This must be demonstrated for all aspects of the proposal - from site selection through to details of siting and design. All other relevant provisions of the Development Plan and the RSES must be complied with. All proposed developments in these areas will be required to demonstrate;

I. That sites have been selected to avoid visual prominence

II. That site layouts avail of existing topography and vegetation to minimise visibility from scenic routes, walking trails, public amenities and roads;

III. That design for buildings and structures minimises height and visual contrast through careful choice of forms, finishes and colour and that any site works seek to reduce the visual impact of the development.

CDP14.6 – Seascape Character Areas

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

a) To require that it be demonstrated that every effort has been made to visually integrate any proposed development within a Seascape Character area. This must be demonstrated by assessing the proposal in relation to:

- *Views from land to sea;*
- *Views from sea to land;*
- *Views along the coastline.*

b) To ensure that appropriate standards of location, siting, design, finishing and landscaping are achieved.

In terms of scenic designations, the Clare CDP identifies Scenic Views and Prospects in Section 14.7, and on map 14A. Whilst these are not specifically labelled or defined, there are numerous sections of scenic route running around the Blackhead peninsula and Burren coastline as well as within elevated inland sections of the Burren Uplands. Those contained within the 60km radius study area and also within ZTV pattern are considered relevant to this assessment. However, they may be represented by a smaller number of representative viewpoints in the visual impact assessment contained herein, due to the considerable distance and similar visual context. (see Figure 16-7).

CDP14.7 Scenic Routes

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

a) To protect sensitive areas from inappropriate development while providing for development and change that will benefit the rural community;

b) To ensure that proposed developments take into consideration their effects on views from the public road towards scenic features or areas and are designed and located to minimise their impact; and

c) To ensure that appropriate standards of location, siting, design, finishing and landscaping are achieved

16.5.2.4 Mayo County Development Plan (2022-2028)

Only the highest peaks of southwest County Mayo show any potential for even partial visibility of the OAA at distances of well over 40km. A similar scenario occurs for Clare Island and Inishturk off the coast of Mayo. For these reasons the landscape and visual related policies and designations are not considered relevant to the assessment and have been scoped out of further assessment.

16.6 Visual Receptors

It is important to reiterate that visual receptors are people and groups of people engaged in particular activities or resident at particular locations which can influence their susceptibility to visual change. The sub-headings below relate to locations and linear features from which viewers might be afforded views of the Project. The following sections establish the viewpoints (VP) that have been selected to represent different visual receptor types. These include designated scenic routes and views from the relevant County Development Plans (CDP) as well as non-designated receptors such as population centres, major transport routes and tourism, amenity and heritage locations. These are all publicly accessible receptor locations in accordance with GLVIA3. The representative nature of VP allows for one VP to sometimes cover more than one receptor and receptor type, particularly where the view is likely to be similar in terms distance, orientation, context and visual receptor sensitivity. In such instances, the VP location priority goes to the clearest viewing context and most sensitive receptor in order to represent a conservative / worst-case for the assessment.

Only those parts of the receiving environment that potentially afford views of the Project are of concern to the visual impact assessment. This is best established using Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping, which can be generated from bare ground terrain data or from digital surface model data. Route Screening Analysis (RSA) has also been undertaken for the Project. Both forms of ZTV mapping and the RSA will be described in more detail within the sections below in the context of understanding visibility within the SLVIA Study Area and helping to determine relevant visual receptors to be covered in the visual impact assessment by representative viewpoints.

16.6.1 Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Mapping

A computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map has been prepared to illustrate where the Project is potentially visible from. The initial ZTV map is based solely on Digital Terrain Model (DTM) data (i.e. bare ground visibility), and ignores features such as vegetation or buildings, which may screen views. The main value of this form of ZTV mapping is to determine those parts of the landscape from which the Project will definitely not be visible, due to terrain screening in order that they can be screened-in or screened-out of further assessment. A finer grain of analysis is also afforded by ZTV maps generated from Digital Surface Model (DSM) data that accounts for screening by all existing forms of land cover including vegetation. DSM has been used within 20km of the OAA to facilitate Route Screening Analysis (RSA) from all public road within the same 20km central study area.

16.6.1.1 Bare-Ground ZTV mapping

Bare-ground ZTV mapping has been prepared for the full 60km radius SLVIA Study Area generated from the tip height of the WTGs (See Figure 16-9 in Appendix 16-2). Those visual receptor locations

that fall within the ZTV pattern have some potential to afford viewers visibility of the OAA, notwithstanding any intervening vegetation and buildings. The general pattern of visibility is described below with relevance to particular receptors covered in Section 16.4.3.4.

- Most of the OAA facing shoreline itself will have the potential for open visibility of all WTGs, but visibility becomes partial and intermittent (fractured pattern) very quickly inland and from shorelines that are not directly OAA facing or where intervening sections of shoreline occur. In general, this illustrates discrete and complex open sea visibility in this part of Connemara that is not typical of much of Ireland's coastline
- The hummocky islands and peninsulas are highlighted by the fact that their seaward (western) sides have full visibility, but their inland sides have partial visibility, or no visibility. This is a complex coastline in general, and the sporadic visibility pattern reflects this.
- Considerable screening is provided by certain hills in the 15-20km range allowing no visibility beyond. This includes Errisbeg to the north of the OAA near the village of Roundstone and Cnoc Mordain a similar distance to the northeast. Further beyond to the northeast the upper slopes and ridge of The Twelves Pins and the Maumturk Mountains are afforded visibility, but no visibility is afforded beyond these mountain ranges.
- Aside from the upper slopes of higher mountain ranges, there is little visibility beyond 20km from the OAA.
- In relation to the Aran Islands, the nearest and largest island of Inishmore is afforded open visibility for much of the north-facing aspect but due to the orientation of this chain of islands, Inishmaan and Inisheer are largely screened by Inishmore. Similarly, only the nearest southern slopes of Inishbofin (40km NW) are afforded potential visibility.
- There is little potential from visibility from the northern side of Galway Bay.
- There is potential for long distance open visibility from the north-western coastline of County Clare except where there is minor screening by the Aran Islands. This represents approximately 10% of the land area of County Clare that is contained within the SLVIA Study Area.

16.6.1.2 Route Screening Analysis (RSA)

Whilst the standard ZTV map outlines baseline theoretical visibility within the SLVIA Study Area, it can considerably overestimate the actual degree of visibility as it does not take the likes of existing vegetation or buildings into account.

Route Screening Analysis, as its name suggests, considers actual visibility of the Offshore Site from surrounding roads using recently captured, highly accurate Digital Surface Model (DSM) data that accounts for screening terrain as well as by all existing forms of land cover including vegetation and buildings. Route Screening Analysis bridges the gap between the bare-ground theoretical visibility modelling (e.g., ZTV maps) and the actual nature of visibility in a given area because DSM data represents a more realistic context in terms of actual visibility than bare-ground DTM data does. In order to get a clearer understanding of visibility within the central portion of the study area (20km radius in this instance), Route Screening Analysis (RSA) was undertaken for every public road within this area using a Digital Surface Model (DSM) and sample points every 25m along each public road.

The RSA consists of three visibility scenarios: open visibility; partial visibility; and fully screened. In this instance, 'open visibility' is very conservatively judged to occur if the view of a full blade rotation of any one single WTG is afforded. 'Partial visibility' occurs when there is view of less than a full blade rotation of any particular WTG/s occurs. For analysis purposes, the RSA data is broken down into concentric 5km distance bands excluding the initial 5km which occurs within the sea i.e., 5km to 10km and so on out to 20km. See Standard RSA Map (Figure 16-11 in Appendix 16-2).

The RSA map (Figure 16-11 in Appendix 16-2) and associated analysis graph illustrates a notable degree of wind farm screening from the onshore road network within 20km of the OAA. Beyond 15km, fully screened views dominate by a considerable margin (nearly 50% of the 16km of relevant road network), whilst between 5km and 10km from the WTGs open views predominate (60% of the 42km of road network in this distance band). For views in the mid distance range between 10km and 15km there is a roughly even spread of 'open', 'partial' and fully 'screened' views, with a marginal predominance for open visibility (40% of the 82km of road network in this distance band). There is a distinct inverse relationship between 'Screened Views' and 'Open Views' across the distance bands as is typical of other RSA studies. These results reflect the ever decreasing scale (height above the horizon) of the WTGs over distance relative to intervening screening elements. It also reflects the fact that most of the open sea views that occur within this complex section of coastline occur within 5km of the coastline. Even where visibility is afforded from the outer distance bands beyond 10km, it is most often in relation to roads that are within less than 5km from the coastline rather than inland views.

The nearest peninsula of coastline around the settlement of Carna is the only section of the mainland that is substantially within 10km of the OAA. The majority of the roads within that area are afforded open visibility of WTGs and this accounts for nearly the full 60% figure of open visibility within this distance band.

Within the 10 – 15km distance band, it is the roads around Roundstone to the north and around Gorumna to the east that account for most of the road network and again open visibility is prevalent but only marginally so. The main contribution of open visibility in the 15 – 20km distance band is the peninsula around Ballyconneely to the northwest. Otherwise, this distance band consists of inland roads to the northeast where views are predominantly screened by intervening landform and vegetation.

16.6.1.2.1 *Additional 'Open View' Analysis*

As the methodology used for the RSA requires only a view of the full blade set of one WTG to record an 'open view' of the Project, it is useful to analyse the 'open view' set in more detail to establish how many WTGs are actually visible in each instance (see the 'Open View' Refinement map - Figure 16-12 in Appendix 16-2)

The results for the finer grained analysis of the 'Open View' RSA class are intriguing as it appears that the closer the viewer is to the OAA, the fewer WTGs they are likely to see. In the nearest band of 5km to 10km to the OAA, where there is an open view of WTGs for 60% of the road sections, this most typically relates to a view of less than 10 WTGs (40% of road sections). By contrast, open visibility of more than 20 WTGs occurs for 32% of road sections in this nearest distance band. Although views of more than 20 WTGs become marginally prevalent in the next distance band from 10-15km, this is by a small margin of less than 3% relative to views of less than 10 WTGs. Unsurprisingly, given the higher degree of screening overall on the 15-20km distance band, views of less than 10 WTGs are most prevalent in this more distant band when open views are afforded at all. Overall, the results are relatively even and consistent across the three distance bands and the key point is that 'open' visibility in the main RSA analysis does not equate to open visibility of the whole OWF and that most views will be at least somewhat obscured by intervening elements.

16.6.1.3 Identification of Visual Receptors

16.6.1.3.1 *Views from Scenic Designations*

As highlighted in the policy section, the County Galway and County Clare CDPs contain scenic route and scenic view designations. Table 16-9 provides a list of those scenic designations which are potentially relevant to the visual impact assessment and then determines whether due to distance, orientation and containment within the ZTV pattern they are considered relevant for further assessment. If considered relevant, the representative viewpoint (VP) number for this assessment is also provided.

Table 16-9: Relevant County Development Plan Scenic Designations – visual receptor relevance

Scenic Designation Reference	Relevance / Description	Representative VP herein
Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028)		
VP1 (Regional significance)	Omey Island Not relevant – Viewpoint investigated, but no potential for visibility of the OWF	Not Required
VP2 / Maritime Scenic route 5 (Regional significance)	Bunowen Bay Yes relevant – Views indicated to be predominantly throughout the eastern quarters, whereas the view to the OWF is to the south. Described as; *"The focus of this view is the coastal waters. The Twelve Bens and Iorras Beag in the background are important features of the view"*	VP18
VP3 / Maritime Scenic route 5 (National significance)	Sky Road Yes relevant – Open elevated views predominantly southward in the direction of the OWF. Described as; The focus of this view is the ocean waters, the scattered islands and the view back inland. Iorras Beag and the headlands in the southern background are important features of the view	VP21
VP4 (National significance)	Alcock and Brown Memorial Yes relevant. 360 degree elevated views. Described as; The focus of this view is the panoramic view of the surrounding countryside and coastal waters. The Twelve Bens and Iorras Beag in the background are important features of the view	VP20
VP5 (Regional significance)	Derrigimlagh Bog Yes relevant. Views indicated to the southwest. Described as; *The focus of this view is the bog that surrounds the OAA.*	VP19
VP8 / Maritime Scenic route 5	Gorteen bay	VP16

Scenic Designation Reference	Relevance / Description	Representative VP herein
(Regional significance)	Yes relevant. Views indicated to the southeast across the bay but open coastal views to the southwest are also afforded. Described as; *The focus of this view is the coastal waters. The adjacent graveyard, Inishlackan and Cnoc Mordain are important features of the view*	
VP10 / Maritime Scenic route 5 (Regional significance)	Cloch na Ron Yes relevant. Views indicated to be of the immediate context of the village and bay, but there is some potential for background views of the OWF. Described as; *The focus of this view is both Cloch na Rón village and Cloch na Rón bay. The distant shores, Twelve Bens and Cashel hill are all important features of the view*	VP15
VP12 / Maritime Scenic route 5 (Regional significance)	Coonisle Quay Yes relevant. Views indicated to be to the southeast of the immediate context, but there is some potential for background views of the OWF. Described as; *The focus of this view is the coastal waters. The hills and shoreside fields are an important feature of the view*	VP14
VP13 (Regional significance)	Glynsce Pier Marginal relevance. Views indicated to the north (away from OWF) but some potential for background visibility to the southwest. Described as; *The focus of this view is the coastal waters. Cashel Hill and Iorras Beag in the background are important features of the view*	VP13
VP18 / Maritime Scenic route 5 (County significance)	Droichead Charraig an Logáin, Leitir Móir Yes relevant. View indicated as being generally southwards and of the immediate setting, whilst the OWF will be in the distance to the west. Described as; *The focus of this view is the bridge, the coastal waters, the rocky shore immediately adjacent and the beginning of Garmna*	VP8
VP19 / Maritime Scenic route 5 (Regional significance)	Coral Strand Yes relevant. View indicated as being generally south-west wards and focussed on the immediate setting, whilst the OWF will be in the distance to the west. Described as; *The focus of this view is the length of rocky coast and the coastal waters. The hills of Garmna across the water are an important feature of the view*	VP7
Clare County Development Plan (2023-2029)		

Scenic Designation Reference	Relevance / Description	Representative VP herein
R477 Scenic Route around Blackhead	Yes relevant. Seaward views within ZTV.	VP34
R478 Scenic Route between Lisdoonvarna and Lahinch	Yes relevant. Seaward views within ZTV.	VP36

16.6.1.3.2 Views from Centres of Population

As described previously in the general description of the SLVIA Study Area, the population centres within the study area tend to be small and dispersed with the exception of Galway City, which is contained within the eastern extremities of the study area and outside of the ZTV pattern indicating no visibility of the Project. There is a sequence of coastal villages lining the R336 coast road along the northern side of Galway Bay. These have very limited potential for visibility of the OAA (as indicated by the ZTV pattern) and they are generally oriented to take advantage of southward views across the bay. All other relevant settlements tend to be contained within 30km of the OAA though it should be noted that many of these are contained within sheltered harbours that avoid direct westerly exposure to elements and by default – westerly views in the direction of the OAA. Notable settlements, and whether they have been included in the assessment based on the ZTV, are listed in Table 16-10.

Table 16-10: Notable Centres of Population – visual receptor relevance

Centre of Population	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Galway City	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Bearna	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Moycullen	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Oughterard	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Maam Cross	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Recess	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Spiddal	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP1
Inverin	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP2

Centre of Population	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Rossaveel	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP5
Carraroe	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Costelloe	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Lettermore	Yes relevant – ZTV coverage	VP8
Lettermullen	Yes relevant – ZTV coverage	VP23
Glencoh	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP10
Kilkieran	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Ardmore	Yes relevant – ZTV coverage	VP11
Carna	Yes relevant – ZTV coverage	VP 37
Roundstone	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP15
Clifden	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Ballyconneely	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage within village – clearer outside	VP 38
Letterfrack	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Leenaun	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required
Kilronan (Inismore Island)	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern (not visible)	Not required

16.6.1.3.3 *Views from Major Transport Routes*

The highest order transport route within the SLVIA Study Area is the N59 national secondary road, which runs westwards between Galway City and Clifden and then turns north-eastwards towards Westport in County Mayo. Only a fraction of this route is contained in the ZTV pattern (near Ballynahinch Lake) where it is enclosed by vegetation, precluding visibility of the OAA. Therefore, the N59 is screened-out of further assessment. Otherwise, there is a network of regional roads that follow the coastline of Connemara servicing the settlements and communities, which often line the local roads that feed off the regional road network. The main regional roads, which are often designated scenic routes as well, are listed in Table 16-11 below.

Table 16-11: Major transport routes – visual receptor relevance

Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028)		
Major Transport Route	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
N59	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Scoped-out
R336	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP6 & VP9
R372	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP5
R343	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	Generally represented by VP5, VP6 and VP7
R374	Yes relevant – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP8 & VP23
R340	Yes relevant – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP10 & VP11
R341	Yes relevant – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP15 & VP17
R342	Yes relevant – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP14

16.6.1.3.4 Views from Tourism, Amenity and Heritage features

Wild Atlantic Way (WAW): The Wild Atlantic Way coastal driving route is a 2,500km long tourist driving route along Ireland's west coast from Donegal to Cork. The Connemara area hosts 300km of this route and some of the key attractions in terms of beaches, heritage features and settlements. Some of these include;

- Aillebrack Beach
- Coral Beach
- Dog's Bay
- Gorteen Bay
- Mweenish Beach / Cemetery
- Ballynahown Pier
- Clifden
- Roundstone
- Connemara National Park
- Kylemore Abbey
- The Twelve Bens
- Derrigimlagh
- Black Head
- The Limestone Coast of the Burren
- Cliffs of Moher

The complete list of features included on wildatlanticway.com are listed below, with potential visibility and representative viewpoints, where relevant.

In addition to the destinations above, there are numerous walking and cycling trails, including coastal loops such as Luibin Mhairois near Crosspatrick and the Blue, Green, and Yellow trails that converge on Lettermullan. The Clifden Cycle Hub loop 4 also follows the coastal sections of the R341 between the popular tourist villages of Clifden and Roundstone. The annual 'Connemarathon' loops north from Derryclare Lough to Killary Lough and south along the Maam Valley to Maam Cross. The Sky Road is another popular tourist driving route heading west from Clifden where vast elevated views are afforded.

The nearest of the Aran Island's (Inishmore) is also popular with visitors and has a series of walking and cycling loops as there are few cars on the island. It also hosts the ancient fort of Dun Aengus, which was proposed to be placed on the tentative list of candidate UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2010 although it is not currently on the list of tentative sites for Ireland. Of the many islands within the SLVIA Study Area, those with listed walking trails include Clare Island in the northernmost extents of the study area, Inisturk slightly further south, the larger Inisbofin, and the remaining Aran Islands, Inisheer, and Inishmaan.

Connemara and the wider northeast of the SLVIA Study Area is a popular area for both international and domestic visitors, including the Connemara National Park, Diamond Hill, iconic Kylemore Abbey and surrounding walks. It is an area that has become somewhat synonymous with a nostalgic view of 'old Ireland', and much of the tourist draw relates to this perception. One such location is the 'Quiet Man Bridge' between Lough Boffin and Lough Agraffard, which is associated with the 1952 movie 'The Quiet Man' starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. This is located well inland, 37km northeast of the nearest WTG, and is a popular photo location for people who pose in the same manner as the movie, with the landscape behind them.

The Screebe Fisherman's Hut is another local scenic location and visitor attraction. To the southwest, at Lough Aroolagh is the Ionad Cultúrtha an Phiarsaigh, Conamara (Pearses Cultural Centre), which is a tourism information and heritage site, as well as 'Pearse's cottage' Discovery point on the Wild Atlantic Way. In the dramatic, elevated topography of the Twelve Bens and Maumturk Mountains to the north and northwest of the OAA, there are a variety of recreational walkways and historic structures/viewpoints. One of these is the Máméan Chapel, located 29km to the east of the OAA and a key feature of the Western Way as it passes through Galway over the Maumturk Mountains. The Maumturk Way walking route passes along the ridge of the mountain range. The adjacent mountain range, the Twelve Bens, is a popular walking area and iconic backdrop for much of Connemara.

Smaller historic features along the coastline include the Canower Pier, High Cashel Cemetary, Cashel Hill and Neolithic Tomb, Glynsk Pier, Inis Nee walking loop, located opposite Roundstone. Private sites with a moderate tourism presence include Connemara Golf Links to the southwest of Clifden; Delphi resort to the north of Killary Lough near Doo Lough, and Ballynahinch Castle to the south of the Twelve Pins/Bens. There is a ring of hotels and B&Bs around the coast of Galway and Clare, interspersed with private holiday houses.

Macdara's Island is a small uninhabited island at the end of a chain of islands extended out from the mainland via Mweenish Island and Mason Island. It is the closest island to the OAA and its most distinctive aspect is that it hosts St Macdara's Island Monastery. This consists of a small stone chapel and associated stone enclosures that date from the 10th century having replaced an earlier wooden church. Although the island is not inhabited, it is visited once a year on the 16th of July as part of a pilgrimage by residents of the local area for a blessing of boats (Saint Macdara is the patron saint of seafarers). Thus, views from the island are afforded predominantly on the 16th of July each year for local pilgrims.

To the distant north of the SLVIA Study Area is the southern shore of Westport Bay, which features a number of Wild Atlantic Way points (Annagh Killadanagan Archeological Complex, Murrisk, National Famine Memorial) and the dramatic mountain peak of Croagh Patrick, which also features a pilgrimage route and chapel. Further inland from Croagh Patrick, 40-60km northeast of the OAA, are uplands and lakes shared by Co. Mayo and Co. Galway. The settlement of Cong, between Lough Mask and Lough

Corrib, is a high-value tourist destination, with a number of 'The Quiet Man' themed attractions; Cong Abbey and Ashford Castle are both located on the River Cong, which have high amenity value. While Ashford Castle is under private ownership, facing south from the shore of Lough Corrib, the surrounding grounds are partially open for visitors. Lough Corrib also features the Hill of Doon Viewing Point, which looks across Lough Corrib to the small peninsula of the Hill of Doon on the opposite shore, on the Western Way. On the western side of Lough Corrib is Castlekirk/ Henn's Castle, a ruined castle on an island near the northern section of the Lough. Tourmakeady Waterfall and Walkways and Pilgrims Walk are located to the north and west of Lough Mask, in Co. Mayo.

To the south of Galway Bay, in Co. Clare, the Burren National Park and Limestone Coast of the Burren include a dense collection of sensitive features, which attract high tourism numbers year-round. In the southern extent of the coastline are the Cliffs of Moher, which, along with a section of the Burren Way, traces from Doolin to Hags Head. The Cliffs of Moher Experience and UNESCO Global Geopark are located halfway between. The Cliffs and The Burren are the main attractions for day trip tours from Ennis and Galway, as well as those staying in the multiple tourist villages along the coastline or following the Wild Atlantic Way along the coast. Other features surrounding the Burren and coastline (including a number of Wild Atlantic Way points) are Black Head and Lighthouse, the Burren Way and Cappanawalla. Inland, typically smaller features include Aillwee Burren Experience, Doolin Cave, Corkscrew Hill Scenic Route, Rathborney Church and Graveyard, Newtown Castle, The Pinnacle Well, and Caher Bridge Garden.

There is a dense overlay of historic sites along the coast at Doonmacfelim, Pollnaclogha, and Glasha More. A small selection of these is Doonmacfelim Ringfort, Cathair Dúin, Teergonean Ringfort and Souterrain, and Ballycahan Ringfort and Souterrain. Poulnabrone Dolmen, Caherconnell Stone Fort. These can be grouped in the following tables as 'The Burren' and 'The Limestone Coast of the Burren'. The more frequented locations will be identified individually (such as the Cliffs of Moher). The combination of all of these features results in a high density of receptor locations along a relatively linear section of coastline to the south of the SLVIA Study Area.

Larger Tourist Villages are included above as population centres, however those also listed as attractions along the Wild Atlantic Way include Kinvara; Ballyvaughan; Spiddal: Galway City; Clifden; Roundstone, Doolin, Clahane, and Lahinch.

Table 16-12: Tourism, Amenity and Heritage – visual receptor relevance

Wild Atlantic Way (Discovery Points in Bold, points listed north to south in sequence)	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Annagh Killadanagan Archeological Complex	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Murrisk	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
National Famine Memorial	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Croagh Patrick	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Old Head Beach	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required

Wild Atlantic Way (Discovery Points in Bold, points listed north to south in sequence)	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Carrowmore Beach	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Carrownisky Strand	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Doolough Valley	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Silver Strand	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Aesleagh Falls	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Killary Harbour	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Rosroe Quay	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Glassilaun Beach	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Lettergesh Beach	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Rinvyle Point	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Kylemore Abbey	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Connemara National Park	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP26
Knockbrack Megalithic Tomb	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Omey Island	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Eyrephort Beach	Marginal relevance – feature outside of ZTV, immediate surrounds in varied ZTV pattern	VP22
Sky Road	Relevant – partial to full ZTV pattern	VP21
Clifden Castle	Relevant – partial to full ZTV pattern	Nearest VP21

Wild Atlantic Way (Discovery Points in Bold, points listed north to south in sequence)	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
John D'Arcy Monument	Relevant – partial to full ZTV pattern	Nearest VP21
Clifden	Not relevant - Outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Derrigimlagh/ Alcock and Brown landing site	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP19 & VP20
Aillebrack Beach	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP18
Bunowen Castle	Relevant – partial to full ZTV pattern	Nearest VP18
Dogs Bay	Relevant – partial to full ZTV pattern	VP16
Gurteen Bay	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP16
Roundstone	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP15
Pearse's Cottage	Marginal relevance – feature outside of ZTV, immediate surrounds in varied ZTV pattern	Nearest VP10
Illaunnaginga	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP15
Ardmore Point	Relevant – partial to full ZTV pattern	Nearest VP11
Lettermore Causeway	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP8
Coral Beach	Marginal relevance – feature outside of ZTV, immediate surrounds in varied ZTV pattern	VP7
Ballynahown Pier	Marginal relevance – feature outside of ZTV, immediate surrounds in varied ZTV pattern	VP3
Spiddal Pier	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	VP1
Silverstrand Beach	Marginal relevance – feature outside of ZTV, immediate surrounds in varied ZTV pattern	Represented by VP1 to VP3
Flaggy Shore/Inishmaan	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	Nearest VP31
Finnavarra Point	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	Nearest VP34
Finavarra House	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required

Wild Atlantic Way (Discovery Points in Bold, points listed north to south in sequence)	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Shanmuckinish Castle	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	Nearest VP34
Bishop's Quarter Beach	Relevant – partial ZTV pattern	Nearest VP34
Bishops Quarter/Drumcreehy Church	Not relevant – Outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Ballyvaughan Pier	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Ballyvaughan	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Inishmore	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP30 & VP31
Gleninagh Castle	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Black Head	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP34
Limestone Coast of the Burren	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	Between VP34 and VP36
Fanore Beach	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	Between VP34 and VP36
Inisheer	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	Between VP31, VP34 and VP36
Doolin Pier	Relevant – full to partial ZTV pattern	Nearest VP36
Doolin	Marginal relevance – feature outside of ZTV, immediate surrounds in varied ZTV pattern	Nearest VP36
Doonagore Castle	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	Nearest VP36
Cliffs of Moher	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP36
Clahane	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Lahinch	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required

Table 16-13: Tourism, Amenity and Heritage – inland, non WAW features

Attractions not identified on Wild Atlantic Way	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Quiet Man Bridge	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Screebe Fisherman's Hut	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	Between VP9 and VP10
Ionad Cultúrtha an Phiarsaigh, Conamara (Pearses Cultural Centre) (Adjacent to WAW Pearse's Cottage)	Marginal relevance – feature outside of ZTV, immediate surrounds in varied ZTV pattern	Nearest VP10
Lough Inagh View Point/Inagh Valley Scenic Drive	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage	Between VP28 and VP27
Pás Mám Éan/Mamean Chapel	Relevant – full ZTV pattern over western section of pass, and at Chapel	VP27
Western Way (between Oughterard and Pás Mám Éan/Mamean Chapel)	Not relevant – Outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Western Way (Pás Mám Éan/Mamean Chapel around Lough Inagh)	Relevant – full ZTV pattern over western section of pass, partial visibility over Lough Inagh	VP27
Western Way (Lough Inagh to Killary Lough northward out of SLVIA Study Area)	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Diamond Hill (Connemara National Park)	Relevant – full ZTV pattern over upper sections	VP26
Twelve Pins/Bens Walks	Relevant – Varied full to partial visibility	VP28
Maunturk Mountains	Relevant – Varied full to partial visibility, represented by Western Way and Mamean Chapel	VP27
Connemarathon Route	Not relevant – Generally outside of ZTV pattern, with the exception of a small section of R344	Not required
Mweenish Beach / Cemetery	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP12
Macdara's Island	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP29

Attractions not identified on Wild Atlantic Way	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Canower Pier	Marginal relevance – partial bare-ground ZTV coverage, main amenity faced away from the OAA	Between VP14 and VP32
High Cashel Cemetary, Cashel Hill and Neolithic Tomb,	Relevant – Varied full to partial visibility	Nearest VP14
Glynsk Pier	Marginal relevance – limited bare-ground ZTV coverage, main amenity faced away from the OAA	VP13
Inis Nee walking loop	Relevant – Varied full to partial visibility	VP32
Connemara Golf Links	Relevant – full ZTV pattern	VP25
Delphi Resort	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Ballynahinch Castle	Marginal relevance – limited bare-ground ZTV coverage, main amenity faced away from the OAA	Not required
Cong	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Cong Abbey	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Ashford Castle	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Hill of Doon	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Castlekirk/Henn's Castle	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Tourmakeady Waterfall	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
Pilgrims Walk	Not relevant – Substantially outside of ZTV pattern	Not required
The Burren Way	Relevant – full ZTV pattern and intermittent sections of reduced visibility, in particular along western coast	VP36
Inishbofin	Relevant – Varied full to partial visibility	VP35

Attractions not identified on Wild Atlantic Way	Relevance (ZTV coverage)	Representative VP herein
Inishturk	Relevant – Varied full to partial visibility	Represented by VP35
Clare Island	Relevant – Varied full to partial visibility	Represented by VP35

16.6.1.3.5 *Selected Representative Viewshed Reference Points*

Based on the analysis of potential viewshed reference points throughout Section 16.6.1.4 the set of representative viewpoints to be used for the visual impact assessment is shown in Figure 16-8 below. These viewpoints are all subject of individual assessment in Appendix 16-1 and the assessments are summarised herein at Section 16.7.2.2 at Table 16-17.

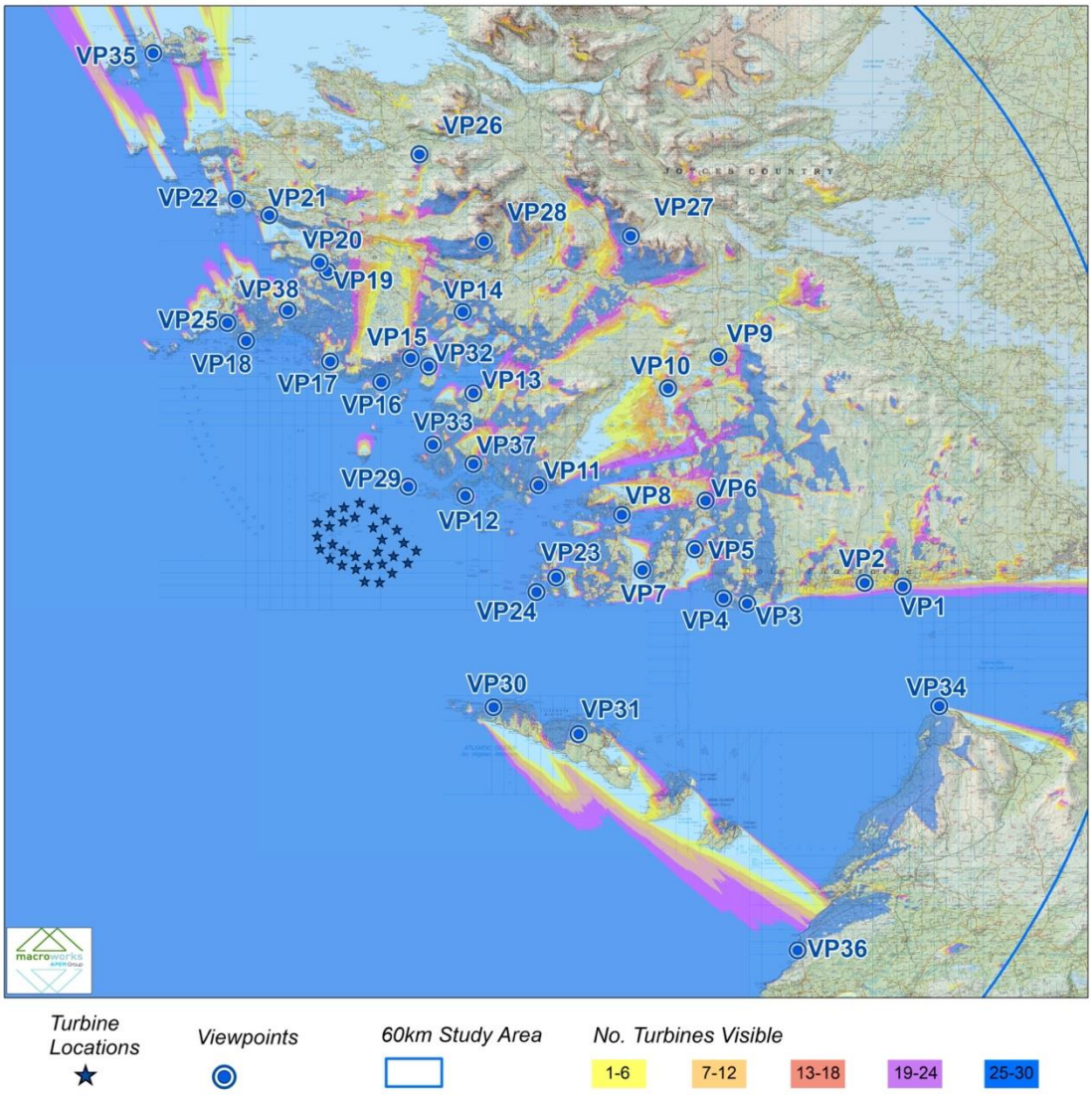


Figure 16-8 Viewpoint Location Map

16.7 Likely Significant Effects and Associated Mitigation Measures

16.7.1 Seascape and Landscape Impact Assessment

As outlined in the methodology section, Seascape and Landscape effects and Visual effects are assessed separately. Impacts will be assessed at Construction Phase, Operation and Maintenance phase and Decommissioning phase.

On the basis that Seascape and Landscape receptor sensitivity is common and consistent to the assessment of the significance of effects at the Construction Phase, Operation and Maintenance Phase and Decommissioning Phase, it is appropriate to establish sensitivity assessments prior to the assessment of impacts for each phase of the Project. Seascape Character Areas as identified and described in the Regional Seascape Character Assessment for Ireland (2020) will be used as the framework of the Seascape sensitivity assessment and subsequent assessment of Seascape Impact magnitude. As these seascape units typically penetrate only 1km inland, it is considered necessary to also include the coastal landscape character unit from each of the relevant County Landscape Character Assessments, which extend further inland. In all instances of overlap (along the coastline), it is considered that the Regional Seascape Character Unit should take precedence over the County-based Landscape Character Unit as the former is more specific to the coastal aspect and is also more comprehensive.

As is normal practice for SLVIA, based on GLVIA3, only the operation and maintenance phase of the Project is depicted in the verifiable photomontages, as construction and decommissioning visual effects relate to an evolving and dynamic scenario that changes considerably even within the short-term duration of these phases. Consequently, the visual assessment of these phases will be presented in a more generalised manner, to avoid undue repetition of assessment text from each selected viewpoint.

16.7.1.1 Seascape and Landscape Sensitivity

The assessment of seascape sensitivity is structured around each Seascape Character Area from the Regional Seascape Assessment for Ireland (2020) identified in the baseline section. These units are then correlated with the overlapping coastal landscape character units from the various County Development Plans. As previously outlined in the methodology section, the sensitivity judgement is derived from a combination of the susceptibility of the landscape receptor and its value. The judgement of susceptibility is neither an inherent one, nor is it specifically related to the Project (as that would be tantamount to double counting the magnitude of impact). Instead, in this instance, susceptibility relates to the potential for seascape change that is of a size / extent to influence seascape character at the scale of the Seascape Character Area.

Table 16-14: Seascape and Landscape Sensitivity

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
SCA5 – Atlantic North Mayo and Galway	Coastal Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Connemara Coastal Islands;	This SCA lies around 15km to the northwest of the OAA with Slyne head being it most southerly headland feature. The closest aspect of this seascape area immediately south of Slyne Head is of most relevance to the Project followed by that north of Slyne Head toward the Island of Inisbofin which is between 20km and 40km from the OAA. The

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
	Connemara Sea Loughs; Hard Shore Coastal; Soft Shore Coastal; Island Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Inisbofin Unit	seascape north and east of Inisbofin Island is not relevant to this assessment as it is substantially outside of the ZTV pattern and a long distance from the OAA. Therefore, the relevant southern part of this seascape area represents a relatively small proportion of this SCA which otherwise stretches northwards as far as Belmullet in Northwest Mayo. The description of SCA 5 includes a statement that; "The area around Slyne Head at Ballinaleama retains a relatively remote and exposed character, due to the elevated landform and plateau". This section of coastline is one the most westerly extending protrusions along Ireland's west coast, at least north of Galway. It is a combination of wild and windswept rocky outcrops facing into the Atlantic gales coupled with small island inlets and beaches that offers enclosed protection from the westerly exposure. This is reflected in two contrasting 'sense of place' statements from the Regional SCA which include: "At the elevated western parts of this SCA, particularly at western facing cliffs, this combination of dramatic cliffs, sea stacks, crashing waves, strong winds, soaring seabirds and exposure to the elements create a strong character of wildness and remoteness"; and, "For much of the SCA however, the sounds and smells of the Atlantic are more muted due to the connectivity to the islands and the more intimate indented coastline". Due to the contrasting character based on the degree of enclosure, it is a richly varied section of coastline with a high degree of scenic amenity and little in the way of built development. The built development that does exist is modest in scale and timeless in design often relating to subsistence farming. However, there are also more contemporary holiday house sensitive receptors lining the local road network as well as caravan holiday parks such as the one at Keerhaunmore near Connemara Golf Links. In terms of perceptual associations this landscape seascape area, like much of Connemara, is synonymous with 'old Ireland' with its scattered coastal cottages and intricate stone wall field patterns sheltering below craggy skylines. It is therefore popular for tourism and summer holiday makers. There are numerous looped sections of the Wild Atlantic Way tourist driving route that weave in and out of this area including several key waypoints such as the Sky Road lookout west of Clifden and Aillebrack Beach. The town of

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
		Clifden is the hub of Connemara tourism with a multitude of hotels, restaurants and bars. Views and vistas are an integral part of the seascape character and vary considerable in terms of scale and extent as well as composition throughout this seascape area depending on the degree of enclosure afforded by coastal land form and islands. In this regard the Regional SCA notes; "Views across and along the bays in this SCA vary from small to large scale but the bay character is reinforced by the land views commonly to the east, north and south; these land views are frequently associated with the mountains in the distance ..."; and, "The numerous nearshore islands and indented coast enable some perception of scale and distance to sea views. Their frequent proximity to the shore and visibility can create a more intimate seascape view". Based on the factors described above, this seascape area is considered to have a high degree of susceptibility to large scale development either onshore or offshore, because it is characterised by low levels of built development and low intensity landscape / seascape management. The built development that does occur is modest in scale and dispersed in nature and onshore and offshore industry is also modest in scale and reflective of a local subsistence rural / maritime economy. Recreation and tourism are two of the key draws in this area and both are integral to the landscape and seascape context. Seascape value in this SCA relates to a sense of wild remoteness and a high degree of scenic amenity. Whilst rural and maritime industry is present, it exists at a localised subsistence scale and is secondary to the natural and scenic value. This is one of the reasons this area also has considerable value in terms of tourism and recreation. For these reasons the seascape value of this SCA is also considered to be high. Combining the above high susceptibility and high value judgements for SCA5 and its underlying coastal LCA units, the overall sensitivity of this area can only be considered **High**.
SCA 6 - Atlantic	Coastal Landscape (Class 3 – Special)	This SCA contains the OAA at its northern end and stretches south to the north Clare coastline incorporating the Aran Islands and Galway Bay. Most of the offshore aspects

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
Galway Bay and Islands	Connemara Coastal Islands; Connemara Sea Loughs; Cois Fharriage Island Landscape (Class 4 – Iconic) Oileain Arainn	of this SCA is in full ZTV pattern indicating unobstructed views of the OAA. The exceptions being the 'view shadow' generated by the Aran islands in the south-easterly direction to the North Clare coastline. Liscannor Bay has no visibility and neither does the northeastern portion of Galway Bay that incorporates Galway City. Of particular consequence, is that almost immediately upon striking the shoreline of Connemara, the ZTV pattern becomes sporadic due to the hummocky nature of the headlands and nearshore islands and the idented inlets. Considerable screening is provided by Errisbeg to the north of the OAA and Cnoc Mordain a similar distance to the northeast. The complex Connemara coastline is distinctly different to the northern shores of Galway Bay which rise gently towards the upland area that hosts Galway Wind Park. The internal south-eastern coastline of Galway Bay is similar to the Connemara coastline in terms of complex indented bay and hummocky headlands. However, the Burren coastline, at the mouth of the bay, is dominated by the dramatic and distinctive limestone headland of Black Head, which rises sharply from the sea. This northwest facing section of coastline also boasts the iconic Cliffs of Moher. Overall it is a distinctly varied section of coastline that also includes some of Irelands most iconic offshore islands. The one common feature is that it is a coastline steeped in heritage and culture that is also a strong draw for visitors, holiday makers and tourists. The description of SCA 6 includes a statement that; "Art and literature have strong links to this SCA, the Aran islands and Galway Bay as well as the landscapes of Connemara and the Burren having inspired a significant number of writers, artists". Other key considerations from the Regional SCA include; "A large limestone bay (Galway Bay) is framed by two distinctive and very different coastlines, north (Connemara) and South (Burren)"; and, "The Cliffs of Moher form the southern part of this SCA and comprise high sandstone/metasedimentary cliffs and plateaus, similar to the coast nearer Loop Head and Sliabh Leagues in Co. Donegal. This are [sic] very well known and promoted with a popular visitor centre, and coastal walk". This richly varied section of coastline has a high degree of scenic amenity and aside from the northern side of Galway Bay and Galway City there is only a modest degree of built

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
		development. The built development that does exist is often of a timeless design relating to fishing settlements and subsistence farming. However, there are also more contemporary holiday house sensitive receptors lining the local road network throughout the Connemara and Burren coastal areas. In terms of perceptual associations this landscape seascape area is synonymous with 'old Ireland' with its scattered coastal cottages and intricates stone wall field patterns sheltering below craggy skylines or dramatic limestone headlands. There are numerous sections of the Wild Atlantic Way tourist driving route that trace the coastline of this area including several key waypoints such as Black Head and the Cliffs of Moher. There are a number of coastal settlements that are hubs for tourism around Galway Bay and the Burren coastline including Spiddal, Galway City, Kinvara and Ballyvaughan . Views and vistas are an integral part of the seascape character and vary considerably in terms of scale and extent as well as composition throughout this seascape area depending on the degree of enclosure afforded by coastal land form and islands. In this regard the Regional SCA notes; "Views from the Slyne Head westwards [presumably eastwards] along the indented coastline and islands is smaller in scale and the numerous small headlands, bays, and predominantly rocky shores provide for a diverse, interesting aspect; The low-lying topography means views are often at, or close to, sea level with a horizontal character to the scene, and the eye drawn to the detail at, or close to, the shoreline. The numerous nearshore islands and indented coast enable some perception of scale and distance to sea views. Their frequent proximity to the shore and visibility can create a more intimate seascape view"; and, "Depending on the orientation, views along this western area can include Cnoc Mountain (351m OD) or the Connemara mountains". Based on the factors described above, this seascape area is considered to have a relatively high degree of susceptibility to large scale development either onshore or offshore, because it is characterised by generally low levels of built development and low intensity landscape / seascape management. However, northern Galway Bay and Galway City provide some scale and intensity to built development for part of this SCA. Otherwise, the built development that

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
		does occur is modest in scale and dispersed in nature and onshore and offshore industry is also modest in scale and reflective of a local subsistence rural / maritime economy. Recreation and tourism are two of the key draws in this area and both are integral to the landscape and seascape context. Seascape value in this SCA relates partly to a sense of wild remoteness and also of cultural heritage tied to the marine environment. There is a high degree of scenic amenity in those areas that are less developed. Whilst rural and maritime industry is present outside of Galway Bay, it exists at a localised subsistence scale and is secondary to the natural and scenic value. This is one of the reasons this area also has considerable value in terms of tourism and recreation. For these reasons the seascape value of this SCA is also considered to be high. Combining the above high susceptibility and high value judgements for SCA5 and its underlying coastal LCA units, the overall sensitivity of this area is also considered to be **High**.
Not relevant (inland)	Uplands and Bog Landscape LCT Maumturk Mountains LCA Class 4 – Iconic; West Connemara LCA Class 3 - Special; South Connemara LCA Class 2 - High	This large LCT covers both coastal bog areas and mountainous areas as well as the transition between them. Excluding the Coastal LCT and associated LCAs, this LCT covers all of Connemara east to Lough Corrib. The nearest portion of the Uplands and Bog LCA to the OAA is a section of coastal bog in the West Connemara LCA just northeast of the settlement of Carna at a distance of approximately 9.3km away. The nearest portion of the Maumturk Mountains LCA is over 20km away in the same direction. This is an important distinction because the Maumturk Mountains LCA is assigned 'Class 4 – Iconic' landscape sensitivity, which is the highest class, whereas the West Connemara LCA is assigned 'Class 3 – Special' sensitivity, being the second highest class. The South Connemara LCA, which hosts Galway Wind Park is classified as Class 2 – High sensitivity, which is the second lowest category. This is 30k to the east of the OAA at its nearest point. In terms of ZTV coverage and potential for intervisibility, the nearest lowland sections of the West Connemara LCA have a relatively sporadic ZTV pattern due to intervening screening by the headlands and outcrops of the rugged Coastal LCT. Indeed, large areas of the coastal bog within the West Connemara LCA have no potential for views of the OAA. This also tends to be a sparsely populated area with few roads penetrating into it. However approaching the Maumturk Mountains LCA the visibility pattern increases to

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
		cover many of the exposed southwest facing slopes particularly north of the N59 which skirts the foothills. There is very little intervisibility with the South Connemara LCA except from the nearest upper slopes and ridges which then preclude most visibility beyond. This limits the potential for cumulative effects with the wind farms that constitute Galway Wind Park. Of the general areas and sub units of the Uplands and Bog LCT it is the Maumturk LCA that is deemed to be of most relevance to the Project because, despite being further away than the West Connemara LCA there is greater potential for visibility of the OWF within vast elevated views that are a key characteristic of this mountainous area – unlike the more insular and uniform views obtained from within the coastal bog of the West Connemara LCA. The South Connemara LCA is least relevant due to the separation distance and limited intervisibility. It is also a sparsely populated area dominated by commercial forestry and wind turbines. The Maumturk Mountains LCA is an iconic mountainous area that forms the backdrop and dramatic enclosure of Connemara as well as dividing it from the Lakelands around Lough Corrib and the mountain and fjord area of southwest Mayo. It is formed by two distinct ranges being the Maumturks to the east and the Twelve Pins (Bens) to the west. Both have dedicated walking routes along their ridgelines with the Twelve Pins route being described as one of the few true alpine routes in the country. These are routes for experienced hikers and not used by large numbers of recreationalists, but those that do venture there are seeking wild remoteness and pristine upland nature. They are also seeking the vast elevated views over Connemara that are characteristic of this LCA. In terms of susceptibility to seascape / landscape change the LCAs contained within the uplands and bogs LCT have low levels of built development and landscape management at present. However, they are at a considerable remove from the coastline and sea area where the development is proposed, so there is little potential for their salient character to be altered by it. The main aspect of susceptibility relates to broad, distant coastal views that are mainly characteristic of the Maumturk Mountains LCA. Susceptibility is therefore deemed to be High-medium for the Maumturk Mountains LCA, but Medium for the West Connemara LCA and Medium-low for the South Connemara LCA.

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Sensitivity
		In terms of value, the Maumturk Mountains and West Connemara LCAs contained within the Uplands and bogs LCT are synonymous with remoteness, naturalistic character and together then form the unique and cohesive setting of Connemara – a landscape steeped in cultural heritage and popular with visitors and tourists seeking an experience of old Ireland and the windswept west coast. The South Connemara LCA is characterised by higher levels of built development and land management in the form of wind farms and forestry and associated values relate more to productive use. Landscape Value is therefore considered to be High within the Maumturk Mountains and West Connemara LCAs, but Medium within the South Connemara LCA.. Overall, it is considered that the sensitivity of the Maumturk Mountains LCA is **High**, the West Connemara LCA is **High-medium** and the South Connemara LCA is **Medium-low**.

16.7.1.2 Seascape and Landscape Impact Magnitude

16.7.1.2.1 *Construction Phase*

The construction phase of the Offshore Site of the Project consists of constructing the WTGs within the OAA as well as the laying of the subsea OEC from the OSS up to, but not including the Landfall on coastal plateau farmland at Killard in County Clare. The Onshore Landfall Location will be addressed as part of the Onshore Site in Chapter 23 Landscape and Visual.

Table 16-15 Construction Stage Seascape / Landscape Impacts

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts
SCA5 – Atlantic North Mayo and Galway	Coastal Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Connemara Coastal Islands; Connemara Sea Loughs; Hard Shore Coastal;	Vessel traffic and activities within the OECC and OAA will be noticeable from this SCA but only from the coastline and sea area south of Slyne Head where the construction activities and incremental installation of the WTGs will be visible in long-shore views to the southeast. These views are generally flanked and backed by coastline and the offshore Aran Islands rather than impacting on the open sea horizon to the south and west. In this respect the activities are contained by coastal landform rather than located within the wild and windswept setting of the Atlantic Ocean where the sense of scale, distance and openness might be diminished.

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts
	Soft Shore Coastal; Island Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Inisbofin Unit	A crane operating from a jack-up barge will be used to access and install the WTG component pieces, otherwise internal ladders and lifts within the WTG towers will allow access to the nacelle for construction personnel. There will be a greater intensity of industrial related sea traffic as well as the emerging presence of large scale, sea-based structures. An undersea OEC will be placed across the seabed and will be buried or laid on the seabed with rock armour protection as appropriate in different sections, but they will not be visible and will not have an impact on the Seascape. Only the cable laying vessels will be potentially visible during the construction stage and at a considerable distance of 20km+ as the OEC will be laid in a southernly direction from the OAA in the opposite direction to this SCA. The largest scale construction related effects will be associated with the OWF and the emerging WTGs and OSS and these will occur between 15km and 21km from the nearest point of this SCA – a considerable distance where water surface activity may be screened by earth curvature. There will be clutter and complexity from the partially completed structures flanked by a crane and jack-up barge coupled with movement / activity from vessels and machinery. On the basis of the reasons outlined above, the predicted magnitude of change associated with the incremental construction of the WTGs is considered to be **Medium**, the quality of that effect is **Negative** and the duration **Short-term**. It should be noted that this assessment is a worst-case for the construction stage as the period of time that the WTGs will be present above foundation level (sea level + 30m) in conjunction with other construction stage structures and vessels will be several months and therefore this highest level of effect will only be of a Temporary duration.
SCA 6 - Atlantic Galway Bay and Islands	Coastal Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Connemara Coastal Islands; Connemara Sea Loughs; Cois Fharriage	Vessel traffic and activities within the OECC and OAA will be noticeable from this SCA particularly in from exposed sections of coastline that stretch between Golum Head to the southeast and Slyne Head to the northwest of the OAA, as well as from the north-western aspects of Inishmore Island. Within this somewhat enveloping coastal context, the construction activities and incremental installation of the WTGs and OSS is nearest to shore and central to offshore vistas. A crane operating from a jack-up barge will be used to access and install the WTG component pieces, otherwise internal ladders and lifts within the WTG towers will allow access to the nacelle for construction personnel. There will be a greater intensity of

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts
	Island Landscape (Class 4 – Iconic) Oileain Arainn	industrial related sea traffic as well as the emerging presence of large scale, sea-based structures. An undersea OEC will be placed across the seabed and will be buried or laid on the seabed with rock armour protection as appropriate in different sections, but the OEC will not be visible and will not have an impact on the Seascape. The cable laying vessel will be noticeable as it makes its way south from the OAA around the western end of Inishmore Island on the way to the Clare coastline west of Doonbeg. This will be a temporary and transient operation undertaken by a vessel which will not appear as an ambiguous or even conspicuous feature in this seascape setting. The largest scale construction related effects will be associated with the OAA and the emerging WTGs and OSS and these will occur between 5km and 11.5km from the nearest points of the shoreline at Mweenish. There will be clutter and complexity from the partially completed structures flanked by a crane and jack-up barge coupled with movement / activity from vessels and machinery. The context of construction stage offshore activities is a coastal environment containing some commercial shipping into Galway Port and Rossaveel Harbour. There are also passenger ferry routes and local fishing fleets contributing to productive maritime activity, modest in scale and intensity, but it is commonplace and contributes to baseline seascape character. On the basis of the reasons outlined above, the predicted magnitude of change associated with the incremental construction of the WTGs is considered to be **High / Negative** and of a **Short-term** duration for the seascape contained within 10km of the OAA. This relates to the central and most seaward exposed portions of the 'Connemara Sea Lough' unit and part of the 'Connemara Coastal Islands' unit. Between approximately 10-15km of the OAA the magnitude of impact will reduce to High-medium and Medium depending on the degree to which broad coastal views are a key characteristic of the Seascape character. This encompasses the same seascape units above as well as a small part of Oileain Arainn. It should be noted that this assessment is a worst-case for the construction stage as the period of time that the WTGs will be present above foundation level (sea level + 30m) in conjunction with other construction stage structures and vessels will be several months and therefore, this highest level of effect will only be of a Temporary duration.

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts
Not relevant	Uplands and Bog Landscape LCT Maumturk Mountains LCA Class 4 – Iconic; West Connemara LCA Class 3 - Special; South Connemara LCA Class 2 - High	Vessel traffic and activities within the OECC and OAA are unlikely to be noticeable from this SCA given the viewing distances involved as well as intervening landform from the lower lying West Connemara bog and South Connemara uplands. The incremental installation of the WTGs will be seen in clear viewing conditions, but at considerable remove from this inland landscape. The emerging WTGs will introduce tall built features into the distant aspects of the coastal views afforded from here and will serve as a distant focal point. This will increase the scale and intensity of built development within the broader setting of this landscape, which is otherwise characterised by small scale / low intensity development of a traditional nature. Nonetheless, the emerging WTGs will be perceived as discrete from the upland landscape area. The predicted magnitude of change associated with the incremental construction of the WTGs is considered to be **Medium-low / Negative** and of a **Short-term** duration. It should be noted that this assessment is a worst-case for the construction stage as the period of time that the WTGs will be present above foundation level (sea level + 30m) in conjunction with other construction stage structures and vessels will be several months and therefore, this highest level of effect will only be of a Temporary duration.

16.7.1.2.2 Significance of Construction Phase Seascape Effects

Based on combining the above assessments in relation seascape sensitivity and seascape impact magnitude, the significance of construction phase seascape effects are set out below;

- SCA5 - Major-moderate / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**
- SCA6 – Major / Negative / Temporary/ **Significant**
- Uplands and Bog Landscape LCT;
  - Maumturk Mountains LCA - Moderate / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**
  - West Connemara LCA – Moderate-slight / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**
  - South Connemara LCA Slight / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**

16.7.1.2.3 Operation and Maintenance Phase

During the Operation and Maintenance Phase, seascape effects will relate to the long-term presence of the WTGs and OSS, but no impacts will arise from the OEC as this is below the water line and not visible. There will be a low level of vessel traffic associated with maintenance activities and this will have a Negligible impact on Seascape Character due to its scale, nature and frequency. Seascape effects in relation to each of the identified Seascape Character Areas are assessed in Table 16-17 below.

Table 16-16: Operation and Maintenance Stage Seascape / Landscape Impacts

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts
SCA5 – Atlantic North Mayo and Galway	Coastal Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Connemara Coastal Islands; Connemara Sea Loughs; Hard Shore Coastal; Soft Shore Coastal; Island Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Inisbofin Unit	According to the ZTV maps, the WTGs will be openly visible from limited parts of this SCA and principally from the coastline and sea area south of Slyne Head where they will be visible in long-shore views more than 15km to the southeast. The WTGs will also be visible at greater distances from north of Slyne head where the westernmost coastline and offshore islands are afforded visibility across Slyne Head as well as from the southern side of more elevated peninsulas and promontory headlands just back from the coastline. These views are generally flanked and backed by complex coastline and the offshore Aran Islands rather than intruding on the open sea horizon to the south and west. In this respect the WTGs are contained by coastal landform rather than located within the wild and windswept setting of the Atlantic Ocean where the sense of scale, distance and openness might be diminished. The main effect from the Project will be the introduction of tall moving structures into a substantially undeveloped and lightly utilised seascape setting that is perceived as a transition from the complex Connemara Coastline to the open Atlantic Ocean. Although new to the seascape to the south, the development is not an ambiguous feature as there will be a perceptual connection between the remote windswept setting and the WTGs which have been placed to take advantage of that exposure. There will be a sense that the WTGs are peripheral and discrete to this Seascape Area, which predominately relates to the coastal setting to the north of Slyne Head. On the basis of the reasons outlined above, the predicted magnitude of impact associated with the operation and maintenance phase of the OWF is considered to be **Medium**, the quality of that effect is **Negative** and the duration **Long-term**. This level of impact only relates to the seascape to the south of Slyne Head and beyond to the north the impact will reduce to Medium-low and Low with increasing distance, broader context and contextual separation.
SCA 6 - Atlantic Galway Bay and Islands	Coastal Landscape (Class 3 – Special) Connemara Coastal Islands; Connemara Sea Loughs; Cois Fharriage	According to the ZTV maps, the WTGs will be openly visible from parts of this SCA and principally from the sea and exposed coastline of central and south Connemara from Slyne Head to the north Clare coastline, including the Aran Islands. Many areas contained within indented bays and inlets without a clear view of open sea are also excluded from views of the WTGs. From the north and south of the Offshore Site, these views are generally flanked and backed by complex coastline and the offshore

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts
	Island Landscape (Class 4 – Iconic) Oileain Arainn	Aran Islands rather than intruding on the open sea horizon to the west. The viewing context of the OAA is more directly offshore from Mweenish and Gorumna, albeit still framed by coastal headlands and islands. In this respect the WTGs are somewhat contained by coastal landform rather than located within the wild and windswept setting of the open Atlantic Ocean where the sense of scale, distance and openness might be diminished. The main effect from the Project will be the introduction of tall moving structures into a substantially undeveloped and lightly utilised seascape setting that is perceived as a transition from the complex Connemara Coastline to the open Atlantic Ocean. Although new to this host seascape, the development is not an ambiguous feature as there will be a perceptual connection between the remote windswept setting and the WTGs which have been placed to take advantage of that exposure. The OAA will be a prominent focus of offshore views from within the nearest portions of this seascape unit, but more peripheral and discrete relative to the coastal setting of Galway Bay and the north Clare seascape beyond the Aran Islands. On the basis of the reasons outlined above, the predicted magnitude of change associated with the operation and maintenance phase of the Project is considered to be **High / Negative** and of a **Long-term** duration for the seascape contained within 10km of the Offshore Site. This relates to the central and most seaward exposed portions of the 'Connemara Sea Lough' unit and part of the 'Connemara Coastal Islands' unit. Between approximately 10-15km of the OAA the magnitude of impact will reduce to High-medium and Medium depending on the degree to which broad coastal views are a key characteristic of the Seascape character. This encompasses the same seascape units above as well as a small part of Oileain Arainn. For Galway Bay and the north Clare coastline where there is much greater visual and contextual separation from the Offshore Site, the impact reduces to Low and Negligible depending on the degree of open sea connection.
Not relevant	Uplands and Bog Landscape LCT Maumturk Mountains LCA Class 4 – Iconic; West Connemara LCA Class 3 - Special;	The WTGs will range between fully and partially visible as well as fully screened from this SCA given the viewing distances involved as well as intervening landform from the lower lying West Connemara bog and South Connemara uplands. More open, but distant visibility is generally afforded from the southwestern slopes of the Maumturk Mountains LCA. The OAA will be seen in clear viewing conditions, but at considerable remove from this inland landscape. The WTGs will introduce tall built

Seascape Character Area	Underlying County Landscape Character Types and Areas	Magnitude of Seascape / Landscape Impacts
	South Connemara LCA Class 2 - High	features into the distant aspects of the coastal views afforded from here and will serve as a distant focal point. This will increase the scale and intensity of built development within the broader setting of this landscape, which is otherwise characterised by small scale / low intensity development of a traditional nature. Nonetheless, the WTGs will be perceived as discrete from the upland landscape area. The predicted magnitude of change associated with the operation and maintenance phase of the OAA is considered to be no greater than **Medium-low / Negative** and of a **Long-term** duration. This impact magnitude applies to those aspects of the Maumturk Mountains from which vast coastward vistas are a characteristic feature and also from nearer portions of the West Connemara and South Connemara that have more restricted intervisibility with the WTGs. The more distant and restricted the intervisibility is, the less the WTGs will impact on landscape character.

16.7.1.2.4 *Significance of Operation and Maintenance Phase Seascape Effects*

Based on combining the above assessments in relation seascape sensitivity and seascape impact magnitude, the significance of operation and maintenance phase seascape effects are set out below;

- SCA5 - Major-moderate / Negative / Long term/ **Not Significant**
- SCA6 – Major / Negative / Long term / **Significant**
- Uplands and Bog Landscape LCT;
  - Maumturk Mountains LCA - Moderate / Negative / Long term/ **Not Significant**
  - West Connemara LCA – Moderate-slight / Negative / Long term / **Not Significant**
  - South Connemara LCA Slight / Negative / Long term / **Not Significant**

16.7.1.2.5 *Decommissioning Phase*

During the decommissioning phase of the WTGs, OSS and associated offshore infrastructure, seascape effects will be very similar in scale and nature to those described in Section 16.7.1.1 for the Construction Phase except in reverse and with a slightly lesser duration. The effects will relate to the temporary presence of a crane on a jack-up barge adjacent to the WTG being dismantled along with support vessels and associated decommissioning activity. The Rehabilitation Schedule is outlined in detail in Appendix 5-18. The highest level of impact will occur when decommissioning machinery and vessels are present within the OAA and travelling frequently to shore, but with the WTGs still substantially in place. Effects will reduce as the WTGs are incrementally removed and the duration of all effects will be less than a year and therefore, Temporary.

The significance of decommissioning stage effect at each of the SCA's will be the same as assessed in Section 16.7.1.1 for construction stage effects;

Based on combining the above assessments in relation seascape sensitivity and seascape impact magnitude, the significance of operation and maintenance phase seascape effects are set out below;

- SCA5 - Major-moderate / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**
- SCA6 – Major / Negative / Temporary/ **Significant**
- Uplands and Bog Landscape LCT;
  - Maumturk Mountains LCA - Moderate / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**
  - West Connemara LCA – Moderate-slight / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**
  - South Connemara LCA Slight / Negative / Temporary/ **Not Significant**

16.7.2 Visual Impact Assessment

16.7.2.1 Visual Receptor Sensitivity

The detailed visual receptor sensitivity assessment is included within 'Appendix 16-1 Visual Impact Assessment at Selected Viewpoints'. This takes account of viewer susceptibility as well as the values associated with the particular view (see methodology Section 16.4.3.3). The results of the detailed visual impact assessment contained in Appendix 16-1 are summarised in Table 16-17.

In terms of visual receptor sensitivity trends, most viewpoint locations register sensitivity assessments ranging between High-medium and Very High. This is a result of many of the viewpoints often being selected at locations frequented by tourists and outdoor recreationalists in areas with low levels of existing coastal development. Such receptors are highly attuned to views of the surrounding landscape and susceptible to visual change that might alter the character of the view. Similar susceptibility is applied to those that live and holiday in Connemara and Burren coastal areas though it should be noted that sensitive receptors and settlements are often located in the sheltered lea of hills and coastal promontories to avoid exposure to Atlantic gales, but also reducing their potential to afford open seaward views.

In terms of view value, many of the higher sensitivity receptor locations are valued for dramatic coastal or mountain scenic amenity and a sense of wild and naturalistic character. They also have a strong sense of place and often a sense of awe associated with the scale of the view or its features. Where ancient features are also overtly present there is also a layer of cultural heritage value woven into the view (see Chapter 17 Marine Archaeology and Cultural Heritage). Such view characteristics inevitably relate to associated recreation and tourism value.

There are no low sensitivity visual receptors included in this assessment, which reflects a general absence of strongly modified utilitarian landscape settings and major transport routes. Those receptors most likely to attract mid-range visual receptor sensitivity are those within or closely associated with settlements that have a higher intensity of built development and more contained (sheltered) vistas on offer. Alternatively, they are within the low-lying coastal bog areas, where there is a sense of naturalistic value, but the views are relatively contained and not strongly influenced by the mountains or the sea.

16.7.2.2 Visual Impact Magnitude

16.7.2.2.1 *Construction Phase*

During the construction phase, operations and machinery movements associated with the Offshore Site, and the OEC will be visible with the most noticeable impacts near the end of the construction phase when all WTGs are in place in addition to concentrations of activity in the form of WTG installation vessels and cable laying vessels. The Project will introduce a number of offshore lights in the night time

sea view during the construction phase. At night time, navigational and aviation lighting is likely to be visible from the coastline in clear conditions.

Construction related sea-based activity will be most noticeable from the stretch of coastline between Slyne Head to the north and Golum Head to the south and particularly from the coastal area in the vicinity of Mweenish Island and Crosspatrick where the construction activities and incremental installation of the WTGs is nearest to shore and central to offshore vistas. Relevant visual receptors include the settlements of Carna and Ardmore as well as the Wild Atlantic Way which follows the R340 road between them and is also a section of designated scenic route in the Galway County Development Plan.

Whilst cable laying activities are generally transient, there will be a greater intensity and duration of fixed location activity at the OSS and also just offshore from the seaward end of the Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) vessel which will be stationed just off the County Clare coastline. The HDD vessel will initiate the underground transition from subsea cables to terrestrial cables at the Transition Joint Bay (TJB), which is onshore within coastal farmland in the townland of Killard. This will be a temporary activity generating only localised visual effects for onshore receptors in the near vicinity of this nearshore construction activity (c. 2km). Whilst this activity may be discernible from greater distances with clear line of OAA, visual effects will be increasingly limited (with distance) due to the relative perceived scale and broader context of this aspect of offshore construction activity, which will simply appear as a modest scale vessel stationed off the coastline.

North and south beyond Slyne Head and Golum Head, construction related sea traffic and activity will be less noticeable due to viewing distance from the OWF and the effects of earth curvature which begin to screen low objects within the sea beyond approximately 5km. These more peripheral coastal areas within the SLVIA Study Area will still have visibility of the emerging WTGs in clear viewing conditions, but generally partial visibility above intervening landform.

Visual receptor sensitivity is assessed in relation to the 38 representative viewpoints used for the visual impact assessment of the OAA. This forms part of the detailed operation and maintenance phase visual impact assessment at viewpoints, which is contained in Appendix 16-1 and summarised within this Chapter at Section 16.7.2.2.2. Overall receptor sensitivity ranges between Very high and Medium, but with those VP between Slyne Head and Golum Head, being the nearest section of coastline to the OAA, predominantly rated between High and High-medium. It is these nearer VP locations that are most likely to experience notable construction stage effects, especially from the likes of increased sea traffic and construction phase activity.

The worst-case magnitude of visual change during the latter part of the construction phase, when WTGs are in place along with construction activity, is assessed as **High** for those receptors within 10km of the OAA that have open views of the sea. Visual impacts will reduce thereafter at greater viewing distances and in broader viewing context where only the pre-operational WTGs will be noticeable. These effects will be Short-term in duration. Based on a worst-case sensitivity of 'High' at VP12 – Mweenish Cemetery and VP29 St Macdara's Island, the significance of construction phase visual effects is deemed to be **Major** and of a **Negative** quality, which is considered to be a Significant effect . For other receptors within 10km that are of a lesser sensitivity or have less open sea views the predicted construction phase visual effect is not considered to exceed Major-moderate, which is Not deemed to be a Significant impact. Outside of this area, the significance of construction phase effects will generally reduce to 'Moderate' or lower with increasing separation distance and is not significant.

16.7.2.2.2 *Operation and Maintenance Phase*

Operation and maintenance phase visual impacts are assessed from 38 representative viewpoints and the detailed assessments, which include receptor sensitivity judgements, visual impact magnitude judgement and the overall significance of visual effect, are contained in Appendix 16-1.

Table 16-17 Summary of Visual Impacts (from Appendix 16-1)

Viewpoint	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Visual Impact	Significance / Quality / Duration of Effect
VP1 Spiddal Pier	High-medium	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP2 Inverin Beach	High-medium	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP3 Cartron Harbour	High-medium	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP4 Bauntragh Cemetery	High-medium	Low	Slight / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP5 Rossaveel Harbour	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP6 R336 at Lough Carrafinla	High-medium	Low	Slight / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP7	High	Negligible	Imperceptible /

Viewpoint	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Visual Impact	Significance / Quality / Duration of Effect
Coral Strand			Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP8 Lettermore	High-medium	Low	Slight / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP9 R336 at Screebe	High-medium	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP10 R340 at Glencoh	High	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP11 R340 at Ardmore	High	High-medium	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP12 Mweenish Cemetery	High	High	Major / Negative / Long-term Significant
VP12 Mweenish Cemetery (Night time)	Medium (At night)	Low	Slight Negative Long Term

Viewpoint	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Visual Impact	Significance / Quality / Duration of Effect
			Not Significant
VP13 Glynsk Pier	Medium	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP14 R342 at Cloonisle Quay	High	Low-negligible	Slight / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP15 Roundstone	High	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP16 Gurteen Bay	High	High-medium	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
V16 Gurteen Bay (Night Time)	Medium (at night)	Low	Slight-imperceptible Negative Long Term Not Significant
VP17 R341 at Callow	High	High-medium	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP18	High	Medium	Moderate /

Viewpoint	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Visual Impact	Significance / Quality / Duration of Effect
Bunowen Beach			Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP19 Derrigimlagh Bog	High-medium	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP20 Alcock and Brown Memorial	High	Medium	Moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP21 Sky Road Viewpoint – Clifden	Very High	Medium-low	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP22 Eyrephort Beach	High-medium	Negligible	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term Not Significant
VP23 Lettermullen	Medium	High-medium	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP23 Lettermullen (night time)	Medium/Low (at night)	Low	Slight-imperceptible Negative Long Term

Viewpoint	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Visual Impact	Significance / Quality / Duration of Effect
			Not Significant
VP24 Tramore – Golam Head	High	High-medium	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP25 Connemara Golf Links	High-medium	Medium	Moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP26 Diamond Hill	Very High	Medium-low	Moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP27 Maumeen Chapel	Very High	Medium-low	Moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP28 Twelve Pins alpine route at Lettery	Very High	Medium-low	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP29 Macdara Island Monastery	High	High	Major / Negative / Long-term Significant
VP30	High	Medium	Moderate /

Viewpoint	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Visual Impact	Significance / Quality / Duration of Effect
Inishmore Island at Cloghadockan			Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP31 Inishmore Island Lighthouse	High	Medium-low	Moderate-slight / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP32 Inis Ni	Medium	Medium	Moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP33 Dooyeher	Medium	High-medium	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP34 Black Head (County Clare)	High	Low-negligible	Slight-imperceptible / Neutral-Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP35 Inishbofin Island	High	Low-negligible	Slight-imperceptible / Neutral-Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP36 Cliffs of Moher (County Clare)	Very High	Low-negligible	Slight / Neutral-Negative / Long-term

Viewpoint	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Visual Impact	Significance / Quality / Duration of Effect
			Not Significant
VP37 Carna	High-medium	High-medium	Major-moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant
VP37 Carna (Night time)	Medium (at night)	Low	Slight Negative Long term Not Significant
VP38 Ballyconneely	High-medium	Medium-low	Moderate / Negative / Long-term Not Significant

In order to summarise the day time visual impacts assessed in Table 16-17 (derived and set out and assessed in further detail in Appendix 16-1) in a logical and digestible manner, it is considered more pertinent to group them geographically than by receptor type. This is partly because receptor type is not particularly differentiating in this instance as the majority are from scenic designations and amenity / heritage / recreation features, whereas few are from large centres of population or major transport routes. It is also because the SLVIA Study Area has distinct geographical areas, the nature of which dictates visibility and visual context of the WTGs. Consequently, the visual impacts will be summarised using the following geographical areas;

- North Galway Bay Coastline
- Southwest Connemara Coastline
- North Connemara Coastline
- The Connemara Mountains
- The offshore Islands
- North Clare Coastline

North Galway Bay Coastline

Views from the north Galway Bay coastline represent the string of connected settlements that straddle the R336 coast road between Galway City and the entrance to Rossaveel Harbour. This includes VP1, VP2, VP3 and VP4. All of these views are captured from the coastline at the beaches and harbours associated with these settlements.

The ZTV map (Figure 16-9) indicates very limited visibility from this section of coastline and no visibility at all from Galway City. This is confirmed by the photomontages prepared in respect of the

selected viewpoints as none of the first three VPs have any material visibility of the WTGs. Only VP4 from Bauntragh Cemetery afforded partial and distant views of the WTG blades above intervening terrain resulting in a Slight effect and not significant.

No significant effects were assessed at any of the North Galway Bay representative receptor locations.

Southwest Connemara Coastline

This southwest facing section of coastline is the closest section of the coastline to the OAA and, for the purposes of this summary, stretches from Slyne head in the north to Rossaveel in the south. The representative views include VP5, VP6, VP7, VP8, VP9 VP10, VP11, VP12, VP13, VP14, VP15 VP16, VP17, VP18, VP23, VP24, VP25, VP29, VP32, VP33 and VP37, which are quite varied in context depending on how close to the shoreline they are.

Beginning with the southernmost receptors, VP5 and VP7 are contained within Rossaveel Harbour and Greatman's Bay respectively and neither has a potential view of the WTGs resulting in Imperceptible effects which are Not Significant.

Although VP6, VP9 and VP10 are all comparatively inland relative to the other views, they are all closely connected to the labyrinth of inlets, lakes and islands that make up the complex Connemara coastline where it makes a slow transition to coastal bogland. In each of these cases the view is dominated more by undulating bogland land than by water. Consequently, if the WTGs are potentially visible at all, it is partial blade sets at long distances rotating on the intervening skyline and effects do not exceed Slight. Similarly, the view from the settlement of Lettermore (VP8) reveals only partial blade sets of the WTGs above an intervening skyline at distances greater than 18km and the effect is also deemed Slight which is Not Significant.

VP11 represents the first clear view of the OWF from the R340 heading west along the Wild Atlantic Way. It is a broad and slightly elevated vista and although the WTGs are aligned with the direction of travel, they are slightly peripheral to the main aspect of visual amenity to the south. This clear view of the WTGs at distances beyond 11.5km results in a Major-moderate effect which is Not Significant.

One of the closest and clearest onshore views of the Project is afforded from VP12 at Mweenish Cemetery which overlooks the sea in the direction of Sceirde Rocks. The WTGs present with a dominant visual presence from this distance of 5.7km to the nearest of them, but without a particular sense of overbearing. They occupy a broad lateral extent which encompasses over half of the visible open sea horizon and that being the section directly offshore surrounding Sceirde Rocks. Nonetheless, the WTGs are seen in a clear and comprehensible manner from base to blade tip with a strong sense of perspective between the nearest and furthest of them. Whilst there is no particular rhythm or order to the arrangement of WTGs, they are loosely presented in about 5-6 clusters with some permeability between the clusters which slightly reduces the sense of enclosure of the open sea view. Furthermore, orderly rows of WTGs would not be appropriate in this disorderly section of coastline where a more organic layout is deemed the appropriate design response. The development will introduce tall moving structures into an undeveloped area of open sea that is framed by a complex shoreline and islands such that it is only partly perceived as being within the open Atlantic context from this viewpoint. There is also some perceptual connection between the remote windswept setting and the WTGs that are placed to take advantage of that exposure such that they are not an ambiguous feature. For these reasons the effect at VP12 is deemed to be Major and this is a Significant effect.

The view of the WTGs from VP13, VP14 and VP15 are all completely or substantially screened from view with effects ranging between Slight and Imperceptible which are Not Significant. These are typical views from within the complex Connemara coastline of sandy inlets rocky peninsulas and nearshore islands.

Gurteen Bay and Dogs Bay share either side of a sandy spit and are popular Connemara beaches on the Wild Atlantic Way. VP16 represents the elevated scenic view above them and affords a view of all of the WTGs rising above the low peninsula that contains the beaches at a distance of 9.9km to the nearest of them. Whilst the OAA has a reasonable lateral extent in the context of the broad coastal vista to the south, there are only glimpses of open sea horizon and all aspects of the complex coastline compete for the viewers' attention. The scenic view is specified as being across the bay to the southeast towards the complex Connemara coastline, whereas the WTGs are seen to the southwest. On balance, the effect is deemed to be Major-moderate at this location, which is Not considered to be a Significant effect.

VP17 is further to the west around the R341 coast road from VP16 and it is also on the Wild Atlantic Way. It affords clear and legible view of the WTGs at distances of 11.7km and beyond. They occupy a reasonable lateral extent which encompasses a modest and slightly peripheral section of the open sea horizon that can be seen from here with more open views further to the west. Overall, the effects is also deemed to be Major-moderate which is Not Significant.

Bunowen Beach is represented by VP18 and from here the WTGs present at a distinctive scale from a distance of 15.5km, but without dominating the view. They will rise beyond the pier and pier-side development and there will be a degree of clutter generated between overlapping WTGs and those that rotate between and beyond the nearer buildings. Overall, the visual effect is deemed Moderate here. On a similar alignment but slightly further away is VP25 at Connemara Golf Links and again the WTGs are seen at noticeable, but not dominating scale within the context of the foreground golf links and Connemara Bay Beach. The westernmost WTG is seen from base to blade tip within the open sea context, but the remainder rise beyond intervening terrain. Overall, the visual effect is also deemed to be Moderate which is Not Significant.

Lettermullen, is one of the closest settlements to the Project and a view from its seaward side is represented by VP23. From here the WTGs and associated OSS are fully visible from base to tip and they are seen at a prominent scale from this distance of 11.6km to the nearest of them. They rise out of a narrow horizontal strip of sea that is almost obscured by the flat intervening peninsula such that there is some scale / distance and contextual confusion as to whether they actually rise from the nearer landform. This effect is alleviated slightly by the northernmost WTGs which are more clearly seen to be rising from open sea. Overall, the visual effect is deemed to be Major-moderate which is Not Signficant. Closer to the OAA from the same sequence of islands and headlands is Golam Head, which is represented by VP24. From here the WTGs will be substantially visible on the north-western seaward skyline at distances beyond 10.3km with the blade sets of most of them rotating fully above an open sea skyline or Golam Island to the right of the stone tower that sits on Golam Island. The WTGs are a prominent feature of the scene, but will occupy less than half of the open sea horizon that is visible from here. Overall, the visual effect is also considered Major-moderate from VP24 which is Not Significant.

VP29 represents Macdara's Island, which is a small uninhabited island at the end of a chain of islands extended out from the mainland via Mweenish Island and Mason Island. It is the closest island to the OAA and its most distinctive aspect is that it hosts St Macdara's Island Monastery. It is visited once a year on the 16th of July as part of a pilgrimage by residents of the local area for a blessing of boats (Saint Macdara is the patron saint of seafarers). Thus, views from the island are afforded predominantly on the 16th of July each year for local pilgrims. The WTGs present with a dominant visual presence from this distance of 3.2km to the nearest of them. Although the moving WTGs will be a visually dominating feature of the offshore view with a broad lateral extent, their vertical extent does not present with a sense of overbearing. The lateral extent of the OAA encompasses the majority of the visible open sea horizon that can be seen between the summit of the island to the west and the Aran Islands to the south. Notwithstanding, due to the close proximity of this viewpoint to the OAA, there is a greater sense of visual permeability through it than is experienced from more distant viewpoints. The WTGs are seen in a clear and comprehensible manner from base to blade tip within the open sea context, albeit with the most northerly WTGs partially obscured by the summit of the island from the

VP29 location. There is a noticeable difference in scale between the nearest and furthest WTGs, which generates a sense of perspective and an understanding of the depth of the OAA and distance between individual WTGs. The development will introduce tall moving structures into an undeveloped area of open sea that is perceived as a transition to the open Atlantic context from this viewpoint. There is some perceptual connection between the remote windswept setting and the WTGs placed to take advantage of that exposure. It is also that sense of remoteness and exposure that inspired the creation of monastic sites at the edge of the known world. There is a distinct juxtaposition between ancient and contemporary built features within this view that may appeal to some viewers, but not others. On balance, the visual effect is deemed to be Major from here and this is considered to be a Significant effect (see also, the Cultural Heritage Assessment in Chapter 17 Marine Archaeology and Cultural Heritage).

VP37 is from the small and slightly dispersed coastal settlement of Carna some 8km to the northeast of the nearest point of the OAA. The selected viewpoint is from the Emigrants Commemorative Centre, which is located adjacent to the shoreline downhill form the main street. This location is afforded more open seaward visibility than many other parts of the settlement but views of open ocean are restricted by the intervening complex coastline of inlets, outcrops and islands. From here the WTGs will be prominently visible and there is some minor ambiguity relating to the exact location (scale / distance) of the OAA because the open sea they rise from is not visible from here. Consequently, the WTGs have a slightly confusing scale and distance relationship to the nearer sensitive receptors on Mweenish Island. On balance, the visual effect is deemed to be Major-moderate from here which is Not Significant.

Viewpoints VP32 and VP33 are both located on local waymarked walking/ cycling trails withVP32 being on Inis Ní Island across the inlet from the popular tourist village of Roundstone. VP33 is at Dooyeher near Moyrus Beach. From VP32, the partial blade sets of most of the WTGs will be visible rising in silhouette above the low skyline ridge of Inis Ní at distances beyond 12.4km and the visual effect is deemed to be Moderate. From VP33, which is only 7.1km from the nearest WTGs they are seen to rise out of open sea at a prominent scale and the visual effect is deemed Major-moderate which is Not Significant.

North Connemara Coastline

The nearest of the North Connemara viewpoints is actually from a transitional location between the northern and southern side of Slyne Head at the settlement of Ballyconneely (VP38). Further north are VP19 and VP20 which lie to the south of Clifden and then VP21 and VP22 which lie to the west of Clifden.

At VP38 from Ballyconneely, which is a rare elevated view from just outside the lower and more enclosed core of the settlement, the Project will be fully visible along the coastline to the south at a nearest distance of 16.6km. Consequently, the WTGs will be seen at a modest yet noticeable scale. Whilst the OAA occupies a reasonable lateral extent, this is only a small section of the broad vista available and a subordinate proportion of the open sea horizon that is visible further to the west. In the context of the complex view across a settled, but rocky and exposed section of Connemara coastline, the WTGs do not appear out-of-place in this view and the effect is deemed to be Moderate which is Not Significant.

The site of the crash landing of Alcock and Brown's inaugural non-stop flight across the Atlantic is an important historical location. Both the crash landing site within Derrigimlagh bog and the nearby hilltop memorial were assessed for visual effects using VP19 and VP20 respectively. There is no material view of WTGs from the bog, but from VP20 the WTGs are fully visible within a vast coastal and hinterland vista at a distance of 20km. It is a clear and legible view of the WTGs and the effect is deemed be Moderate which is Not Significant.

The Sky Road and its dedicated lookout point west of Clifden afford some of the most vast and iconic vistas across the Connemara coastline and is one of the highlights of the Wild Atlantic Way. It therefore

attracted a Very High sensitivity rating. The WTGs will be fully visible along the coastline to the south at a nearest distance of 24.5km. Consequently, they will be seen at a modest yet noticeable scale, but only in clear viewing conditions. The majority of WTGs can be seen within open sea with the easternmost WTGs rising above low coastal promontories and islands. Thus the OAA is seen more in the context of the complex and settled coastline, than within the wild and open Atlantic context, which opens up further to the west. The OAA represents a noticeable increase in the scale, extent and diversity of man-made development within the vista. Yet, there is a legible correlation between the exposed coastal setting, the settlement patterns and the WTGs, such that they do not appear as an ambiguous feature in this view. They will serve as a background focal point of the southerly view, but without dominating it. On balance, the magnitude of visual impact was deemed Medium-low, but due to the Very High sensitivity, the significance of effect is deemed to be Major-moderate. This is not considered to be a significant effect in EIA terms.

Eyrephort Beach is accessed from the Sky Road and is at the seaward end of the peninsula that the Sky Road circulates. It is represented by VP22, but there will be no view of the WTGs from here. The significance of effect is deemed to be Imperceptible which is Not Significant.

The Connemara Mountains

The Connemara Mountains represent the containing element of the Connemara coastal area and also afford elevated views across it from trails that are popular with tourists and hillwalkers. The representative views include VP26, VP27 and VP28.

VP26 is from Diamond Hill, which is something of a standalone peak within Connemara National Park just to the east of the settlement of Letterfrack where it is accessed via a popular walking trail. The southerly view from Diamond Hill is a vast panorama framed to the east by the taller peaks of the Twelve Bens. The fore-to-middle ground consists of undulating hills of moorland and forestry and further beyond is a lowland setting of lakes, coastal bog, marginal farmland and conifer forests then finally a complex coastline that gives way to open sea. The WTGs will be substantially visible rising above the distant sea horizon at a nearest distance of just under 29km. The promontory headland of Errisbeg screens the towers of nine of the WTGs in the centre-right of the cluster. The WTGs are clearly contained within open sea in a legible manner, albeit divided by a coastal promontory and just beyond a labyrinth of islands and inlets. Thus the OAA is seen within a context that does not read as the wild and open Atlantic context. Based on the Very High sensitivity rating combined with a Medium-low magnitude of impact, the visual effect is considered to be Moderate which is Not Significant.

VP27 is from Maumeen Chapel which is an ancient place of worship on a high saddle within the Maumturk Mountains that define the landward extent of Connemara. It is located on the Western Way national waymarked walking route and marks the start / end of the alpine section of the trail along the main Maumturk ridgeline. The westerly view is a striking panorama framed by the mountains that define the saddle in the foreground. There is a sweeping apron of moorland and rock that gives way to a lightly settled lowland setting of coastal bog, marginal farmland and conifer forest. There are numerous hills and coastal promontories and in the far distance is an intermittent band of sea interspersed with islands. The OAA will be fully visible rising before the distant sea horizon at a nearest distance of just over 30km. Consequently, the WTGs will be seen at a small yet noticeable scale, but only in clear viewing conditions. They will serve as a distant focus of this framed vista towards the sea and will occupy the majority of the sea horizon that can be seen from here. However, this view is vast and complex and the distant sea context is but one small element of it. Based on the Very High sensitivity rating combined with a Medium-low magnitude of impact, the visual effect is deemed to be Moderate from here which is Not Significant.

VP28 is from the Twelve Pins Alpine route and is a view obtained by advanced hill walkers just before descending towards Ben Lettery Hostel on the N59 below. The westerly view takes in a naturalistic

transition from high mountains to foothills and flats of blanket bogs and lakes that seamlessly give way to coastal bogs, inlets and islands in a complex labyrinth of waterways that defines the Connemara coastline. The OAA will be fully visible rising before the distant sea horizon at a nearest distance of 23.5km. Consequently, the WTGs will be seen at a modest yet noticeable scale. They will serve as a distant focus of this broad vista towards the sea where they will occupy a subordinate proportion of the open sea horizon that can be seen from here. Overall, the visual effect is considered to be Major-moderate from here, which is Not considered to be a Significant effect.

The Offshore Islands

The Offshore Island views consist of two views from Inishmore Island (VP30 and VP31), being the nearest of the Aran Islands, and one view from Inishbofin Island off the coast of north Connemara (VP35).

From VP30, at the western (seaward) end of Inishmore Island, the view takes in a foreground of a lichen covered flaggy shoreline that descends gently towards the rocky shoreline. In the distance to the north and northeast can be seen the complex shoreline and nearshore islands of Connemara with promontory headlands and the Connemara Mountains rising above. The WTGs are seen at a distance of 13.7km to the nearest of them and will be a visually prominent feature of the long shore view with a reasonable lateral extent that is subordinate and offset from visible open sea horizon that can be seen between the end of the island to the west and the Connemara coastline to the north. The development will introduce tall moving structures into an undeveloped area of sea that is perceived as a transition to the open Atlantic context from this viewpoint and the visual effect is deemed to be Moderate. From VP31, which is from the high point of the island and nearly 20km from the OAA, the northerly view includes a foreground of intricate stonewall field boundaries on this plateau summit of the island. The nearest section of shoreline is obscured from view but further west can be seen the rocky western end of Inishmore. The WTGs will be a noticeable feature of the north-westerly open sea view and the OAA has a reasonable lateral extent that occupies around half of the visible open sea horizon that can be seen between the end of the island to the west and the Connemara coastline to the northwest. From this more distant views, the visual effect is deemed to be Moderate-slight, which is Not Significant.

The ruins of the ancient coastal fort of Dún Aonghusa are an important heritage feature and popular tourism location contained on a high point at the southwest of the Inishmore Island. As this is on the southern slopes of the island, it takes in vast seaward vistas to the south, but is precluded visibility north towards the OAA. Those who have ventured to see it will already have been exposed to views of the Project and may also continue on to the western tip of the island where they will encounter northward views like that represented by VP30 (described above). Consequently, there will be general views of the proposed WTGs for those visiting Dun Aonghusa, but not from the fort itself.

VP35 is a view afforded from the southern side of Inishbofin Island which lies off the coast of north Galway / south Mayo and is accessible by ferry from the mainland. The southerly view in question takes in a local beach and there are a number of small islands in the foreground. Beyond in the distance, can be seen the complex inlets, headlands and nearshore islands of the north Connemara coastline. At a nearest distance of just over 40km, the WTGs will be seen as very small and distant features and only in the clearest of viewing conditions. Even in such conditions they will have a low degree of contrast against a backdrop of sky. Only the blade sets of the WTGs will rise above a low section of the west Connemara coastline and the overall visual effect is deemed to be Slight-imperceptible which is Not Significant.

North Clare Coastline

Receptors on the north Clare (Burren) coastline are represented by VP34 on Blackhead and VP36 at O'Brien's Tower on the coastal promontory above the Cliffs of Moher visitors centre.

VP34 is a vast and open seaward view from a roadside pull-in point on Black Head within the Burren Geopark in County Clare. It lies just above Black Head Lighthouse and is backed by steep and bare limestone slopes that are unique to this area. The seaward view is a simple one across the mouth of Galway Bay and out to the Atlantic Ocean. The Aran Islands can be seen at the entrance to Galway Bay, but like the Connemara coastline beyond, the landform presents with a low profile from this distance. At a nearest distance of nearly 45km, the WTGs will be seen as very small and distant features and only in the clearest of viewing conditions. Only the blade sets will be visible above the horizon due to earth curvature. Even in clear conditions they will have a low degree of contrast against a backdrop of sky. The overall visual effect is deemed to be Slight-imperceptible which is Not Significant

VP36 is a vast and elevated panoramic coastal vista that is afforded from one of the country's most visited natural heritage features – The Cliffs of Moher. These dramatic coastal cliffs feature on postcards of Ireland and are one of the iconic features on the Wild Atlantic Way. However, this view is obtained from O'Brien's Tower which perches on a promontory ridge that frames the northern side of the main Cliffs of Moher visitors centre enclave. It is reached with a brisk uphill walk of around 300m from the main viewing area that affords the iconic south-westerly vista along the scalloped cliffs. Landform precludes visibility towards the OAA from this main viewing point and the visitor's centre. The view in question takes in a vast and open Atlantic scene to the west and the more enclosed setting of the mouth of Galway Bay to the north. The Aran Islands are a key feature at the entrance to the Bay and serve to divide it from the open Atlantic context. In the immediate context are a series of scalloped sea cliffs heading in a north-easterly direction. As with VP34 from Blackhead, the WTGs would only be seen in the clearest of viewing conditions, 45km away to the northwest. Only the partial blade sets of the WTGs will rise above the low profile of the Aran Islands. At this distance the OSS appears as a simple line and any clutter caused by overlapping WTGs is negated by distance. The overall visual effect is deemed to be Slight-imperceptible which is Not Significant

16.7.2.2.3 *Climate and Visibility Frequency*

The visual effects assessed in Appendix 16-1 all relate to clear viewing conditions as the baseline photography was deliberately captured in clear weather conditions in order to illustrate worst-case effects in terms of visual exposure of the proposed WTGs within the OAA. Scheduling this photography capture fieldwork proved difficult as weather / viewing conditions are frequently sub-optimal. Indeed, the Met Eireann Website identifies, in relation to cloud cover, that "Irish skies are completely covered by cloud for well over fifty percent of the time".

Unlike the UK meteorological service (Met Office), the Irish meteorological Service (Met Eireann) does not measure distance visibility at its weather stations. Whilst visibility has been traditionally measured by human observation, latest automated techniques use Meteorological Terminal Air Report (METAR), which records the distance that a beam of light can travel before its luminous flux is reduced to 5% of its original value, which is considered to correlate to the human eye. The UK Met Office defines visibility distance using the following categories;

- Very Poor - Less than 1,000 metres
- Poor - Between 1,001 and 4,000 metres
- Medium - Between 4,001 and 10,000 metres
- Good - Between 10,001 and 20,000 metres
- Very Good - Between 20,001 and 40,000 metres
- Excellent - Greater than 40,000 metres

Typical figures for a weather station near the Welsh coastline indicate that over a 10 year period the frequency of 'Good', 'Very Good' and 'Excellent' viewing conditions occurred c. 18%, c. 40% and 29% of the time respectively and it is these viewing distances (10km to 40km+) that are most relevant to the visual receptors within the 60km radius SLVIA Study Area. If climatic conditions are at least similar on the west coast of Ireland, these figures would suggest that the WTGs will be potentially visible for nearly 90% of the time from those visual receptors that are within 20km of the nearest WTGs. For those

visual receptors between 20km and 40km, potential visibility due to climatic conditions reduces to approximately 70% of the time and then to less than 30% of the time from those beyond 40km, such as from the North Clare coastline.

Even when potential visibility of WTGs is not precluded by climatic conditions, a key visibility consideration is the degree of contrast of WTGs against the backdrop of sky above the horizon. Fieldwork for this and other projects around Ireland over the past 20 years has revealed that the seaward horizon is most frequently cloudy and even on sunshine days often presents with a hazy/ milky appearance. When presented against such a light tone backdrop, the light tone (off-white) WTGs have a low degree of visual contrast meaning they will be visually recessive and less noticeable.

Given that the proposed WTGs will present against a western sea horizon for those visual receptors located north of Galway Bay, there is potential for the WTGs to be backlit (presenting with a dark tone) against the western sky at dusk. In this circumstance the WTGs will present as silhouettes with a higher degree of contrast (visibility) against the sky backdrop than would be typical throughout the remainder of the day. The opposite may also occur in morning light if the WTGs are front-lit by the sun against the backdrop of a dark or stormy sky making them more visible than in other scenarios of lesser contrast against the sky. These situations represent some of the less common, but nonetheless notable, variations in the way in which the WTGs will occasionally be presented to viewers where visual contrast will be greater than that typically experienced.

Although the visual impact assessment of the Project is based on clear viewing conditions, when coastal visual amenity is also optimised, it is reasonable to consider that due to the climatic conditions of the Atlantic coast, the visual impacts of the proposed WTGs will be less than what has been assessed, in the depicted clear conditions, for a reasonable proportion of the year. It is important to note that moderating effects associated with weather / visibility conditions have not been factored into visual impact judgements, which therefore represent a worst-case / conservative approach to the assessment.

16.7.2.2.4 Night-Time Visual Effects from WTG Lighting

The SLVIA Study Area is not designated in terms of dark skies but given the population density is relatively sparse, the baseline context of night time light pollution is relatively low. The international Light Pollution Map which is available on the 'Dark Skies Ireland' website, and is generated by satellite imagery, indicates that the 'Zenith Sky Brightness' equates to 'Class 2 – Average Darkness' at the OAA. This is the second highest of a nine category classification system that is topped by 'Class 1 – Excellent Dark Sky', (occurs in the open ocean c. 10km west of the OAA) and has Class 9 – Inner City Sky at the other end of the spectrum. To put this in further context, the sky around the nearest settlement of Carna is classified as Class 3 Rural Sky and the larger settlement of Carraroe is classified as Class 4 – Rural Suburban transition. All other areas within the surrounding seascape and complex Connemara coastline share the same Class 2 classification as the OAA.

The maritime sky horizon along the section of the sky that contains the WTGs contains some navigational aids in terms of light houses and beacons as well as commercial vessel corridors in and out of Galway Bay, fishing grounds and ferry routes. Thus, it is a baseline context of some other modest sources of light – some moving and some static.

The WTG lighting consists of marine lighting near the base of the towers of significant peripheral WTGs and aviation lighting will be located at the nacelle of significant peripheral WTGs. Whilst the marine lighting only needs to be visible to 2 nautical miles, the aviation lighting is more intense - between 2000 cd and 200 cd depending on visibility conditions. For the purpose of this study 200 cd lighting has been simulated because it is only in clear conditions that lighting will be visible from shore based receptors and although lighting intensity will be increased as visibility conditions diminish it will only be to maintain an equivalent lighting intensity (see full lighting details in Appendix 5-9 Lighting and Marking Plan). Even though the current aviation lighting requirements in Ireland specify white flashing lights that are baffled so that light will not be emitted below the horizontal, red lights with no

baffle have been used as a worst-case-scenario in this instance as there is potential for lighting requirements to change in the future.

Four of the viewpoints used for day time photomontages were also used for the preparation of night time photomontages to illustrate the effects of WTG lighting (VP12 – Mweenish Cemetery, VP16 – Gurteen Bay, VP23 - Lettermullen, and VP37 - Carna). These were selected on the basis of providing a range of viewing distances and angles, but also to represent locations that might be visited at night or have surrounding residences who have similar night time views. The night time photomontages provide the relevant seaward view and a full 360 degree panorama is also inset to illustrate the nature of the baseline lighting conditions that surround the viewer at each location.

The results of the night time visual impact assessment are contained in Appendix 16-1 and summarised in Table 16-17 where they immediately follow the day time assessment at each of the relevant VPs. It is considered that the same receptor sensitivity as established for daytime visual amenity does not apply to night time views, which relate principally to the sense of darkness. Notwithstanding, there is some value attributed to the dark skies in this area, but without it being designated as a dark sky reserve. Consequently, Medium night time sensitivity is applied to all but the view from VP23 – Lettermullen where Medium-low is applied on the basis of the higher degree of surrounding light sources.

In terms of magnitude, the red flashing aviation lights at the hub of the WTG and the yellow maritime lights near the base will both be visible from VP12 and VP16 where intervening land does not obstruct views of the maritime lights. In such instances there may be some ambiguity in the lighting due to the different colours and heights of the two forms of lighting. The aviation lights will be visible from each of the representative VP locations in clear night time viewing conditions, but they are not a prominent feature of the night sky and will reside just above the horizon. They will read as dots of light that are only slightly stronger than the stars that can be seen in the sky above them, albeit they are noticeably stronger from VP12 at Mweenish Cemetery than from the more distant VP locations. It is important to consider that they are light sources designed to be seen rather than illuminate the setting around them and they will not draw from the ability to see stars in the sky overhead or contribute to a noticeably increased sense of ambient light in the area. For seaward views, the lights will serve to enclose the night time view to a minor degree giving a reduced sense of open sea and associated darkness and distance. Overall, the magnitude of impact is not considered to exceed Low / Negative at any of the VP locations resulting in Slight significance at VP12 and VP37 and Slight-imperceptible significance at the more distant VP23 and VP16. These are Not considered to be Significant effects.

16.7.2.2.5 *Decommissioning Phase*

During the decommissioning phase of the Offshore Site, visual effects will be very similar in scale and nature to those described in Section 16.7.1.2.2 for the Construction Phase except in reverse and with a slightly lesser duration. The highest level of impact will occur when decommissioning machinery and vessels are present within the OAA and travelling frequently to shore, but with the WTGs still substantially in place. Effects will reduce as the WTGs are incrementally removed until there is no effect.

The worst-case magnitude of visual change during the early part of the decommissioning phase, when WTGs are in place along with the dismantling crane and barge as well as associated decommissioning activity. This is assessed as **High** for those receptors within 10km of the WTGs that have open views of the sea. Visual impacts will reduce thereafter at greater viewing distances and in broader viewing context. These effects will be Temporary in duration. Based on a worst-case sensitivity of 'High' at VP12 – Mweenish Cemetery and VP29 St Macdara's Island, the significance of decommissioning phase visual effects is deemed to be **Major** and of a **Negative** quality, which is considered to be a Significant effect. For other receptors within 10km that are of a lesser sensitivity or have less open sea views the predicted decommissioning phase visual effect is not considered to exceed Major-moderate, which is Not a Significant effect Outside of this area, the significance of construction phase effects will generally reduce to 'Moderate' or lower with increasing separation distance which are Not Significant

16.7.3 Do Nothing Scenario

In a do-nothing scenario the seascape and visual setting of the OAA and its surrounds is likely to remain consistent with the baseline scenario and any development is likely to follow current trends and planning policy for the area.

16.8 Residual Effects

In the case of seascape / landscape and visual effects, any mitigation measures are embedded in the siting and design of the Project assessed in Section 16.7. There are no specific mitigation measures proposed and therefore, further assessment of residual effects does not arise as the impacts are as concluded in Section 16.7 above.

16.9 Cumulative Effects

All potential cumulative projects from Appendix 4-1 have been reviewed and it is considered that only other commercial scale wind energy developments are relevant to the assessment of cumulative effects in relation to the proposed OAA. There are a number of small single turbines that are also excluded from the cumulative effects assessment as they are not comparable in terms of scale and will not contribute to cumulative effects in a material way. In terms of cumulative wind farms within the SLVIA Study Area there are five multi-turbine operational developments, six single turbine operational developments and one permitted development. These include;

- Galway Wind Park - Operational (58 turbines)
- Arderoo - Operational (adjacent to Galway Wind Park (25 turbines)
- Inverin – Operational (5 turbines)
- Knockalough - Operational (12 turbines)
- Leitir – Operational (17 turbines)
- Rossaveel Harbour – Operational (single turbine)
- Knockranny - permitted (11 turbines)

It should also be noted in the context of the vast majority of the above wind energy developments being operational, that they already formed part of the baseline scenario that was considered as part of the assessment of the OAA in Section 16.7.

16.9.1 Cumulative Landscape / Seascape Effects

In terms of landscape character, operational wind energy developments are a familiar, but not overly frequent feature of the landscape of the SLVIA Study Area and tend to be heavily clustered in the south Connemara hill country. This is the lightly populated area of forestry and marginal farmland that hosts the Galway Wind Park / Arderoo / Leitir /Knockalough / Knockranny cluster referred to hereafter as the 'GWP cluster'. Otherwise operational wind energy developments are small and relatively isolated and do not contribute greatly to the prevailing landscape character.

Aside from the single turbine at Rossaveel Harbour and the small wind farm upslope from Galway Bay at Inverin, the seascape within the SLVIA Study Area is not currently characterised by wind energy development. Nor is it likely to be in the near future as the Project is the first offshore development proposed within the study area.

Given the physical separation distance between the GWP cluster and the OAA they will seldom be seen in combination and when they are, it will be in distinctly different landscape / seascape contexts. The Project will contribute to wind energy development being a more familiar and frequent feature of

the SLVIA Study Area but without contributing to the intensity or scale of the GWP cluster, albeit the scale and intensity is more akin to GWP cluster than the other small scale wind energy developments in the study area.

Overall, it is considered that the Project's contribution to cumulative landscape / seascape impacts will Not be a Significant effect and represents a very minor increase to the intensity and dispersal of wind energy development at the broad scale of the 60km radius SLVIA Study Area.

16.9.2 Cumulative Visual Effects

As can be seen from the cumulative ZTV map, the only substantial cluster of other wind farms inside the 60km radius SLVIA Study Area are those developments within the hilly setting of the GWP cluster in the eastern portion of the study area. There is also a small three turbine development north of Galway Bay (Inverin) and a single turbine at Rossaveel Harbour. Aside from these small developments that are nearer the coast, the GWP cluster is physically, visually and perceptually contained within a rugged hill country setting of the South Galway LCA, which is discrete from the coastal setting of the OAA some 35km to the west.

The cumulative ZTV map (See Figure 16-13 in Appendix 16-2) indicates that there is little intervisibility between these developments and the OAA from visual receptor locations due to intervening terrain screening across distances of greater than 35km. Indeed, the greatest potential for combined visibility is looking from Black Head where the GWP cluster is 20km north and the OAA is more than 40km away. From the north facing slopes of the Aran Islands the GWP is between 27 and 33km away to the northeast and the OAA is between 15 and 35km to the northwest. Again, the viewing distances are considerable and the landscape / seascape context is disparate.

Within the hilly landscape and complex coastline that occurs directly between the GWP cluster and the OAA, the cumulative visibility pattern is sporadic, but there is a clear trend. Within and immediately around the GWP cluster, the predominant scenario is exclusive visibility of the GWP and combined visibility with the OAA from just the higher ridges and peaks where there are few roads and very few sensitive receptors. Moving westwards, the pattern becomes more evenly proportioned between exclusive visibility of either the GWP cluster or the OAA as well as combined visibility of both. There are few areas that have no visibility of any WTG in the zone between the GWP cluster and the OAA. Whilst the highest ridges and hill tops have potential for combined visibility, this tends to be at distances of more than 15km to one or both of the cumulative developments and they are also situated in opposite directions to each other. Typically, east facing slopes have views of the GWP cluster and west facing slopes afford visibility of the OAA. Closer to the OAA it tends to have a higher proportion of visibility than the GWP cluster.

The most notable example of the cumulative visibility trend described above relates to the Gowlan headland northeast of Carna. Here the east facing slopes have exclusive visibility of the GWP cluster whilst the west and south facing slopes have exclusive visibility of the OAA. Only a narrow strip of ridgeline between these slopes has combined visibility of both of these developments and in a context where the former is more than 20km away and the latter is more than 10km away in opposite directions.

There is a strong potential for cumulative visibility within the sea context of Galway Bay and south Connemara where close intervening landform does not obscure combined visibility to the same degree as it does in the onshore / nearshore context. However, such visibility it limited to those on boats, which is a very small proportion of the overall population and many of those are engaged in maritime work rather than tourists and visitors who are more sensitive visual receptors.

Within the context of the Connemara Mountains to the northwest of GWP cluster and northeast of the proposed OAA, visibility of either development is precluded from valleys and only higher slopes show

visibility of either or both. This tends to be dictated by the direction that the slope faces and only south facing slopes have combined visibility at long distances from both developments.

Notwithstanding the theoretical results of the cumulative ZTV map, it is also apparent from the wireline image and photomontages used for the visual impact assessment that there are few instances where cumulative visibility occurs between the GWP cluster and the proposed OAA. Furthermore the small Inverin development and single turbine at Rossaveel Port are seldom noticeable other than in their own immediate contexts.

By far the greatest potential for cumulative effects to occur is between the proposed OAA and the GWP cluster as these represent the greatest concentration of latest generation (>150m tip height) turbines. However, it is considered that cumulative effects will Not be a Significant effect due to the physical and contextual separation between the Project and other operational or permitted wind farms as well as the complexity of combined visibility within the undulating landscape / seascape that lies between them. From none of the representative viewpoints used in the visual impact assessment is it considered that the cumulative visual impact will be materially greater than for the Project in its own right.

It should be noted that there is no potential for in-combination seascape or visual effects to occur between the Offshore Site and the Onshore Site given the substantial distance between the OAA and the Landfall and other Onshore Site infrastructure which has very a limited visual effect even within the Onshore LVIA Study Area as described in Chapter 27 Onshore Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

16.10 Conclusion

This seascape / landscape and visual assessment has considered seascape effects and visual effects separately in accordance with GLVIA 2013. This considered the sensitivity of seascape / landscape receptors and visual receptors and weighed these assessments against the magnitude of impacts to derive the significance of effect. As highlighted in Table 16-7, those effects that are deemed to be 'Major' or greater are equivalent to significant effects.

The sensitivity of both seascape / landscape receptors and visual receptors tends to be in the range of Medium to Very High in the Connemara and North Clare coastal areas due to the diverse and dramatic scenery layered with heritage, tourism and recreational value. Many of the roads and amenity areas are designated as scenic routes and scenic views in the Galway and Clare County Development Plans and also host sections of the Wild Atlantic Way tourist driving route. It is also an area that currently contains a relatively low intensity of dispersed small-scale development and landscape management geared at sustaining the local economy.

In terms of the magnitude of impacts, the proposed OWF will be a prominent feature of coastal views and the seascape setting within approximately 10km of visual receptors, where it will introduce tall moving structures into an area currently characterised by a low intensity and scale of development. Nonetheless, the exposed windswept coastline provides a legible locational context for the OWF, which has clearly been sited there to harness that exposure. In a broad context, the OAA is enveloped to the north by the westward projecting Connemara coastline and to the south by the Aran Islands and coastal landform tends to frame coastal views of the WTGs. As such, the OAA is perceived to be contained within a transitional coastal setting with some anthropogenic influence rather than being contained within the open Atlantic Ocean. This is an important consideration because there is less of a sense of taming the wild Atlantic or diminishing its sense of scale, distance and openness. Furthermore, the development is not an ambiguous feature in this seascape setting as there will be a perceptual connection between the remote windswept setting and the WTGs which have an appropriately organic layout and have been placed to take advantage of that exposure.

Whilst the proposed WTGs are openly visible from exposed coastal reaches well beyond 10km to the northwest and southeast as well as from the northern side of Inishmore Island, visibility reduces rapidly inland beyond this distance due to the screening and partial screening afforded by the complex Connemara coastline of rocky peninsulas, sandy inlets and coastal promontory hills. Indeed, as evidenced by the ZTV maps and results of the Route Screening Analysis, there is little open visibility of the WTGs from within the broad band of coastal bog that stretches between the coastline and the Connemara Mountains. Long distance open visibility returns from the elevated southwest facing slopes of the Connemara Mountains.

In terms of overall significance, the assessment is similar for both seascape / landscape effects and visual effects. The Project is considered to give rise to Major / Negative seascape effects only within approximately 10km of the OAA, which envelops the coastal waters and nearshore Islands of Macdara, Mason and Mweenish as well as the complex Connemara coastline of the seaward end of the promontory peninsula they extend from. Major / Negative visual effects are also assessed from some, but not all, of the representative viewpoint locations within this part of the central SLVIA Study Area that are afforded open coastal vistas to towards the OAA. These are VP29 from the uninhabited Macdara Island and VP12 from Mweenish Cemetery. For the avoidance of doubt these are the only SLVIA effects that are considered to be significant from an EIA perspective. It is important to reiterate that there are also many visual receptors within 10km of the OAA that incur little or no visual effects where open sea views are more restricted. The Route Screening Analysis shows that 60% of the 42km of public road within 10km of the OAA will have open views of at least some of the WTGs, but only 40% of those open view sections (i.e. about 24% of the total length of public roads within 10km of the OAA) will be afforded clear views of more than 10 WTGs.

Notwithstanding the significant effects described above, Major-moderate seascape and landscape effects are considered to occur within the exposed coastal areas between approximately 10-15km where the OWF will be a notable feature of the seascape setting contributing strongly to the seascape character, but without being a defining element. Likewise, those representative viewpoints contained within approximately15km that have open seaward visibility also tend to attract Major-moderate visual effects. For the avoidance of doubt these SLVIA effects are not considered to be significant. It is also notable, based on Route Screening Analysis and the visual impact assessment from representative viewpoints, that visual effects may also be considerably lower than Major-moderate in the distance range 10-15km from the OAA due to localised screening by intervening coastal landform. Route Screening Analysis indicates that only 40% of the 82km of public road that runs between10-15km from the OAA will have open views of some of the WTGs, but less than 40% of those open view sections (i.e. about 16% of the total length of public roads within 10km of the OAA) will be afforded clear views of more than 10 WTGs.

At distances beyond 15km the OWF becomes more peripheral and discrete from the immediate seascape / landscape and visual setting and it becomes more of a noticeable background feature rather than a key contributor to seascape / landscape character and visual amenity. The significance of effect tends to reduce to Moderate and below for most representative viewpoints beyond 15km of the OAA, depending largely on the degree of visual exposure to the WTGs and the contribution of coastal views to visual amenity. However, there are some 'Very High' sensitivity receptors beyond this distance, including VP21 from the Sky Road viewpoint near Clifden and VP28 from the alpine route of the Twelve Bens where long-distance elevated views of the proposed OWF are afforded and the significance of effect is deemed Major-moderate. In these instances, it is their sensitivity that is the main contributor to the effect and not the magnitude of impact which is Medium-low in both cases. These Major-moderate effects are not considered to be significant effects.

Principally because there are no other offshore wind farms permitted or proposed within the SLVIA Study Area and also considering the limited intervisibility between the OAA and the operational and permitted on shore windfarms in the SLVIA Study Area there will be no significant cumulative effects arising from the Project.

Overall, the Seascape within approximately 10km of the OAA, and two of the visual receptors within this distance are deemed to incur significant effects from the Project. In the context that there is a modest population and only a small proportion of the Connemara coastline within this distance, it is considered that these are localised significant effects. Finally, it is also important to reiterate Policy Objectives 'LCM2 – Landscape Sensitivity Classification' and 'PVSR 1 – Protected Views and Scenic Routes' of the Galway County Development Plan which both identify the requirement to balance landscape protection with *"the need to develop key strategic infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan"* and which are supported by many other objectives within the Galway County Development Plan.