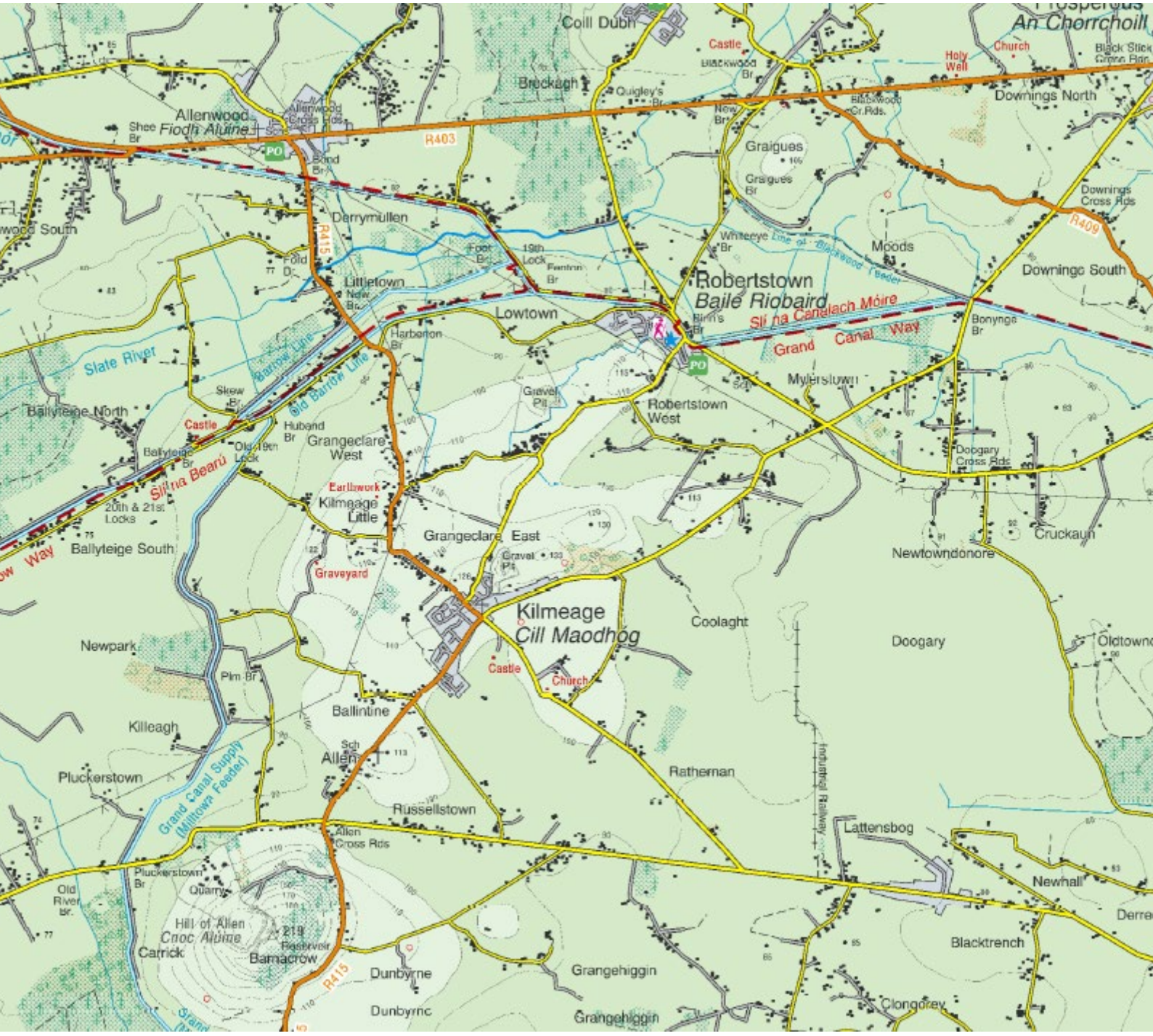
CHAPTER 12

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL



QUARRY CONSULTING

Table of Contents

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INTRODUCTION

12.1 This Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared to accompany a planning application for a sand and gravel extraction pit on a 13.2 hectare area of land at Coolaght, Kilmeague Co. Kildare.

12.2 This LVIA describes the landscape context of the proposed development and assesses the likely landscape and visual impacts of the scheme on the receiving environment. Although closely linked, landscape and visual impacts are assessed separately.

- Landscape Impact Assessment (LIA) relates to assessing effects of a development on the landscape as a resource in its own right and is concerned with how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape and its distinctive character.
- Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) relates to assessing effects of a development 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 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is concerned with additional changes to the landscape or visual amenity caused by the proposed development 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.

Approach and Statement of Authority

12.3 This LVIA adopts an approach that is founded in the following best practice guidance documents:

- Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) publication entitled Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 2013 (GLVIA3);
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publication 'Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements (2022); and
- 'Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/2019.

12.4 This LVIA was prepared by Macro Works Ltd. Macro Works' relevant experience includes a broad range of infrastructural, renewable energy, industrial and commercial projects since 1999, including numerous urban, residential, and mixed use development projects.

Description of the Proposed Development

12.5 The proposed development will involve:

- The removal of woodland, vegetation and overlying soils & subsoils;
- the extraction of sand and gravel on a phased basis from an area of c. 8.65 ha to a final floor level at 95 mOD;
- the infilling of the lands using inert waste on a phased basis following the extraction of sand and gravel;

- the restoration of the lands back to original ground level and the establishment of native woodland planting;
- all related ancillary development and associated site works including processing (crushing, screening and washing) and stockpiling of materials; installation of infrastructure for the management of water on site and all other related activities.

12.6 The Proposed Development will include for the importation of ca. 2,000,000 m3 (or ca. 3.2 million tonnes) of inert soil and stone material to restore ground gradients to similar levels prior to sand and gravel extraction i.e. current ground levels.

12.7 It is proposed to fill the pit void with either:

- Inert soil and stone classified as a waste (imported inert greenfield and non-greenfield soils and stone, and river dredge spoil) operating as a soil recovery facility that will require a waste management licence authorised by the EPA; or,
- Soil and stone by-product (i.e. virgin soil or equivalent to virgin soil and stone and dredge material) which will be notified to the EPA as an Article 27 by-product at the source location, and the Site will be authorised by the Local Authority planning conditions.

12.8 The restored land will provide a natural habitat land use, with ecological benefit provided through the re-instatement of woodland and a mixed species sward.

Methodology

12.9 This document uses methodology as prescribed in the previously mentioned GLVIA3, which follows the European Landscape Convention (ELC) definition of landscape:

> *'Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (Council of Europe, 2000). Thus, GLVIA-2013 covers all landscapes from "high mountains and wild countryside to urban and fringe farmland (rural landscapes), marine and coastal landscapes (seascapes) and the landscapes of villages towns and cities (townscapes)" - whether protected or degraded.*

Scope of the assessment

12.10 GLVIA3 establishes guidelines and not a specific methodology. The preface recognises that:

> *'This edition concentrates on principles and processes. It does not provide a detailed or formulaic 'recipe' that can be followed in every situation – it remains the responsibility of the professional to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the task in hand.'*

12.11 The methodology for this assessment has therefore been developed specifically for this assessment to ensure that it is appropriate and fit for purpose.

12.12 The LVIA Methodology can be summarised as undertaking the following key tasks:

- Desk study and site visits in September 2023;
- Defining the Baseline Landscape setting and conditions;
- Identification and Evaluation of key components of the proposed development;
- Consideration of Mitigation Measures;
- Assessment of Landscape Effects;
- Assessment of Visual Effects; and
- Summary Statement of Significance.

Study Area

12.13 A 3km study area has been adopted in order to understand the site's wider landscape and visual context. A development of the scale and type proposed is likely to be difficult to discern beyond this distance, and so 3km is considered conservative and comprehensive. Indeed, a study area of 3km has typically been used for similar sized quarry projects across Ireland and the United Kingdom, and deemed acceptable by multiple planning authorities.

12.14 Due to the combined influence of natural topography, and screening elements in the wider landscape, a proportionate degree of focus is placed on the landscape within approximately 1km, this containing locations from where the development may be visible, and likely to give rise to the most notable landscape or visual effects. The study area is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Site and 3km study area

Landscape Impact Assessment

12.15 This part of the LVIA provides an assessment of how the introduction of the proposed development will affect the physical features and fabric of the landscape, and then how the proposals influence landscape character with reference to published descriptions of character

and an understanding of the contemporary character of the landscape as informed through desktop and site studies.

12.16 When assessing the potential landscape effects of the development, the value and sensitivity of the landscape receptor is weighed against the magnitude of impact to determine the significance of the landscape effect. Criteria outlined below are used to guide these judgements.

Landscape Sensitivity

12.17 The sensitivity of the landscape to change is the degree to which a particular setting can accommodate changes or new elements without unacceptable detrimental effects to its essential characteristics. The judgement reflects such factors as its quality, value, contribution to landscape character and the degree to which the particular element or characteristic can be replaced or substituted. Landscape Sensitivity is classified using the following criteria set out in Table 1.

Table 1 - Landscape Value and Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Description
Very High	Areas where the landscape character exhibits a very low capacity for change in the form of development. Examples of which are high value landscapes, 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 landscape character exhibits a low capacity for change in the form of development. Examples of which are high value landscapes, protected at a national or regional level (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), where the principal management objectives are likely to be considered conservation of the existing character.
Medium	Areas where the landscape character exhibits some capacity and scope for development. Examples of which are landscapes, which have a designation of protection at a county level or at non-designated local level where there is evidence of local value and use.
Low	Areas where the landscape character exhibits a higher capacity for change from development. Typically, this would include lower value, non-designated landscapes that may also have some elements or features of recognisable quality, where landscape management objectives include, enhancement, repair and restoration.
Negligible	Areas of landscape character that include derelict, mining, industrial land or are part of the urban fringe where there would be a reasonable capacity to embrace change or the capacity to include the development proposals. Management objectives in such areas could be focused on change, creation of landscape improvements and/or restoration to realise a higher landscape value.

Magnitude of change - Landscape

12.18 The magnitude of change is a product of the scale, extent or degree of change that is likely to be experienced as a result of the proposed development. The magnitude takes into account whether there is a direct physical impact resulting from the loss of landscape components and/or a change that extends beyond the immediate setting that may have an effect on the landscape character. Table 2 outlines criteria used to inform this judgement.

Table 2 - Magnitude of Change - Landscape

Criteria	Description
Very High	Change that would be large in extent and scale with the loss of critically important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an extensive change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality.

High	Change that would be more limited in extent and scale with the loss of important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to a considerable change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality.
Medium	Changes that are modest in extent and scale involving the loss of landscape characteristics or elements that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that would lead to noticeable changes in landscape character, and quality.
Low	Changes affecting small areas of landscape character and quality, together with the loss of some less characteristic landscape elements or the addition of new features or elements that would lead to discernible changes in landscape character, and quality.
Negligible	Changes affecting small or very restricted areas of 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 landscape or are hardly perceivable leading to no material change to landscape character, and quality.

Visual Impact Assessment

12.19 This part of the LVIA provides an assessment of how the introduction of the proposed development will affect views within the landscape. It therefore needs to consider:

- Direct impacts of the proposed development upon views through intrusion or obstruction;
- The reaction of viewers who may be affected, e.g. residents, walkers, road users; and
- The overall impact on visual amenity.

12.20 It has been deemed appropriate to structure the assessment around a series of representative viewpoint locations. All viewpoints are located within the public domain and are representative of views available from main thoroughfares and pedestrian areas within the vicinity of the proposed development. The selected viewpoints are considered to be comprehensive in communicating the variable nature of the visual effects.

12.21 When assessing the potential visual effects of the development, the sensitivity of the visual receptor is weighed against the magnitude of the visual impact to determine the significance of the visual effect. Criteria outlined below are used to guide these judgements.

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

12.22 As with landscape sensitivity, the sensitivity of a visual receptor is categorised as Very High, High, Medium, Low, and Negligible. Unlike landscape sensitivity however, the sensitivity of visual receptors has an anthropocentric (human) basis. It considers factors such as the perceived quality and values associated with the view, the landscape context of the viewer, the likely activity the viewer is engaged in and whether this heightens their awareness of the surrounding environment.

12.23 A list of the factors considered by the assessor in estimating the level of sensitivity for a particular visual receptor is outlined below to establish visual receptor sensitivity at each viewpoint location.

Susceptibility of Visual Receptors to change

12.24 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;
- 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;
- 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.

Value attached to Views

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

- Recognised scenic value of the view (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;
- Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas. These are likely to be in the form of Architectural Conservation Areas, which are incorporated within the Development Plan and therefore subject to the public consultation process. Viewers within such areas are likely to be highly attuned to the landscape around them;
- Primary views from residential receptors. Even within a dynamic city context, views from residential properties are an important consideration in respect of residential amenity;
- 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 a national or regional scale;
- Viewer connection with the landscape. This considers whether or not receptors are likely to be highly attuned to views of the landscape i.e. commuters hurriedly driving on busy roads versus tourists focussed on the character and detail of the landscape;
- Provision of vast, 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;
- 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;
- 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;

- Presence of striking or noteworthy features. A view might be strongly valued because it contains a distinctive and memorable landscape / townscape feature such as a cathedral or castle;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- Sense of place. This considers whether there is special sense of wholeness and harmony at the viewing location;
- Sense of awe. This considers whether the view inspires an overwhelming sense of scale or the power of nature.

12.26 Those locations which are deemed to satisfy many of the above criteria are likely to be of higher sensitivity, and no relative importance is inferred by the order of listing.

12.27 It is recognised that a viewer's interpretation and experience of the landscape can have preferential and subjective components. Where relevant, judgements are made on those elements of the landscape that are considered to contribute more prominently and positively to the visual landscape resource as well as those elements that contribute negatively. Overall sensitivity may be a result of a number of these factors or, alternatively, a strong association with one or two in particular.

Magnitude of Change - Visual

12.28 The magnitude of change is again a product of the scale, extent, or degree of change that is likely to be experienced as a result of the proposed development. This is directly influenced by its 'visual presence / prominence', as experienced by visual receptors in the landscape. These terms are somewhat quantitative in nature, and essentially relate to how noticeable or 'dominant' the proposal is within a particular view. Aside from the obvious influence of scale and distance, a development's visual presence is influenced by the extent and complexity of the view, contextual movement in the landscape, the nature of its backdrop, and its relationship with other focal points or prominent features within the view. It is often, though not always, expressed using one of the following terms: Minimal; Sub-dominant; Co-dominant; Dominant; Highly dominant.

12.29 Criteria used to inform judgements are provided in Table 3.

Table 3 - Magnitude of Change - Visual

Criteria	Description
Very High	Complete or very substantial change in view, dominant, involving complete or very substantial obstruction of existing view or complete change in character and composition of baseline, e.g., through removal of key elements.
High	A major change in the view that is highly prominent and has a strong influence on the overall view. This may involve the substantial obstruction of existing views or a complete change in character and composition of baseline, e.g. through removal of key elements or the introduction of new features that would heavily influence key elements.
Medium	Moderate change in view: which may involve partial obstruction of existing view or partial change in character and composition of baseline, i.e., pre-development view through the introduction of new elements or removal of existing elements. Change may be prominent but would not substantially alter scale and character of the surroundings and the wider setting. View character may be partially changed through the introduction of features which, though uncharacteristic, may not necessarily be visually discordant.
Low	Minor change in baseline, i.e. pre-development view - change would be distinguishable from the surroundings whilst composition and character would be similar to the pre change circumstances.
Negligible	Very slight change in baseline, i.e. pre-development view - change would be barely discernible. Composition and character of view substantially unaltered.

Significance of Effects

12.30 The significance of a landscape or visual effect is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of change, and is categorised as Profound, Substantial, Moderate, Slight, or Imperceptible. Intermediate judgements are also provided to enable an effect to be more accurately described where relevant. 'No Effect' may also be recorded as appropriate where the effect is so negligible it is not noteworthy.

12.31 The significance category judgement is arrived at using the Significance Matrix at Table 4 as a guide. This applies the principle of significance being a function of magnitude weighed against sensitivity, but employs slightly different terminology that avoids the potentially confusing use of the term 'significant' (as recommended by GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13 (Landscape institute, 10th June 2013)).

12.32 Indicative criteria descriptions used in relation to the significance of effect category are presented at Table 5.

Table 4 - Significance Matrix

	Sensitivity of Receptor				
Magnitude	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Very High	Profound	Profound-substantial	Substantial	Moderate	Slight
High	Profound-substantial	Substantial	Substantial-moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight-imperceptible
Medium	Substantial	Substantial-moderate	Moderate	Slight	Imperceptible
Low	Moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible
Negligible	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible

Table 5 - Indicative significance of effect criteria descriptions

	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.

12.33 It is important that the likely effects of the proposals are transparently assessed and understood in order that the determining authority can bring a balanced, well-informed judgement to bear when making a planning decision.

12.34 As such, whilst the significance matrix and criteria provide a useful guide, the significance of an effect is ultimately determined by the landscape specialist using professional judgement, and also in the context of occasionally using hybrid judgements to account for nuance.

12.35 Effects assessed as 'Substantial' or greater (shaded cells) are considered to be the most notable in landscape and visual terms, and may be regarded as 'Significant', albeit it is important to note that this is not a reflection on their acceptability in planning terms.

Quality of Effects

12.36 In addition to assessing the significance of landscape and visual effects, the quality of the effects is also determined. Within this LVIA, effects are described as negative/adverse, neutral, or positive/beneficial, and the following criteria has been used to guide these judgements.

- Positive/beneficial - A change which improves the quality of the environment, enhancing the existing view/landscape;
- Neutral - No effects or effects that are imperceptible, within normal bounds of variation e.g. will neither detract from nor enhance the existing view/landscape;

- Negative/adverse - A change which reduces the quality of the environment, detracting from the existing view/landscape.

12.37 In the case of extractive industry developments within rural and semi-rural settings, the landscape and visual change brought about by an increased scale and intensity of built form is seldom considered to be positive / beneficial. Effects in these contexts are generally considered to be adverse in nature, or neutral, where the effect has little influence on the landscape/views.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

12.38 This section of the LVIA presents the existing landscape and visual context against which any changes brought about by the proposed development are assessed.

12.39 The landscape context is described in relation to the proposed application site and the wider study area with reference to published descriptions of landscape character, as well as characteristics of the landscape such as landform and drainage, vegetation, land use, settlement pattern, transport routes and public amenities and facilities.

12.40 The visual baseline is presented in relation to visual receptors to whom the development is likely to be visible, informed by computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping that has been prepared to provide a focus on locations where the proposed development is potentially visible from.

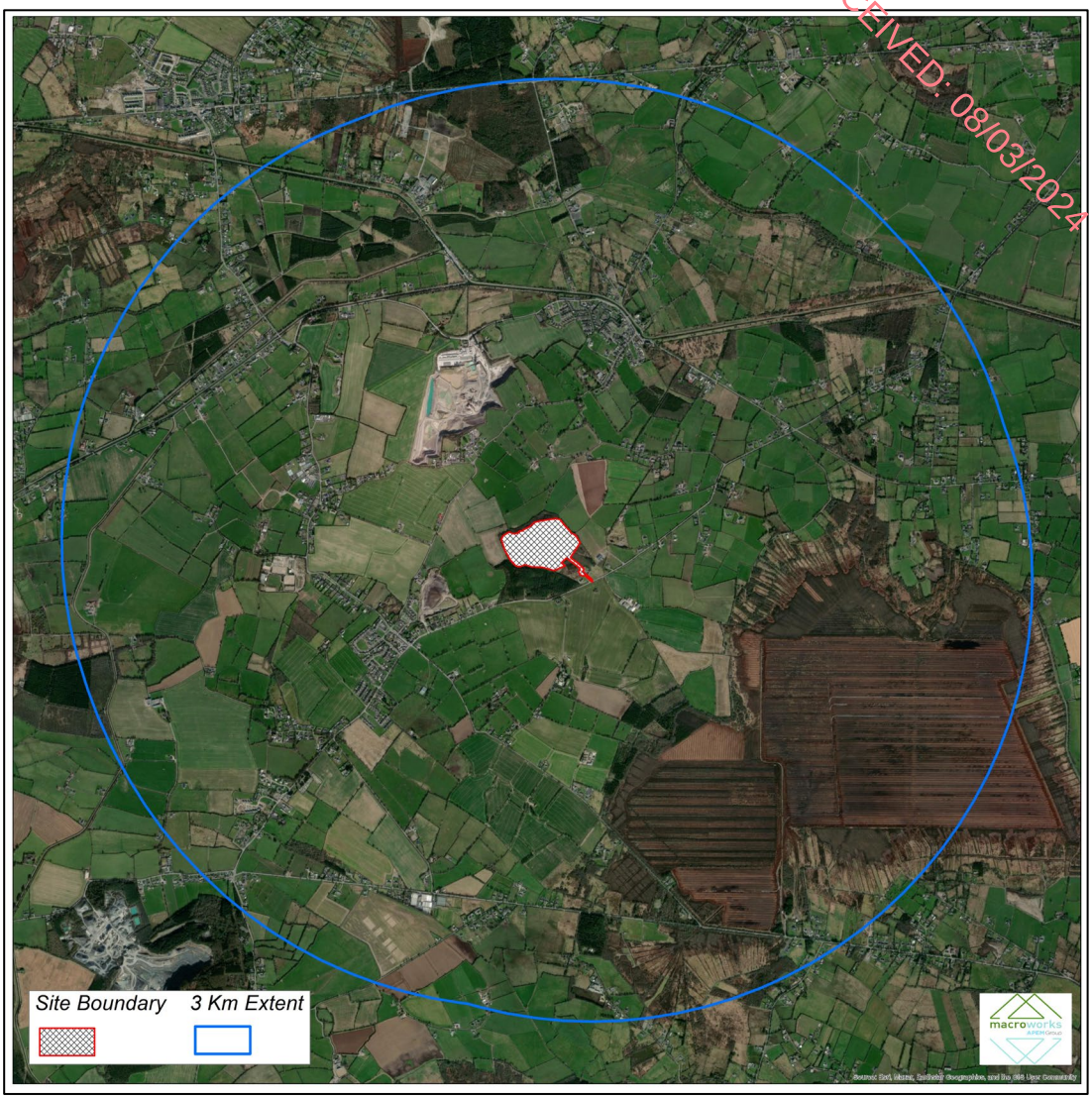
Landscape Baseline

Site level character

12.41 The site itself is located on sloping lands comprising a parcel of managed forestry with a portion of the plot left unplanted, making way for a telecoms mast. The site is located on a gently sloping ridge which is oriented northeast-southwest, with elevations on site ranging between c. 100mOD – 130mOD.

12.42 This is diverse landscape comprising of a multitude of land uses. The predominant land use in the vicinity is pastoral farmland comprising small to moderate size fields, generally defined by intermittent tree-lined hedgerows. There are also several pockets of managed forestry dispersed throughout the wider landscape alongside other more intensive land uses, such as quarrying activities to the west and north of the site. The scale of the existing quarrying operations within the study area range from small to medium scale, with the quarry to the north of the site of a notably larger scale than that to the west of the site. In addition, there is a large area of cutover peatland which occupies the southeast quadrant of the study area, providing evidence of intensive peat extraction activities and commonage which is typical of the low lying lands of Co. Kildare. Refer to Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Site context



12.43 With the exception of Kilmeague village and Robertstown village lying c.700m west and c. 1.3km northeast of the site respectively, the settlement pattern is typical of a rural area, comprising isolated rural dwellings and farmsteads, and linear clusters of dwellings. Linear clusters of dwelling are generally dispersed along the surrounding road network, however in this instance clusters of dwellings can also be seen lining the banks of Grand Canal, which passes through the northern portion of the study area.

12.44 The Grand Canal is the most notable watercourse in the vicinity, passing through the northern half of the study area. It is situated at a distance of just under 1.4km northeast of the site at its nearest point, passing through Robertstown village, after which the canal splits in two, forming the main Grand Canal and the Grand Canal Supply (Milltown Feeder), flowing in different directions.

12.45 The most notable transport route within the study area is the R415 which passes through the western half of the study area, linking Allenwood village to Milltown. The R415 passes the site at a distance of c. 900m west at its nearest point, in the village of Kilmeague. Several local roads also traverse the study area, the nearest of which is L7081 (Mylerstown Road) passes the site to the the immediate south east.

Landscape and Planning Designations

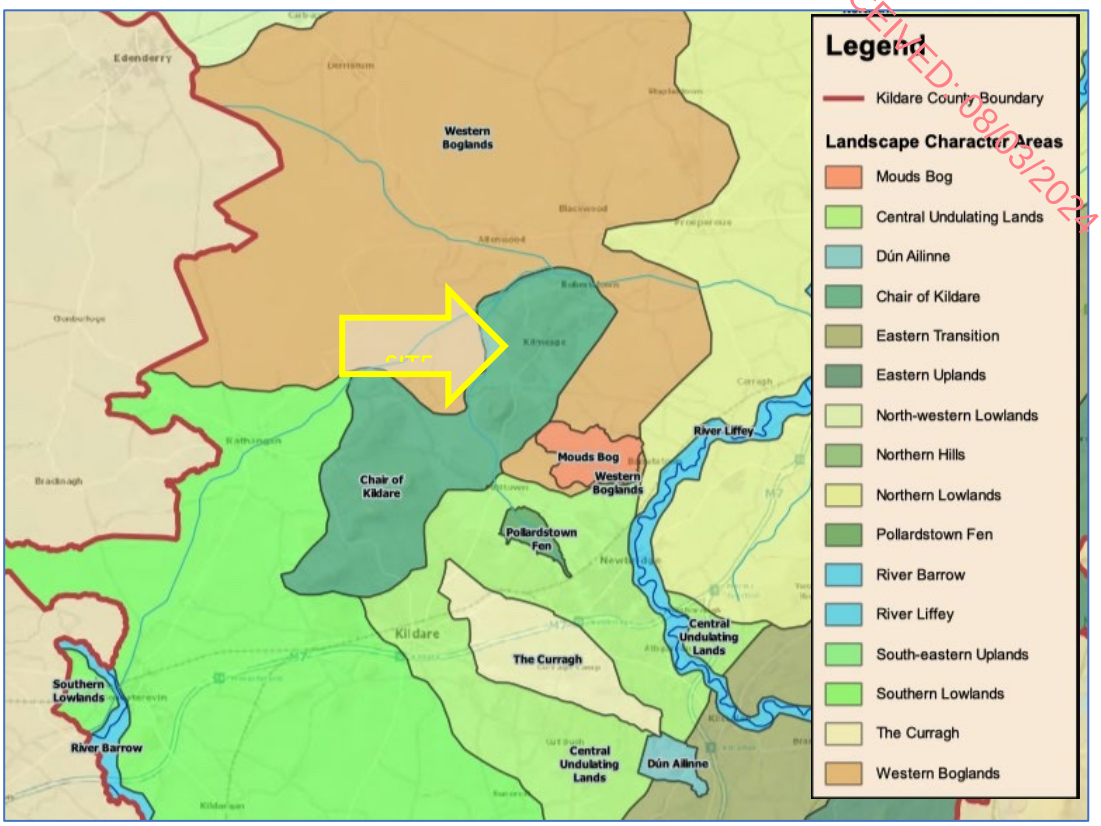
12.46 The site is located within the administrative area of Kildare County Council (KCC) and is therefore subject to the land use policies and objectives of the Kildare County Development Plan (KCDP) 2023-2029. The KCDP provides a framework to guide future development within the county, and accordingly contains many policy objectives that deal with the strategic planning issues.

12.47 Whilst it is acknowledged that the KCDP 2023-2029 contains policy objectives that deal with many design and environmental considerations, those that are considered to be of particular relevance to landscape and visual issues are contained in Chapter 13 (Landscape, Recreation & Amenity). Landscape, Recreation & Amenity Policies LRP1-3 are considered to be of particular relevance to the proposed development in the context of this LVIA. Further to the policies included in the Chapter 13 of the KCDP 2023-2029, the council also outlines objectives, actions and targets, of which objectives LR01-LR38 are of particular relevance to the proposed development.

12.48 The KCDP 2023-2029 incorporates a Landscape Character Assessment which identifies 16 landscape character areas. Each landscape character area (LCA) is assigned a 'sensitivity' - relative to whether a specific LCA can accommodate change. In Kildare, sensitivity is determined considering the following factors: slope, ridgeline, water bodies, land use and prior development. As illustrated in Figure 3, The proposed development is located in the 'Chair of Kildare' LCA which is designated as having 'Class 4 – Special' sensitivity. The 'Western Boglands' LCA also occurs within the study area, and is designated as having 'Class 3 – High' sensitivity.

12.49 Whilst the character assessment is considered relevant at the more strategic landscape level, given the scale of the site relative to the breadth of the identified areas of character described, its contained nature and its physical relationship with the surrounding residential land-uses, it is not considered to be of a scale that is helpful in understanding the potential influence of the proposed development. Furthermore, the site is peripheral within this LCA and physically separated from the distinct hills that make of the Chair of Kildare Hills. The most notable of these is these is the Hill of Allen, which lies to the southwest of Kilmeague and hosts a substantial quarry operation.

Figure 3 – Landscape Character Areas (Kildare CDP)



12.50 There are two KCDP 2023-2029 designated scenic routes within the study area (Figure 4 refers), namely No. 06 *'Views of Robertstown Countryside and views across the Canal, along the R415, L7075 and L7078'* and No. 25 '*Views to the south of the open countryside from the L7081 Kilmeague crossroad to the junction of the L7081/L7078'*. Viewpoints were selected to represent the potential for visibility of the proposed development along both of these scenic routes and are assessed in Section 6.3.

12.51 Scenic route No. 6 is described in Appendix 7 of the KCDP 2023-2029 as follows;

> *'The local road running parallel to the Grand Canal when approaching Robertstown, allows scenic views onto the surrounding countryside. The rural character of the landscape and the existing bog remnant on the outskirts of the town provide visual amenity and remain unaffected by the development that exists in the vicinity. The local roads also allow open and extensive vistas of the surrounding countryside. These local roads are signposted as Kildare tourist routes.'*

12.52 Scenic route No. 25 generally pertains to visual amenity facing away from the proposed development and is described in Appendix 7 of the KCDP 2023-2029 as follows;

> *'Extensive views of the open countryside are available from the L7081 road. Agricultural fields with low and well-maintained hedgerows intertwined with deciduous mature trees provide for vistas to the environs of Kilmeague when looking to the south-east. The River Liffey is also discernible in the distance. Although scattered dwellings and farm buildings are located in the area, vistas along this section of the road remain unaffected.'*

Figure 4 – Landscape and scenic designations (Kildare CDP)

Visual Baseline

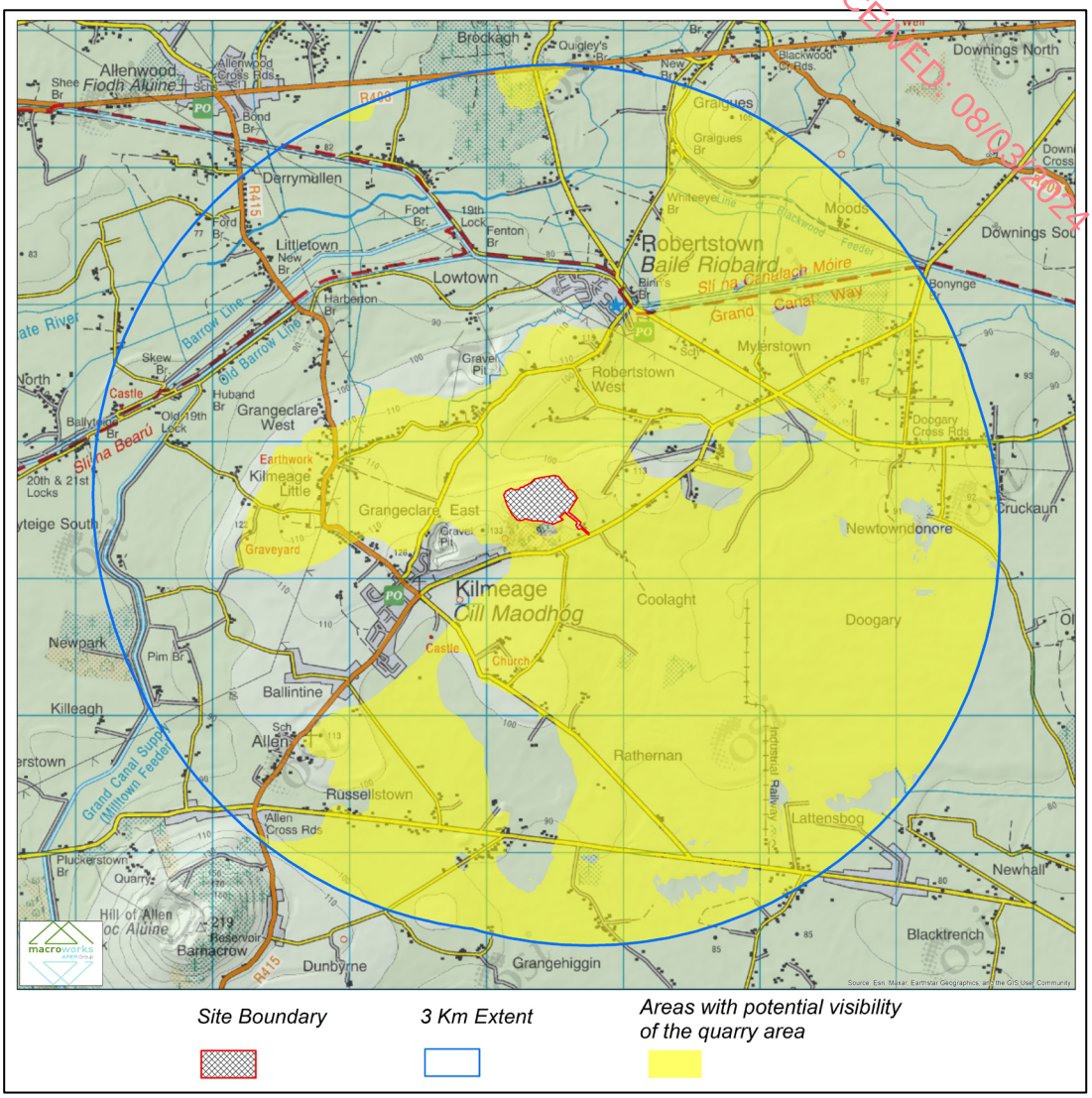
12.53 Only those parts of the receiving environment that potentially afford views of the proposed development are of concern to this section of the assessment. A computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map has been prepared to illustrate those parts of the landscape from where the proposed development is potentially visible. Being based solely on terrain data it does not factor in features such as trees, hedges or buildings, which in reality may act to screen views, or limit them significantly.

12.54 The 'bare-ground' ZTV map (illustrated at Figure 5), illustrates areas from where visibility is theoretically possible. Its main value is to determine those parts of the landscape from which the proposed development will definitely not be visible, so as to enable a focus to be placed on those parts of the landscape where it may be. Key points relating to the ZTV pattern of the proposed development are set out below;

- Visibility of the proposed development is not possible from most of the north-western portion of the study area (areas without any yellow coloured shading), which includes the majority of the R415 regional road and Grand Canal Way. Furthermore, Robertstown village and Kilmeage village have very limited potential for visibility of the site, due to Robertstown villages low-lying nature, and Kilmeage's elevated nature providing the respective villages a high degree of terrain screening.
- The areas with the potential for visibility of the site are generally contained to lowlands situated to the east and southeast of the study area and in the immediate surrounds of the proposed development, excluding Kilmeague village due to its elevated nature. The aforementioned lowland areas show relatively comprehensive theoretical potential for visibility (areas shaded yellow). Notwithstanding, the majority of the lowland area to the southeast of the site relates largely to publicly inaccessible areas of farmland and peatland.

12.55 The most important point to make in respect of this 'bare-ground' ZTV map is that it is theoretical, and does not account for successive layers of trees, hedgerows, and other screening elements in the landscape.

Figure 5 – 'Bare-ground' ZTV map



Visual receptors

12.56 The visual impact of a proposed development is assessed by Macro Works using up to 6 no. categories of receptor type as listed below:

- Key Views (from features of national or international importance) (KV);
- Designated Scenic Routes and Views (SR/SV);
- Local Community views (LCV);
- Centres of Population (CP);
- Major Routes (MR);
- Amenity and heritage features (AH).

12.57 Representative Viewpoints (VPs) might be relevant to more than one category and this makes them even more valid for inclusion in the assessment. The receptors that are intended to be represented by a particular VPare listed at the beginning of each viewpoint appraisal.

12.58 Through analysis of the ZTV, and its interrogation during fieldwork as part of the site visit, it was determined that there is reasonable potential for visibility of the proposed development from

within the eastern and southern portions of the study area as well as within near northern portions. This will relate to the alteration of landform and vegetation profile rather than the proposed sand pit operations themselves, which are substantially contained within the excavation and the access road. The main receptors that coincide with the ZTV pattern include road users on the local and regional level road network that surround the site and serves the occupants of dwellings, which tend to be located close to the road network. The settlements of Kilmeague and Robertstown are partially covered by the ZTV pattern as well as a section of the Grand Canal.

Representative assessment viewpoints

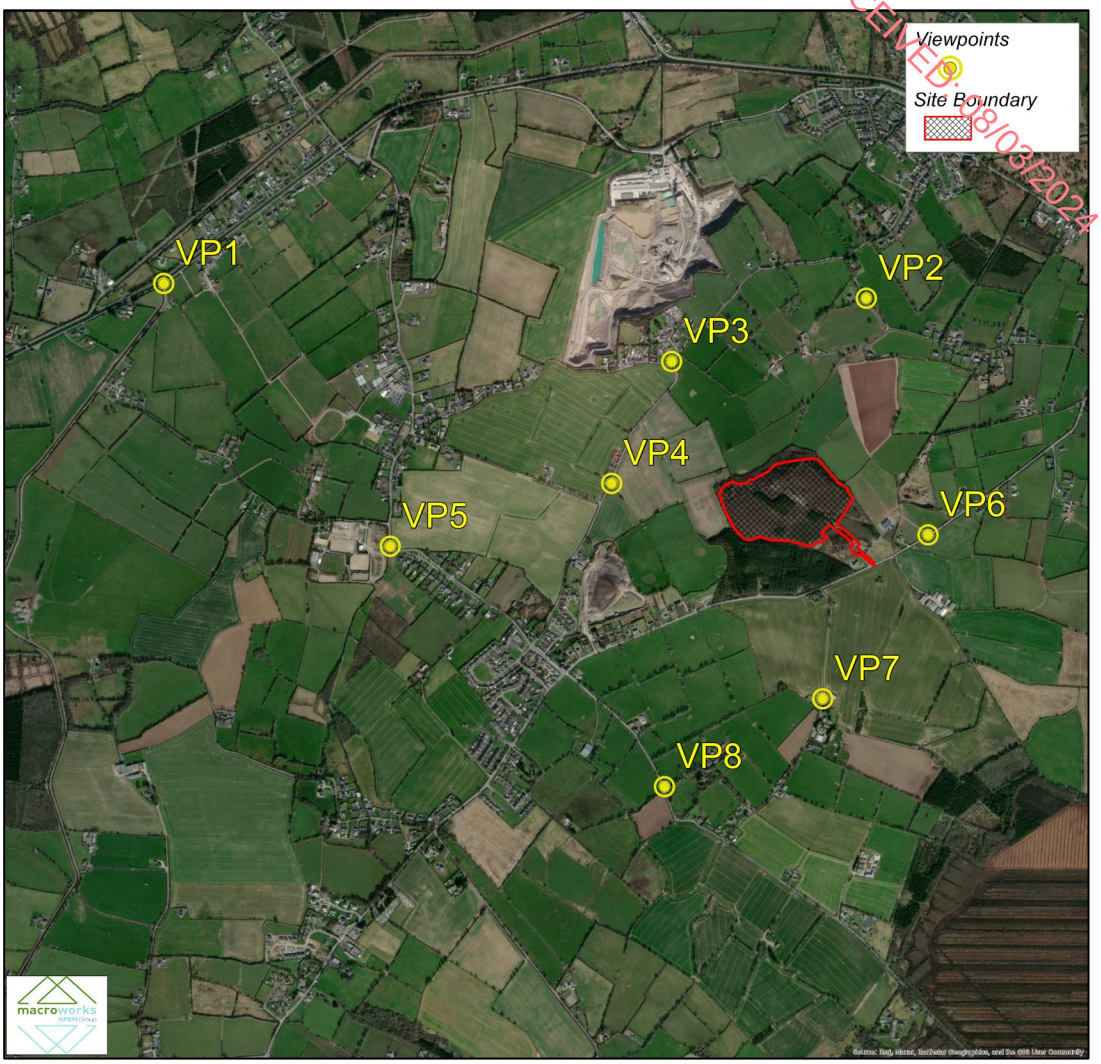
12.59 It is not warranted to include each and every location that provides a view towards the proposed development as this would result in an unwieldy report and make it extremely difficult to draw out the key impacts arising from the proposed development. Instead, the assessment of visual impacts is structured around a total of 8 representative assessment viewpoint locations that are located within areas of theoretical visibility.

12.60 Representative assessment viewpoints seek to reflect a range of different receptor types, distances and orientations, to help to inform the conclusions being made. In the case of this development, where views are precluded by built form and vegetation, they seek to demonstrate the absence of visibility. Viewpoints are detailed in Table 6 and illustrated in Figure 4.

Table 6 - Outline Description of Representative Viewpoints

VP No.	Location	Representative of	Direction of view
1	Huband Bridge along Grand Canal	Walkway users, Residents	SE
2	Local road at Robertstown East	Road users, Residents	S/SW
3	Local road at Robertstown West	Road users, Residents	S/SE
4	Local road at Grangeclare East	Road users	E
5	Scenic Route 6, along R415 at Grangeclare East	Scenic route, Road users, Residents	E
6	Scenic Route 25, along L7081 at Coolaght	Scenic Route, Road users, Residents	W
7	Local road at Coolaght	Road users, Residents	N
8	Local road at Kilmeague	Road users, Residents	NE

Figure 6 - Viewpoint Location Map



12.61 For each of the representative viewpoints, an existing (baseline) view is presented, together with a Photomontage that illustrates through the use of an extents line which indicates the location of the development within the view. Photomontages provide a 'photo-real' depiction of the scheme within the view utilising a rendered three-dimensional model of the development, which has been geo-referenced to allow accurate placement and scale.

MITIGATION AND RESTORATION MEASURES

12.62 Consideration has been given to what measures can be taken to reduce, avoid, compensate and remedy any potential impacts. From a landscape and visual perspective, given the site's discrete and visually contained location, and the nature of the development which seeks to cut into the landscape, extensive planting to screen this proposal is not considered necessary.

12.63 Proposed landscape and visual mitigation measures principally relate to the retention of vegetation surrounding the site. At present there is mixed forestry on site, therefore it is proposed that portions of the forestry are retained during the construction/operational phase of the development, forming a band of vegetative screening along the outskirts of the proposed excavation area.

12.64 In addition, it is proposed that 2 no. of 4 metre high landscaped berms are constructed along the south and southeast flanks of the proposed excavation area. These berms will be planted

with native vegetation and will aid the screening of the excavation area and associated operational activities within the site. This mitigation is embedded within the overall design of the development as the berm will be formed from excavated topsoil/subsoil within the site. Embedded mitigations can be identified within the design and layout drawings that accompany this application.

Decommissioning

12.65 The decommissioning of the site will involve the infilling of the lands using inert waste on a phased basis during the extraction of sand and gravel to restore ground gradients to similar levels prior to sand and gravel extraction i.e. current ground levels. It is proposed to fill the pit void with either:

- Inert soil and stone classified as a waste (imported inert greenfield and non-greenfield soils and stone, and river dredge spoil) operating as a soil recovery facility that will require a waste management licence authorised by the EPA; or
- Soil and stone by-product (i.e. virgin soil or equivalent to virgin soil and stone and dredge material) which will be notified to the EPA as an Article 27 by-product at the source location, and the Site will be authorised by the Local Authority planning conditions.

12.66 Once restored, the land will provide natural habitat land use, with ecological benefit provided through the re-instatement of semi-historic field boundaries, woodland planting and a mixed species sward.

LANDSCAPE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Landscape Sensitivity

12.67 Whilst the immediate vicinity of the site has a strong rural landscape character, the wider study area is anthropogenic in nature. The quarrying and mineral extraction industries within the northern and western extent of the study area heavily influence the overall character of the wider landscape. Nonetheless, while this is a heavily modified landscape it is by no means degraded. This is a robust, productive landscape that encompasses numerous rural land uses.

12.68 There is a degree of recognised visual amenity in the area, as represented by the two KCDP 2023-2029 designated scenic routes within the study area. The scenic quality of these two routes generally pertain to views of surrounding low-lying agricultural lands from the elevated ground and associated local road that surrounds the site i.e. away from the site. Scenic quality also exists along the Grand Canal and the Grand Canal supply and is represented in the form of bridge views; however, these are generally enclosed by canal side vegetation. Recreation within the study area is principally related to several trails and walks in the surrounding locale, primarily centres along the Grand Canal feeder corridor. A high recreation value is associated with the Grand Canal as it is a recognised fishery and it is utilised by recreation canal boaters. A section of the Barrow Way, a national waymarked trail, also occurs along this section of the Grand Canal.

12.69 The site in question is situated in the LCA - '*The Chair of Kildare'* which has been identified as having 'special' sensitivity, and is situated immediately adjacent to the LCA – *'Western Boglands'* which has been appointed a high sensitivity rating. While there are landscape features within the study area that have been identified as highly sensitive, the landscape in the immediate surrounds of the site identifies more as a robust, working, rural landscape. Furthermore, within the KCDP 2023-2029, it states *'It is important to note that within each of these areas there can be a wide variety of local conditions that can significantly increase or decrease sensitivity'*. Therefore, factors such as the large operational quarry to the northwest of the site, and smaller

former quarry which currently operates as a soil recovery facility to the west of the site, are likely to somewhat decrease the sensitivity in the surrounding locale. The significant quarrying and excavations works at the existing quarries within the surrounding landscape influence the overall character of the area, and cause a higher than normal frequency of traffic in the surrounding locale. As noted previously, there are a number of extraction sites located in the 'Chair of Kildare' LCA. This reinforces that quarrying is a characteristic feature of this LCA which has been recognised as a reliable aggregate resource for many decades and that the 'Special' sensitivity classification exists in full regard of the quarrying, rather than in spite of it.

12.70 On the basis of the factors outlined above it is considered that this is a complex rural landscape with robust productive landscape values. Whilst the wider area has a pleasant semi-rural character, generated by its undulating, agrarian, yet settled characteristics, landscape values are generally associated with productivity and rural subsistence rather than any sense of rarity or the naturalistic. While much of the study area is designated as having 'special' sensitivity with a modest sense of visual amenity afforded across the low lying lands and along the Grand Canal corridor, both the immediate vicinity of the site and the wider environs take the form of a typical rural landscape, occupied by a number of intensive anthropogenically driven land uses.

12.71 The site's location is relatively discrete, located within a site which is heavily forested, providing a high degree of visual containment, which limits its contribution to perceived landscape character outside of its immediate footprint.

12.72 Overall, it is considered that this is a diverse working landscape that has, in places, samples of settled life and rural land types. The character of the study area is one defined by a strong legacy of intensive agriculture, forestry and extractive industries. On balance, it is considered that this is a robust, working, agricultural landscape, with a landscape sensitivity that is deemed to be **Medium**.

Magnitude and Significance of Landscape Effects

12.73 In terms of physical landscape effects, the extraction area will create a new void within the application site from an area of c. 8.5 ha from approximately 127mOD to a final floor level at 95 mOD. Quarrying activities generally result in long term landscape effects, however in most cases these effects are reversible in nature, once decommissioned. The application for the proposed development includes an infill proposal as part of decommissioning of the extraction activities on site. It is proposed that the extracted area be infilled using inert waste on a phased basis following the extraction of sand and gravel and restore the land to provide a natural habitat, with ecological benefit provided through the re-instatement of field boundaries, reintroduction of native woodland planting and a mixed species sward.

12.74 The duration of any landscape impacts will last only as long as the proposed development is operational. Although these impacts may be classified as 'long term' (i.e. 15 to 60 years, as defined in the EPA's EIAR guidelines), within a relatively short period of time following decommissioning there would be little evidence that the proposed development existed and the site will be returned to its former condition. In this regard, landscape impacts are considered to be somewhat 'reversible' through the restoration of the land to its original condition.

12.75 The proposed new screening berms may detract slightly from the sloping pastoral/forested setting immediately south of the proposed development, but it's presence is still considered preferable to views of the excavated faces of the extraction activity. Furthermore, once the proposed planting along these vegetated berms becomes established, both will appear more naturalistic and blend into the surrounding landscape context, whilst providing intended visual screening in a characteristic manner.

12.76 This is a productive rural landscape containing two other sand pits - one of which is nearing restoration stage, intensive agriculture, some small scale rural settlement, and other rural hinterland industries including peat harvesting and managed forestry. Therefore, it is not considered that the proposed extraction area will noticeably detract from the integrity of landscape patterns or the productive landscape character that prevails in the area.

12.77 Quarry related activities, such as the movement of heavy vehicles within, as well as to and from the site are already commonplace in the immediate context of the application site, given its proximity to a small/medium sized quarry located c. 450m west. Notwithstanding, there may be a slight increase in the frequency of heavy vehicle movements within the local road network, as a result of the development – refer to EIAR Chapter 13: Traffic.

12.78 On the basis of the factors discussed above it is considered that the magnitude of landscape impact is in the order of **Medium** in the immediate vicinity of the application site (c. <500m from site boundaries). The magnitude of impact is will soon reduce thereafter as the proposed development becomes a smaller component of the overall landscape fabric and is more likely to be read in conjunction with other surrounding intensive land uses.

12.79 With reference to the significance matrix in Table 4, the Medium landscape sensitivity judgement attributed to the study area coupled with a Medium magnitude of landscape impact is considered to result in an overall significance of no greater than **Moderate** within the immediate vicinity of the site and reducing to slight and imperceptible at greater distances.

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

12.80 Views of the agricultural landscape within the study area are generally pleasant in terms of its low-lying, generally 'green', and settled working character. The network of hedgerows and vegetation that occur throughout the surrounding landscape contribute to some sense of naturalness, and in combination with its undulating topography generates a high degree of containment in many locations.

12.81 However, whilst the agricultural context forms the primary landscape and visual experience, in the local landscape of the site, this is interrupted by features and activity associated with the built area around Kilmeague, which includes clusters of residences, transport routes, and an existing sand pit / soil recovery facility. Indeed all parts of this landscape, including those areas in agricultural use, demonstrate longstanding human intervention in the landscape, even in instances where there are naturalistic features such as the Grand Canal - an artificial man-made waterway.

12.82 In general, key differentials in terms of visual receptor sensitivity relate to the occupation of the visual receptor, and the distance at which views are obtained. Static residential receptors are considered generally more susceptible to changes in views over those where views are experienced transiently by those travelling through the landscape. Likewise, receptors located at closer proximity to the site are considered more susceptible to changes in views over those where views are experienced at distance.

12.83 Views towards the site are in no instance considered to be unique, or form a core part of any key views. With regard to scenic routes within the study area, VP5 was captured to represent visibility from Scenic Route No. 6, and VP6 was captured to represent visibility from Scenic Route No. 25. Similarly, VP1 was captured from a point along a road running parallel to the Grand Canal Way. In all instances, the visual amenity along these routes pertain to views away from the site.

12.84 For the reasons outlined above, the range of visual receptor sensitivity is only considered to fall between Medium and Medium-low as determined on a case-by-case basis in Table 7 below.

Magnitude of Visual Effects

12.85 The assessment of visual impacts at each of the selected viewpoints is aided by photomontages of the proposed development. Photomontages are a 'photo-real' depiction of the scheme within the view utilising a rendered three-dimensional model of the development, which has been geo-referenced to allow accurate placement and scale. For each viewpoint, an 'existing view' and 'montage view' have been prepared. An extent line is also included on the montage view (pink) indicating the location of the proposed development within the montage.

	Existing view context	Receptor Sensitivity	Description and Magnitude of Visual impact	Significance/ Duration / Quality
VP1	This is a view captured from a point along a local road which runs parallel to the Grand Canal. This is a typical rural view of agricultural pastures, farmsteads and treelined hedgerow vegetation delineating field boundaries. The scenery along the canal is pleasant, however much of this route is lined by roadside vegetation.	**Medium**	The proposed development will not be visible from here due to screening by intervening terrain. This view has been used to illustrate the absence of impact from this scenic walkway. **Negligible / Neutral**.	**Imperceptible / Long-term/ Neutral**
VP2	This view is afforded from a locally elevated point along the Annesborough Court local road, and illustrates a view that would be available towards the site from this road, and the Hill local road to the southwest. The view looks out over a typical rural scene comprising a patchwork of agricultural fields, linear treelined hedgerows, and a densely forested skyline ridge in the background. This viewpoint was deliberately captured equidistant from two clusters of dwellings to represent their respective potential for visibility. One cluster is situated along the Hill road, northeast of this location, and one along Annesborough Court road, southeast of this location.	**Medium-low**	This view demonstrates the influence that successive layers of vegetation have in precluding views of the actual extraction area. Notwithstanding, there will be an alteration to the contour of the horizon formed by the skyline ridge as a result of the extraction of material from the ground, resulting in the profile of this ridge dipping slightly. However, the retention of vegetation surrounding the outer extents of the extraction area mean that the ridge will retain its smooth flowing profile, but with a less pronounced crest. Furthermore, the existing telecommunications mast is removed from the ridgeline. While the changes may be visible, they will not markedly change the character of the scene or reduce visual amenity. For these reasons, the magnitude of visual impact is considered to be **Medium-low**.	**Moderate-slight / Long-term / Negative**

	Existing view context	Receptor Sensitivity	Description and Magnitude of Visual impact	Significance/ Duration / Quality
VP3	This view is afforded from an elevated section of local road near a cluster of dwellings at Robertstown Holiday Village. This is a pleasant but typical rural scene looking out over pastoral fields, a network of hedgerows, with a gently sloping and densely vegetated ridge cantered within the view. There are partial but distant views afforded toward the backdrop of the view, truncated by the aforementioned ridge.	**Medium-low**	Again this view demonstrates the influence that successive layers of retained vegetation have in precluding views of the extraction pit area and other associated quarrying operations. As with the previous view, there will be visible alterations to the contour of the horizon formed by the skyline ridge as a result of the extraction of material from the ground, resulting in the profile of this ridge dipping slightly. From this viewing angle the lateral extent of the changes to the ridge are wider and therefore more noticeable, but there is a less pronounced crest. Notwithstanding, the retention of vegetation surrounding the outer extents of the extraction area mean that the ridge will retain its smooth undulations and the existing telecommunications masts are removed from the ridge. Furthermore, the extraction pit and other quarry operations will remain screened from view at this location. On balance, the magnitude of visual impact is considered to be **Medium-low**.	**Moderate-slight / Long-term / Negative**
VP4	This view was captured from a low-lying point along an unnamed local road to the west of the site that reflects views that would be experienced when travelling northbound into Robertstown or southbound into Kilmeague. This view looks over an arable pasture, backed by mature treelined hedgerows, and a forested skyline ridge which occupies the background. It is important to note that much of this road is lined by roadside vegetation, therefore this view represents one of few locations where	**Medium-low**	A small portion of the proposed sand pit face will be visible from this location, afforded through gaps in tall treelined hedgerows. In addition, some vegetation will be removed from the top of the ridgeline, causing the profile of this ridge to dip very slightly. Notwithstanding, the retention of vegetation along the perimeter of the extraction area aid in screening and assimilating the development into the view, ensuring the profile of the ridge remains smooth and vegetated along the skyline. When viewed at this distance and in the context of the vegetation within the intervening landscape, it is unlikely that the visible portions of the proposed extraction area will catch the eye of the passing observer. Thus, the magnitude of visual impact is considered to be **Low**.	**Slight / Long-term / Negative**

	Existing view context	Receptor Sensitivity	Description and Magnitude of Visual impact	Significance/ Duration / Quality
	oblique transient views towards the site are possible.			
VP5	This viewpoint is located at a point along the R415 regional road, which is also designated as a section of Scenic Route No. 6 in the Kildare County Development Plan. In this instance, views towards the site are only possible from this gap in roadside hedgerow vegetation, albeit the viewpoint also reflects residential receptors in its vicinity. From this location very little scenic amenity is afforded, with the view comprising an agricultural pasture, backed by treelined hedgerows, and a brief glimpse of a vegetated skyline ridge in the distant background.	**Medium**	A small portion of the proposed development is briefly visible from this location, afforded through this narrow gap in roadside hedgerow. Behind the layers of vegetation in the background, a small portion of the proposed sand pit face will be visible but is not likely to be discernible. In addition, some vegetation will be removed from the top of the ridgeline, causing the profile of this ridge to dip very slightly but become perceptively smoother along the skyline. Furthermore, the retention of vegetation along the outskirts of the extraction area aid in assimilating the development into the view. When viewed at this distance and in the context of the dense vegetation within the intervening landscape, it is unlikely that the visible portions of the proposed development will catch the eye of the casual observer. On balance, the magnitude of visual impact is considered to be **Low**.	**Slight / Long-term / Negative**
VP6	The view was captured from a point along the L7081 local road which is also designated as a section of Scenic Route No. 25 in the Kildare County Development Plan. This view is oriented west in toward the site, depicting views over a fence toward a nearby residence, backed by dense mature mixed forestry. It is important to note that whilst this route is designated as having a degree of visual amenity, fieldwork	**Medium**	This is the nearest viewpoint to the proposed development, and was captured to represent the potential for visual impacts at residences aligning the local road immediately adjacent to the proposal, and reaffirm that there is no sense of scenic amenity in the direction of the site. As a result of the high degree of vegetative screening afforded by the dense forestry that occupies the background of the view neither the proposed development nor changes to the landscape relating to it are discernible from this location other than the removal of the existing telecommunications structures from view. The magnitude of visual impact is considered to be **Negligible / Neutral**.	**Imperceptible / Long-term / Neutral**

	Existing view context	Receptor Sensitivity	Description and Magnitude of Visual impact	Significance/ Duration / Quality
	confirmed that pleasant, distant views of rolling countryside are afforded facing away from the site - toward the south.			
VP7	This view was captured from an unnamed local road to the south of the proposed development, thus oriented north. This point is situated in the vicinity of a cluster of dwellings, all of which are generally contained within landholdings surrounded on most sides by hedgerow vegetation. Views from this location are comparatively open, albeit relatively restricted to middle distance views only due to the density of the forestry in the background of the view.	**Medium-low**	Once again, as a result of the high degree of vegetative screening afforded by the dense forestry that occupies the background of the view neither the proposed development nor changes to the landscape relating to it are discernible from this location other than the removal of the existing telecommunications structures from view . Therefore the magnitude of visual impact is considered to be **Negligible**.	**Imperceptible / Long-term/ Neutral**
VP8	This view was captured from another unnamed local road to the southwest of the site leading into Kilmeage village, near a small cluster of dwellings. It is a relatively brief view, truncated by tall, dense hedgerow vegetation in the mid/back ground.	**Medium-low**	The proposed development will not be visible from here due to screening afforded by the tall treelined vegetation in the background of the view. On balance the magnitude of impact is deemed **Negligible / Neutral** by default.	**Imperceptible / Long-term / Neutral**

12.86 As can be seen from the results of Table 7, the proposed development is extremely well screened with very few instances where the proposed sand pit face will be visible, and no instances where the associated facilities and quarrying activities will be visible within the quarry. Four of the eight representative viewpoints will have an Imperceptible / Neutral significance of impact, whilst two of the eight will have a Slight significance of impact. The remaining two viewpoints incur a Moderate-slight significance of impact and this principally relates to the subtle dip in the skyline ridge profile relative to its slightly more crested present day profile.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

12.87 Within a cumulative assessment, the baseline against which landscape and visual effects are assessed is extended to consider other relevant schemes that are not currently present in the landscape but that are subject to a valid planning application (or have been permitted) as being operational and present in baseline views. Cumulative effects therefore represent any increased effects that may be generated by the development in a scenario where other relevant schemes in the locality are operational.

12.88 In accordance with GLVIA3, schemes that are at feasibility and pre-planning are not generally considered to be appropriate in the context of a cumulative assessment due to a lack of certainty that they will come forward and because of an absence of detail that enable any meaningful judgements to be made.

12.89 No comparable developments were identified, but considering the site's visual containment, it is not considered that there is any potential for cumulative landscape or visual issues of note.

Summary of Impacts

12.90 In terms of landscape impacts, there will be some noticeable physical impacts to landform and land cover at a site scale, but in the context of the wider setting, these will be minor and unlikely to be noticed beyond the immediate context of the site.

12.91 The proposed development is considered to have limited potential to materially impact the local landscape character as it is heavily screened by the dense vegetation surrounding the site. Furthermore, two existing sand pits occur within the study area, with one situated c. 450m west of the site and the other situated c. 800m north.

12.92 Overall, it is considered that the landscape of the study area is principally that of a productive, yet partially settled rural landscape. There is some degree of scenic amenity in the area, as highlighted by is 'special' landscape sensitivity classification in the Kildare CDP, however there is no particular sense of scenery in the immediate vicinity of the site, or in the direction of the site. On balance, the significance of landscape impact is deemed to be Moderate, within the immediate vicinity of the site and reducing to slight and imperceptible at greater distances.

12.93 Visual impacts were assessed at 8 No. viewpoints which represent different receptors, viewing distances and viewing angles within the study area. Visibility of the proposed development is limited to fleeting glimpses of the proposed sand pit face, from local roads afforded through narrow gaps in tall dense vegetation. The significance of visual impact ranges between 'Moderate-slight' and 'Imperceptible' with only two nearby viewpoint location registering the former.

12.94 VP2 and VP3 will experience a moderate-slight significance of visual impact. and this principally relates to the subtle dip in the skyline ridge profile relative to its slightly more crested present day profile. In this regard, it is important to reiterate that this is not a prominent hill, hillock or

ridge, but instead a low, elongated and forested ridge where such change as proposed is subtle and without critical bearing on visual amenity.

12.95 In most instances, the only visual changes are to profile of the skyline ridge and the vegetation on site, and the perceived elevation of the ridge, however these changes are usually subtle where visible.

12.96 Given the site's location, and successive layers of vegetation in the local and wider landscape, the development is of modest consequence in terms of effects to landscape character and views. In this regard it is considered that this is an appropriately sited development, that can be readily assimilated into this landscape with little consequence to landscape character, or views.

Conclusion

12.97 Based on the landscape and visual impact judgements provided throughout this LVIA, the proposed development and associated site works are not considered to give rise to any significant landscape / visual or cumulative impacts.