

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT
BANAGHER CHILLING LIMITED, BANAGHER, CO. OFFALY

7.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Macro Works Ltd. has been commissioned to carry out a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (“LVIA”) on behalf of ‘Banagher Chilling Limited’ for a proposed extension to an existing abattoir in the townland of Clongawny Beg, Co Offaly.

The LVIA describes the landscape context of the proposed development and assesses the likely landscape and visual impacts of the proposed abattoir extension 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.

This LVIA uses methodology as prescribed in the following guidance documents:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publication ‘Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements (revised draft 2017) and the accompanying Advice Notes on Current Practice in the Preparation of Environmental Impact Statements (revised draft 2017); and
- Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment publication entitled Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013).

7.1.1 STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY

This LVIA was prepared by Macro Works Ltd. Relevant experience includes landscape and visual assessments for a range of industrial, commercial and infrastructural developments in Ireland over a period of 20 years.

7.1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The development will comprise the refurbishment and extending of the existing abattoir on the site to allow a maximum slaughter rate of 140 per day. To achieve this, the existing

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slaughter line will be modified and lengthened within the existing abattoir building. Additional cattle chills will be constructed along with offices and staff facilities. The existing Lairage will be extended and the livestock yard increased in size. The existing abattoir building will be extended to provide additional processing rooms and waste out rooms. In addition the construction of a meat cutting, packing, blast freezing and cold storage facility with an output of approximately 40 tons per day. Other facilities to be constructed will comprise, plant rooms, electrical sub-station, water treatment, waste water treatment, packaging storage and staff facilities. The development will extend to 8,578 square meters / 92,333 square feet and an estimated cost €25.59 million. Construction employment will average 250 for an 18 month construction programme.

7.1.3 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Production of this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment involved;

- A desktop study to establish an appropriate study area, relevant landscape and visual designations in the Offaly County Development Plan as well as other sensitive visual receptors. This stage culminates in the selection of a set of potential viewpoints from which to study the effects of the proposal;
- Fieldwork to establish the landscape character of the receiving environment and to confirm and refine the set of viewpoints to be used for the visual assessment stage;
- Assessment of the significance of the landscape impact of the Development as a function of landscape sensitivity weighed against the magnitude of the landscape impact; and
- Assessment of the significance of the visual impact of the Development as a function of visual receptor sensitivity weighed against the magnitude of the visual impact. This aspect of the assessment is supported by photomontages prepared in respect of the selected viewpoints (Attachment 7.1).
- Incorporation of mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts and estimation of residual impacts once mitigation has become established.

7.1.3.1 Landscape Impact Assessment Criteria

When assessing the potential impacts on the landscape resulting from a proposed development, the following criteria are considered:

- Landscape character, value and sensitivity;
- Magnitude of likely impacts; and
- Significance of landscape effects

The sensitivity of the landscape to change is the degree to which a particular landscape receptor (Landscape Character Area (LCA) or feature) can accommodate changes or new elements without unacceptable detrimental effects to its essential characteristics. Landscape Value and Sensitivity is classified using the following criteria set out in Table 7.1.

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Table 7.1: 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.

The magnitude of a predicted landscape impact 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 site boundary that may have an effect on the landscape character of the area. Table 7.2 refers.

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Table 7.2: Magnitude of Landscape Impacts

MAGNITUDE OF IMPACT	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 overall 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 an overall 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 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.
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.

The significance of a landscape impact is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the landscape receptor and the magnitude of the impact. The significance of landscape impacts is arrived at using the following matrix set out in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Impact Significance Matrix

SCALE/MAGNITUDE	SENSITIVITY OF RECEPTOR				
	<i>Very High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Negligible</i>
<i>Very High</i>	Profound	Profound-substantial	Substantial	Moderate	Minor
<i>High</i>	Profound-substantial	Substantial	Substantial-moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight-imperceptible
<i>Medium</i>	Substantial	Substantial-moderate	Moderate	Slight	Imperceptible
<i>Low</i>	Moderate	Moderate-slight	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible
<i>Negligible</i>	Slight	Slight-imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible

Note: The significance matrix provides an indicative framework from which the significance of impact is derived. The significance judgement is ultimately determined by the assessor using professional judgement. Due to nuances within the constituent sensitivity and

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magnitude judgements, this may be up to one category higher or lower than indicated by the matrix. Judgements indicated in orange are considered to be 'significant impacts' in EIA terms.

7.1.3.2 Visual Impact Assessment Criteria

As with the landscape impact, the visual impact of the proposed development will be assessed as a function of sensitivity versus magnitude. In this instance, the sensitivity of the visual receptor, weighed against the magnitude of the visual effect.

7.1.3.3 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

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 and used in Table 7.5 to establish visual receptor sensitivity at each VRP:

1. **Susceptibility of Receptors** - In accordance with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment (3rd edition 2013) 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”.*

2. **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;
3. **Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas.** Again, highly sensitive landscape designations are usually part of a county's Landscape Character

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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;

4. **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;
5. **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;
6. **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 national route versus hill walkers directly engaged with the landscape enjoying changing sequential views over it;
7. **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;
8. **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;
9. **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;
10. **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;
11. **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;
12. **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;
13. **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;

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14. **Sense of place.** This considers whether there is special sense of wholeness and harmony at the viewing location; and
15. **Sense of awe.** This considers whether the view inspires an overwhelming sense of scale or the power of nature.

Those locations which are deemed to satisfy many of the above criteria are likely to be of higher sensitivity. No relative importance is inferred by the order of listing in the Table 7.5 below. Overall sensitivity may be a result of a number of these factors or, alternatively, a strong association with one or two in particular.

7.1.3.4 Visual Impact Magnitude

The magnitude of visual effects is determined on the basis of two factors; the visual presence (relative visual dominance) of the proposal and its effect on visual amenity.

The magnitude of visual impacts is classified in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4: Magnitude of Visual Impacts

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Very High	The proposal intrudes into a large proportion or critical part of the available vista and is without question the most noticeable element. A high degree of visual clutter or disharmony is also generated, strongly reducing the visual amenity of the scene
High	The proposal 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 clutter or disharmony is also likely to be generated, appreciably reducing the visual amenity of the scene
Medium	The proposal represents a moderate intrusion into the available vista, is a readily noticeable element and/or it may generate a degree of visual clutter or disharmony, thereby reducing the visual amenity of the scene. Alternatively, it may represent a balance of higher and lower order estimates in relation to visual presence and 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 detract from, and may even enhance, the visual amenity of the scene

7.1.3.5 Visual Impact Significance

As stated above, the significance of visual impacts is a function of visual receptor sensitivity and visual impact magnitude. This relationship is expressed in the same significance matrix

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and applies the same EPA definitions of significance as used earlier in respect of landscape impacts (Table 7.3 refers).

7.1.4 EXTENT OF STUDY AREA

Within this primarily flat landscape setting the proposed development is likely to be difficult to discern beyond approximately 500m – 1000m due to screening afforded by intervening vegetation. Even if discernible from greater distances it is not likely to give rise to significant landscape or visual impacts beyond this threshold. In the interests of a comprehensive appraisal, a 2km radius study area is used in this instance. However, there will a particular focus on receptors contained within 1km of the site.

7.1.5 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL POLICY CONTEXT AND DESIGNATIONS

7.1.5.1 Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020

Although a landscape character assessment has not currently been completed for County Offaly, Chapter 7 – Heritage and Landscape in the current Offaly County Development Plan (CDP) 2014-2020 identifies a number of general landscape units and their associated sensitivity designations (Figure 7.1).

Offaly CDP Sensitivity Classification:

“Low sensitivity areas: *This class largely encompasses the county’s main urban and farming areas. These areas comprise natural enclosing features (e.g. topography, vegetation) which have the capacity to absorb a range of new development.*

Moderate Sensitivity areas: *Areas which are generally ‘open’ in character with intrinsic quality and moderate capacity to absorb new development.*

High sensitivity areas: *Identified features or areas of natural beauty or interest which have extremely low capacity to absorb new development. Areas included within this class are designated Areas of High Amenity.”*

The proposed beef processing facility is located in a ‘rural and agricultural area’ which is designated as an area of ‘low’ sensitivity (**Figure 7.1** below). Sensitivities associated with rural and agricultural areas that are relevant to the proposed development include;

- *“These areas in general can absorb quite effectively, appropriately designed and located development in all categories (including: telecommunication masts and wind energy installations, afforestation and agricultural structures).*
- *Due to the rural nature of the area, development shall be screened by appropriate natural boundaries that are sympathetic to the landscape generally, where possible.”*

Within the northern and eastern portions of the study area ‘moderate sensitivity’ landscape units occur and relate to large open peatlands. A number of areas of ‘high amenity’ have also been designated throughout County Offaly within the County Development Plan 2014-2020, though none of these are situated within the study area.

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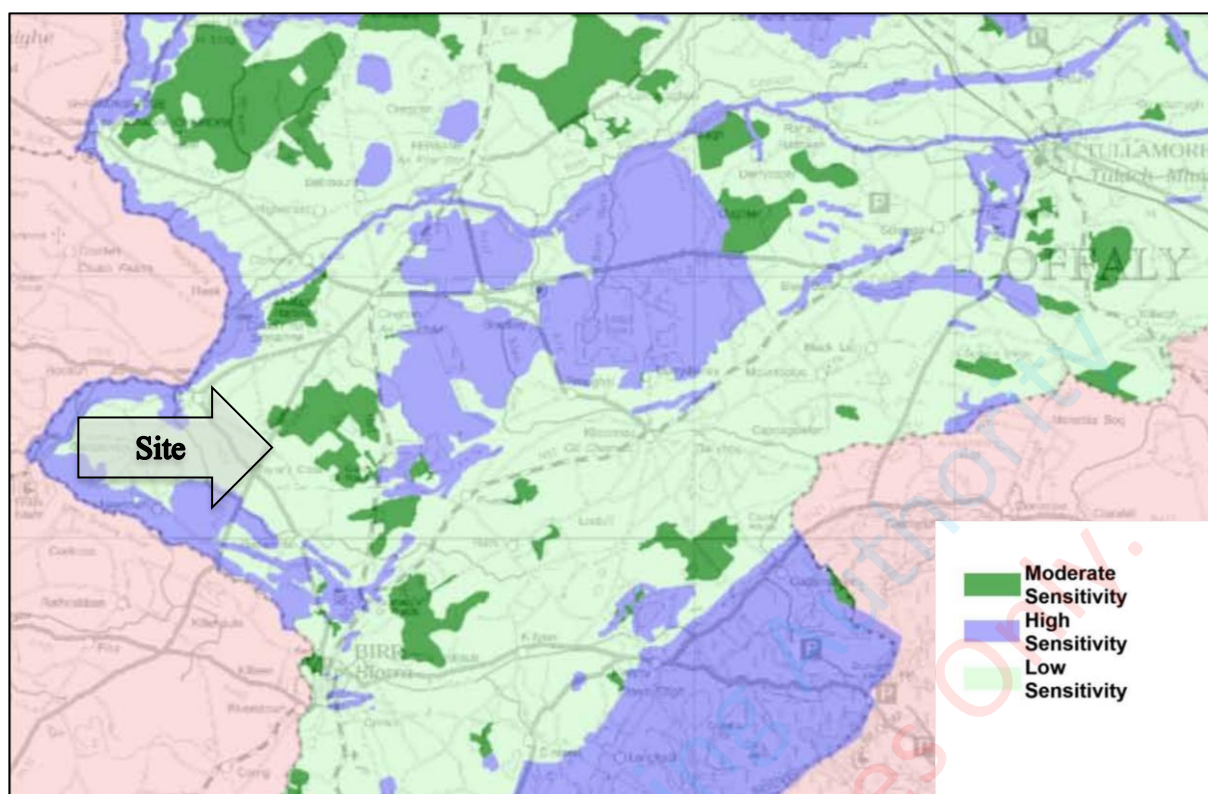


Figure 7.1: Excerpt from Offaly County Development Plan, map 7.15 showing approximate location of proposed proposed site in relation to sensitive landscape designations.

A number of landscape and amenity policies are outlined within the Offaly county development plan in Chapter 7: Heritage and Landscape (subsection 7.13 Landscape and Amenity Policies), some of which are relevant to the development in question and are outlined below:

LAP-01: *It is Council policy that landscape considerations will be an important factor in all land use policy and decision making for the county, ensuring that a proactive view of development is undertaken whilst maintaining respect for the environment and heritage, as per the general principles of sustainable development. Further it is policy to conserve, protect and enhance the landscape of Offaly at a number of levels:*

- *The value of the landscape itself, as open countryside and the associated form and character of settlements.*
- *The value of the landscape as a resource for economic growth in accordance with its physical and visual attributes.*
- *The value of the landscape and its role with habitats and species whose diversity enriches the environment.*

LAP-03: *It is Council policy to protect the county's scenic amenity routes from insensitive levels of roadside development and excessive levels of development. For development directly accessing onto restricted regional routes (key amenity routes) as shown on Map 7.19 (Chapter 4, Infrastructure and Environment Strategy) and on map 4.1, restrictions as per policy STAP-19 will apply.*

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LAP-04: *It is Council policy that existing local landscape features, including hedgerows, shelter belts and stone walls are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development.*

LAP 06: *It is Council policy that new development should ensure the protection of mature trees, hedgerows and the conservation of existing stone walls, and their integration into new development. Where the provision of new boundaries is required, these should comprise native hedgerow planting of Irish provenance, or stone walls which consist of stone found in the locality. Where comprehensive new development occurs, it should take into account the pattern of existing hedgerows and incorporate same into layouts or plant connecting hedgerows where hedgerow removal to facilitate development works is necessary. The Council will require that all new development will respect the existing character of the settlement, in particular through the provision of sensitive landscaping schemes. In the event that the removal of tree(s) is deemed to be necessary, it will be generally conditional on replacement with appropriate species.*

Within the same chapter (Chapter 7: Heritage and Landscape), subsection 7.14 outlines several landscape and amenity objectives. Those that are relevant to the proposed development are outlined below:

LAO-01: *It is an objective of the Council to preserve and enhance the character of the county's landscape where, and to the extent that in the opinion of Offaly County Council, the proper planning and sustainable of the area requires it.*

LAO-02: *It is an objective of the Council to preserve scenic views and prospects throughout the county which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, as part of the development management process (Views are listed in Table 7.11.5 and shown on Map 7.18).*

7.1.5.2 Views of Recognised Scenic Value

Table 7.11.5 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 lists views and prospects of special amenity value or special interest within County Offaly. None of these occur within the study area.

Section 7.12.2 identifies key scenic amenity routes to be protected. None of these occur within the study area.

7.2 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

7.2.1 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

The landscape baseline represents the existing landscape context and is the scenario against which any changes to the landscape and visual context brought about by the development will be assessed.

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A description of the landscape context of the proposed application site and wider study area is provided below under the headings of landform and drainage, vegetation and land use, centres of population and houses, transport routes and public amenities and facilities and the site context. Although this description forms part of the landscape baseline, many of the landscape elements identified also relate to visual receptors i.e. places and transport routes from which viewers can potentially see the proposed Development. The visual resource will be described in greater detail in Section 7.2.2.

7.2.1.1 Landform and Drainage

With the exception of a small hill in the north-western periphery of the 2km study area, the terrain in surrounding the site is relatively flat. While no rivers pass through the study area, a small stream known locally as the Feeghroe Stream flows adjacent to the western boundary of the proposal site. Similarly, a small stream flowing in a westerly direction occurs c.600m south of the proposal site and drains into the Rapemills River situated just outside the southernmost boundary of the study area 2.3km from the site at its nearest point. The meandering corridor of the River Shannon is the most prominent feature within the wider landscape passing west of the settlement of Banagher approximately 3.8km west of the site at its nearest point.



Figure 7.2: Typical example of the relatively flat and enclosed nature of the central study area. Turbines from the Meenwaun Wind Farm in the background

7.2.1.2 Vegetation and Land Use

The landscape of the study area is generally contained in pastoral farmland comprising of small to medium sized geometric fields. These fields are predominately enclosed by dense mature tree lined hedgerows. The remnants of Claremount demesne are situated to the west of the site and are still evident in the form of mature woodlands and large mature broadleaved tree lines. Large scale exploited peatlands are also prominent in the surrounding area, the largest and nearest of which is that of Mullaghakaraun Bog northeast of the proposal site. Blocks of conifer forest plantations are also scattered throughout the 2km study area and are often to be found on the outer periphery of large peat bogs. With regards to industry within the study area, Meenwaun Wind farm (Ireland's largest operating turbines) occur to the east of the proposal site and a number of farmsteads are scattered throughout the wider study area.

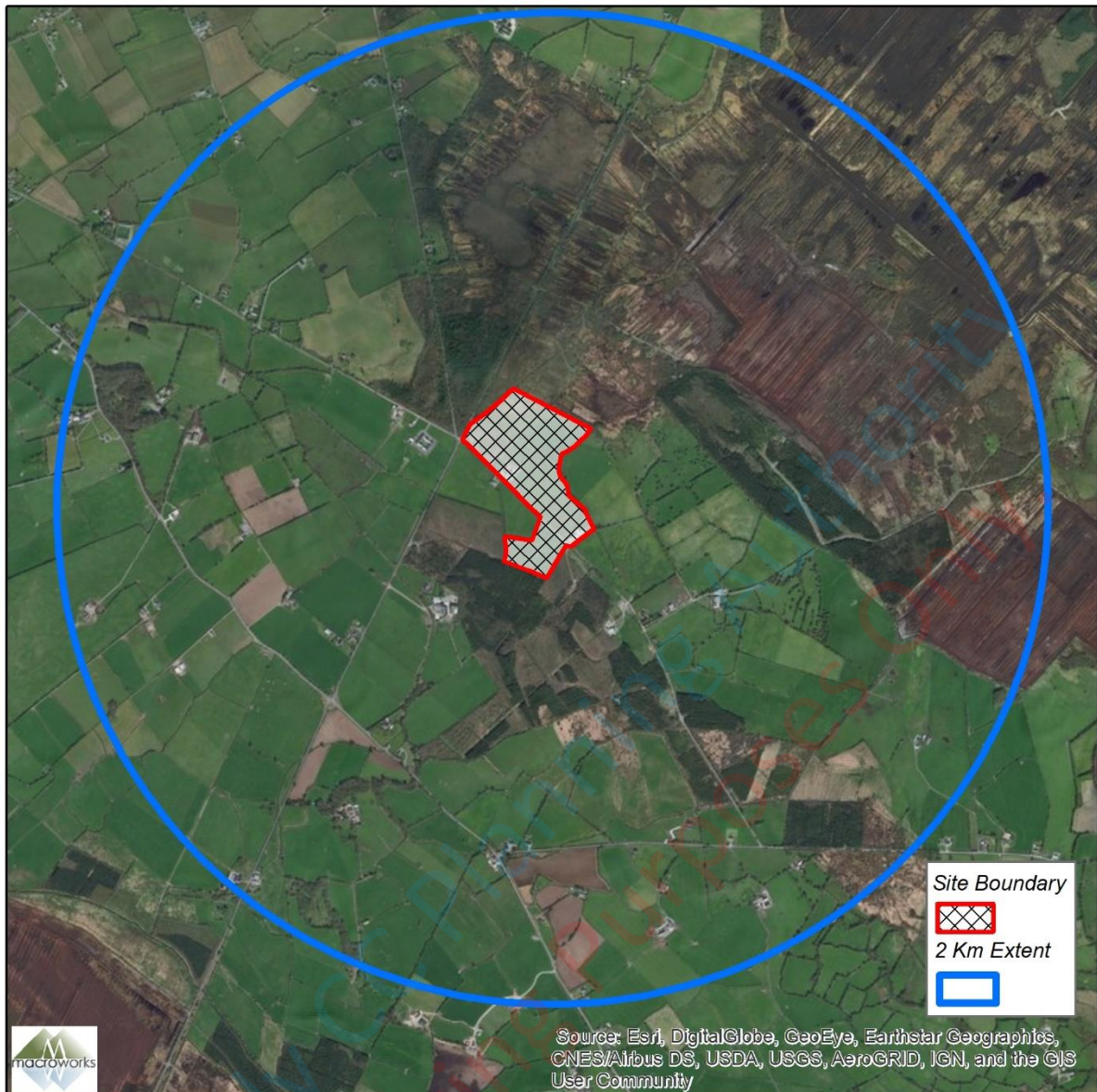


Figure 7.3: Aerial view of the site and its immediate landscape context (Google Earth Pro)

7.2.1.3 Centres of Population and Houses

The most notable centre of population in relation to the site is that of Banagher which is situated outside of the study area along the banks of the River Shannon approximately 3km northwest of the site. Although a moderate number of residential dwellings are located along the local and regional roads that extend out from the settlement of Banagher, the immediate context of the proposal site is somewhat sparsely populated containing only a small number of isolated farmsteads and small linear clusters of dwellings. Similarly, the outer portions of the study area are also relatively sparsely populated.

7.2.1.4 Transport Routes

Oriented in a general north south direction, the R438 regional road is situated immediately adjacent to the neighbouring pastoral field just over 200 meters to the west of the proposed

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site boundary. Extending from the settlement of Banagher in a south-easterly direction, the R439 regional road passes through the southern extents of the proposed development approximately 1.2km from the proposal site. Aside from these two regional routes, a small network of local roads also traverses through the central and wider study area, the nearest of which is the L3010 local road, which follows the path of the southern site boundary.

7.2.1.5 Public Amenities and Facilities

Banagher United sports fields are situated 1.5km west of the proposed development and are the only notable public amenities within the bounds of the study area.

7.2.2 IDENTIFICATION OF VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINTS AS A BASIS FOR ASSESSMENT

Viewshed Reference Points (VRP's) are the locations used to study the visual impacts of a proposal in detail. It is not warranted to include each and every location that provides a view of a development as this would result in an unwieldy report and make it extremely difficult to draw out the key impacts arising from the extension to the existing abattoir. Instead, the selected viewpoints are intended to reflect a range of different receptor types, distances and angles. The visual impact of a proposed development has been assessed using up to 6 no. 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 and heritage features.

VRP's 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 VRP are listed at the beginning of each viewpoint appraisal.

The Viewshed Reference Points selected in this instance are set out in the Table 7.5 below.

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Table 7.5: Outline Description of Selected Viewshed Reference Points (VRPs)

VRP No.	LOCATION	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP1	L3010 local road immediately south of site	N
VP2	L3010 local road immediately south of site	N
VP3	Intersection of the R438 and L3010 west of site	E
VP4	L3010 local road immediately south of site	N
VP5	L3010 local road southeast of site	NW
VP6	Intersection of L3010 and L3006 southeast of site	NW
VP7	R439 south of site	N
VP8	Intersection of R438 and R439 southwest of site (Taylors cross)	NE
VP9	R438 north of site	S
VP10	L7016 local road west of site (Banagher United FC)	E
VP11	L7016 local road west of site	E

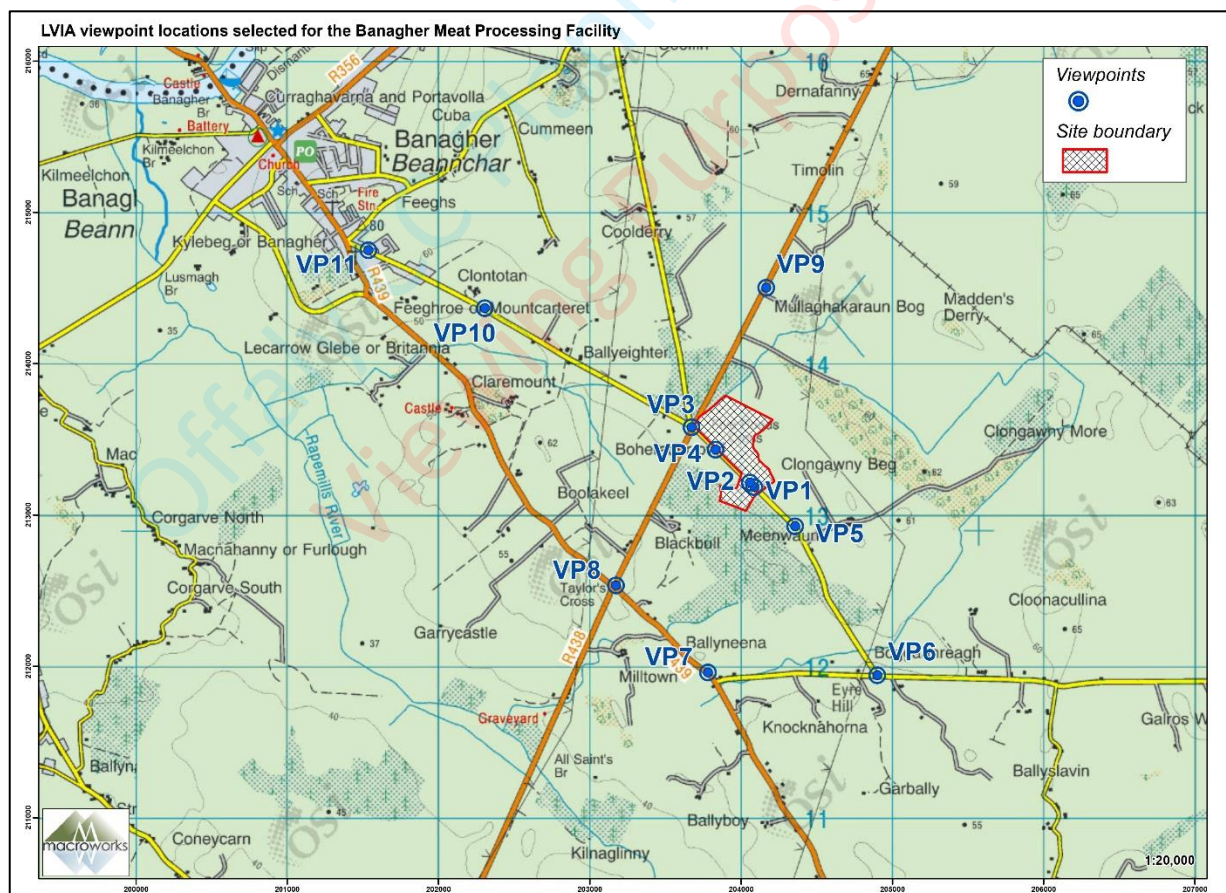


Figure 7.4: Map of viewpoint locations

7.3 MITIGATION AND RESTORATION MEASURES

The main mitigation measure employed in this instance is the siting of the extension to the existing abattoir in a robust rural hinterland that avails of considerable screening from dense intervening mature tree lines and hedgerows

It is proposed to bolster all remaining existing perimeter and internal hedgerows as per Hedge Type 1 (Figure 7.5 refers) with under-planting and inter-planting of whip transplants in order to ensure dense and consistent screening of the site in perpetuity. Advanced nursery stock will also be implemented where any gaps or inconsistent patches of hedgerow vegetation occur. Species will be selected to complement the existing broadleaf hedgerow species mix around the site and will be of local provenance. It is intended to manage hedgerows at a minimum of 3-4m in height.

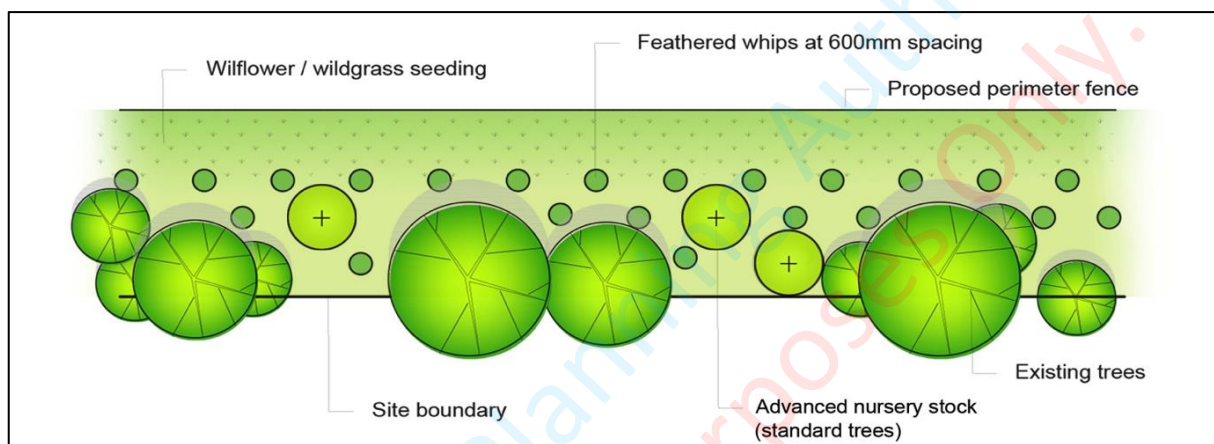


Figure 7.5: Hedgerow Type 1: indicative boundary planting detail showing the approach to inter-planting and under-planting of existing hedgerows (where consolidation is needed).

In addition to supplementing all hedgerows within and surrounding the site, it is proposed to plant an informal wooded area to the north of the proposed building which will aid in screening the proposed development from any receptors to the north and west of the proposed development. This will be provided in the form of high canopy (dominants) species, low canopy (sub-dominant) species, understory and fringe (higher shrubs) species and understory and edge (lower shrub) species, and will comprise of a mix of advanced nursery stock and whip planting (refer to drawing LD.BNGHMPF 1.0 for details). A mounded berm is also proposed along the south/ south-western boundary of the site which will be planted with additional advanced nursery stock and will reinforce the already dense hedgerows between the site and the L3010 local road.

It is also proposed to plant new 'Type 2' hedgerows (Figure 7.6 refers), with whips and a high proportion of advance nursery stock trees (c.3m planted height) to replace any hedgerows lost to facilitate sightlines along the newly proposed entrance to the site (refer to drawing LD.BNGHMPF 1.0 for details). It is also proposed to replant a section of hedgerow to the east of the ICW that will need to be removed to facilitate construction. This planting will be allowed to mature up to a maintained height of 3-4m to provide consistent screening of the proposal site from the adjacent local road.

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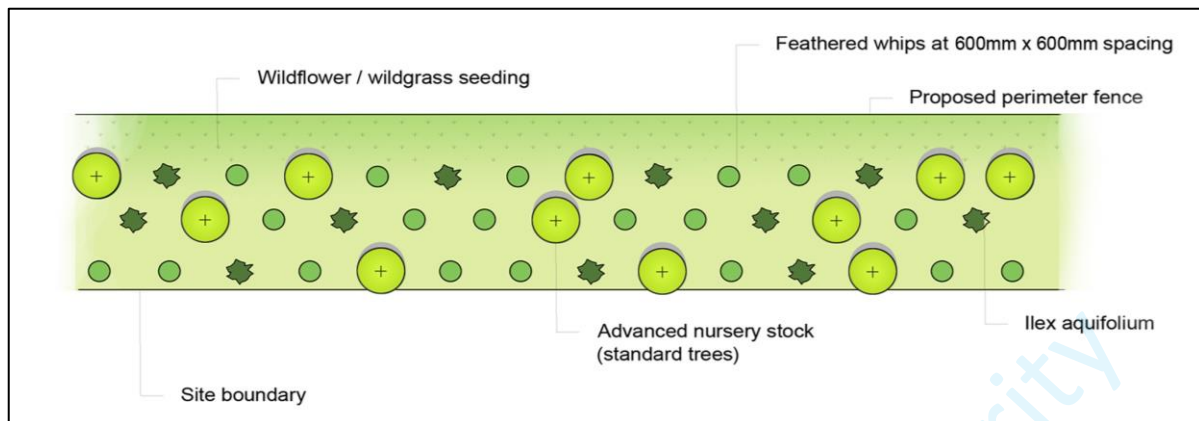


Figure 7.6: Indicative boundary planting detail showing the introduction of new boundary hedgerow TYPE 2.

Space has also been provided for soft landscaping in the form of ornamental shrub planting along the entrance roads and to the front of the extension to the existing abattoir. This has the benefits of softening the appearance of the scheme, providing a high quality of design and serving as a scale transition to the production buildings and ancillary equipment beyond. This planting will provide only a minor degree of screening, but its key purpose is to improve the landscape and visual assimilation of the abattoir extension.

Immediately north-west of the built infrastructure is the proposed Integrated Constructed Wetland (ICW). The proposed ICW will be constructed within lands owned by the applicant and comprises of a five-treatment cell system designed with cascading levels to enable gravity flow across the system. The surrounds of the ICW and cell 5 of the ICW are to be planted with a native tree planting mix in the form of whips and advanced nursery stock. Furthermore, the internal embankments of the ICW are to be planted with a mix of wetland vegetation. Refer to LD.BNGHMPF 1.0 and the Operation and Maintenance plan for further details.

7.4 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.4.1 LANDSCAPE IMPACT

7.4.1.1 Landscape Value and Sensitivity

Landscape value and sensitivity are considered in relation to a number of factors highlighted in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2013, which are set out below and discussed relative to the proposal site and wider study area.

7.4.1.2 Landscape quality (condition)

This attribute is often measured in terms of the integrity of the landscape in question and whether there is a consistent and consolidated use of the land, be it for recreation, conservation rural production or industry. Also, whether there are degraded, untidy or underutilised areas.

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Although a pleasant pastoral aesthetic is presented within the study area especially to the south and southeast, the exploitation of peatlands has left some sense of a degraded landscape in the northern portions of the study area. However, once a strongly anthropogenic feature of this landscape, the large open peatlands have begun the process of natural re-vegetation giving some sense of the naturalistic back to the surrounding area. Aside from pockets in the northern portions of the study area, space is generally well utilised with few fallow or untidy areas.

7.4.1.3 Scenic quality

Predominately flat landscapes such as those within the study area are not often associated with scenic quality, as clusters of mature vegetation will foreshorten the possibility of long distance views and vistas. This is the case within the study area in question where dense tree lines and hedgerows enclose the surrounding road network screening any potential long distance views and vistas.

In the immediate context of the proposed development there is little scenic quality. Mature tree lines and dense hedgerows enclose much of the surrounding landscape. Whilst some longer-range views are afforded in the northern portions of the study area, as a result of the large open peatlands, none of these have any recognised scenic quality and such views are relatively common within the midlands of Ireland.

7.4.1.4 Rarity and Representativeness

Whilst some designed landscapes (demesne remnants) and exploited peatlands occur within the study area, these are not particularly rare or distinctive within the midlands of Ireland. This is reflected within the Offaly County Development Plan, as a large proportion of the central study area has been designated as “*Low sensitivity areas*”, which are those with the “*capacity to absorb a range of new development*”. *Low sensitivity areas* are noted as areas that “*can absorb quite effectively, appropriately designed and located development in all categories (including: telecommunication masts and wind energy installations, afforestation and agricultural structures)*”. Mullaghakaraun Bog carpets much of the northern and north-western extents of the study area and has been classified as a “*Moderate sensitivity area*”.

7.4.1.5 Conservation interests

There are no designated Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Natural Heritage Areas (NHA), proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA) or Special Protection Areas (SPA) within the wider study.

7.4.1.6 Recreation Value

Whilst the landscape in the immediate vicinity of the site and its study area are not synonymous with recreation, the main aspect of recreational value relates to the River Shannon and its waterways, which are situated outside of the 2km study area.

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7.4.1.7 Perceptual aspects

Some sense of rural tranquillity occurs in the immediate context of the site as a result of its low population density and the containment by surrounding dense tree lines and hedgerow vegetation. However, in general this is a landscape heavily influenced by human activity both in the past by harvesting of peat for fuel, and at present through harvesting of wind for energy.

7.4.1.8 Associations

In general there would not appear to be any strong landscape associations to particular people, historic events or mythology in this area. That is not to say that none exist, as all areas have local landscape associations with particular families or historic incidents, but these would not necessarily be associated with landscape values for the wider population.

7.4.1.9 Summary of Landscape Value and Sensitivity

On the basis of the reasons outlined above it is considered that this is a robust hinterland landscape with a **Low** degree of landscape sensitivity.

7.4.2 MAGNITUDE OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

During all construction stages there will be a much higher intensity of activity on site and along the surrounding local and regional road network as a result of HGVs and construction machinery travelling to and from the site. The existing abattoir at the southern end of the site is to be retrofitted and extended while the existing farm sheds in the northeastern portions of the site will remain. A new vehicular/livestock entrance will be situated along the L3010 local road and in turn some hedgerow removal may need to take place to facilitate this access way and its associated sightlines. However, new sections of hedgerow are to be replanted behind the sightlines as per hedgerow Type 2. In addition to this, there will be a loss of two existing hedgerows within the southern extents of the site to facilitate to full footprint of the extension to the existing abattoir.

There will be permanent physical effects to the land cover of the site, which are not readily reversible. These relate to the excavation of large areas of the site to facilitate foundations for the incoming buildings, roads and ancillary equipment, with any excess topsoil being used to create a mounded berm to the front of the proposed development which will rise to a maximum of 2 meters above the existing ground level. Several buildings and a range of ancillary equipment and holding tanks will be constructed on the site with the maximum building height peaking at 12.8m and the highest piece of ancillary equipment reaching a height of 6.5m. While there will be a general loss of agricultural production as a result of the proposed meat processing facility, this will be substituted for more intensive industrial production albeit the end stage of the agricultural process.

The Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICW) will also require a reasonable degree of excavation and movement of topsoil to create the embankments and roads (3.5m wide) that surround the cells. The earthworks are not expected to take longer than 2-3 months to complete and the height of the embankments will not exceed 1m and will have a maximum slope of 2:1.

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Whilst productive rural land uses have long been the dominant land use in the vicinity of the site, which includes the harvesting of peat for fuel and other general agricultural practices, a new form of industry has emerged within the wider study area. The Meenwaun wind farm sits just east of the proposal site comprising of 4 existing turbines and one further permitted turbine, and introduces a new form of built development to the area.

The scale of the extension to the existing abattoir could be considered large relative to the existing agricultural buildings in the area, but could equally be considered modest compared with the existing industrial facilities in the wider context of the site. This a relatively sizable industrial development, but also an appropriately sited development within an area identified in the CDP as a 'low sensitivity area' with the capacity to "*absorb quite effectively, appropriately designed and located development in all categories (including: telecommunication masts and wind energy installations, afforestation and agricultural structures)*".

In terms of effects on landscape character within the study area, the proposal represents the introduction of a relatively large meat processing facility in to a primarily rural context. Although there is a thematic relationship between the previous agricultural use of the land and the proposed meat processing facility, the proposed land use will be that of a highly productive industrial facility and therefore represents a change to the predominant agricultural character of the site itself which also contains a much smaller existing meat processing facility. Once all phases of the proposed extension to the existing abattoir is complete, it is likely to be a prominent land use within the immediate context of the site (i.e. within 100-200m), with other forms of land use becoming somewhat subservient. However, comparable integral relationships between rural settlements and rural industries can be found throughout the country and are not necessarily negative associations; such a relationship helps ensure that rural communities remain viable, sustainable, self-sufficient and/or in employment. This, in turn, can have a major bearing on how additional development is perceived by that population, in terms of its appropriateness within the landscape context.

The proposed extension to the existing abattoir is a facility of local and regional importance, directly related to and inter-dependant with the rural modes of production and the rural economy, it is considered that the magnitude of landscape impact is **Medium** for the site and its immediate environs. Beyond approximately 500m it is less likely to be noticed and will have a 'Low' then 'Negligible' effect over greater distances as it becomes a proportionately smaller component of the overall hinterland landscape fabric.

With reference to the significance matrix (Table 7.4) above, the **Low** landscape sensitivity judgement attributed to the study area coupled with a **Medium** magnitude of landscape impact in the immediate vicinity (<500m) of the proposed extension to the existing abattoir is considered to result in an overall significance of no greater than **Slight**.

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7.4.3 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.4.3.1 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Table 7.6: Analysis of Visual Receptor Sensitivity at Viewshed Reference Points

Scale of value for each criterion

Strong association	Moderate association	Mild association	Negligible association

Values associated with the view	VP1	VP2	VP3	VP4	VP5	VP6	VP7	VP8	VP9	VP1	VP1
Susceptibility of viewers to changes in views											
Recognised scenic value of the view											
Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas											
Primary views from residences											
Intensity of use, popularity (number of viewers)											
Viewer connection with the landscape											
Provision of vast, elevated panoramic views											
Sense of remoteness / tranquillity at the viewing location											
Degree of perceived naturalness											
Presence of striking or noteworthy features											
Sense of Historical, cultural and / or spiritual significance											
Rarity or uniqueness of the view											
Integrity of the landscape character within the view											
Sense of place at the viewing location											
Sense of awe											
Overall sensitivity assessment	L	L	M L	L	L	M L	M L	L	M L	M L	M L

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

7.4.3.2 Magnitude of Visual Effects

The assessment of visual impacts at each of the selected viewpoints is aided by photomontages of the proposed extension to the existing abattoir (Attachment 7.1). 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, the following images have been produced;

1. Existing View
2. Montage View with Mitigation Planting Established

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP1	L3010 local road immediately south of site	0.002km	N

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor Sensitivity **Low**

Existing View This is a heavily contained view from the L3010 local road immediately adjacent to the southeast corner of the site. In the foreground a dense mature hedgerow sits just beyond the grassy verge of the local road and contains this view at a short distance.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed extension to the existing abattoir will be heavily screened from this viewpoint even at such a close viewing distance. Glimpses of the south-eastern extents of the proposed extension will be afforded here through and above a heavy veil of dense hedgerow vegetation that lines the local road immediately adjacent to the viewpoint. Any visibility afforded of the proposed buildings will be in the form of a dull mass backing the dense hedgerow vegetation. The development is likely to slightly increase the already enclosed nature of this local road here due to its height and near distance to the local road corridor. This will also increase the intensity of built development in this quiet rural setting. Overall, it is considered that the magnitude of visual impact is **Medium-Low**.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment In this instance the proposed mitigation will strengthen and fill gaps in the already dense boundary hedgerow. The embankment planted with advanced nursery stock will also supplement the bolstered boundary hedgerow and provide an additional layer of vegetative screening. Whilst the proposed extension will not be entirely screened here due to its height and near distance to the road, the proposed mitigation will soften the strict lines of the building when viewed against the sky. On balance the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to reduce to **Low** in a post mitigation scenario.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
Pre-mitigation	Low	Medium-low	Slight
	Low	Low	Slight-Imperceptible
Residual			

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP2	L3010 local road immediately south of site	0.002km	N

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor Sensitivity **Low**

Existing View This is a contained view from a gateway in a dense hedgerow along a L3010 local road immediately south of the site. The brief view encompasses a flat pastoral field enclosed by mature tree lined hedgerows where it is contained at a near distance. Filtered glimpses of pastoral fields beyond are afforded through small gaps in these otherwise dense hedgerows.

Visual Impact of proposed extension This is a brief and filtered view of the proposed extension to the existing abattoir through a gateway in the roadside hedgerow and over top of the dense tree lined hedgerow. A clear view of the nearest portion of the proposed building will be afforded here through a security fence where the existing gateway is located. The proposed buildings will occupy the entire lateral extent of the gap in roadside vegetation and will be a prominent feature of this view from this close viewing distance. The entire vertical extent of the proposed building will be revealed here with the subtle variations in the buildings elevations slightly reducing the overall perceived mass of the building.

The large extension to the existing abattoir represents a substantial change to this typical rural view and will represent a marked increase in the intensity of development here. However, the dull tone of the proposed building will also help it to assimilate the building with the existing hedgerow vegetation when viewed through any gaps in the dense roadside hedgerow. Overall, it is considered that the magnitude of visual impact is **High-Medium**.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Once fully established, the proposed mitigation will fill any existing gaps in the existing hedgerow vegetation in this view. The proposed bolstered hedgerow will screen much of the vertical extent of the building with only views of the upper floor and roofline afforded from here. The proposed berm backing the boundary hedgerow will also provide an additional layer of screening whilst the advanced nursery stock planted on top of the berm will rise high enough to break up the hard lateral lines of the building's rooftop. On balance the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to reduce to **Medium-Low** in a post mitigation scenario.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

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Pre-mitigation
Residual

Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
Low	High-Medium	Moderate-slight
Low	Medium-low	Slight

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP3	Intersection of the R438 and L3010 west of site	0.023km	E

Representative of:

- Major Route
- Local community views

Receptor Sensitivity **Medium-low**

Existing View This is a relatively short distance view from the intersection of the R438 regional road and the beginning of the L3010 local road that flanks the southern boundary of the proposal site. Dense tree lined hedgerows extend along the fringe of both the local and regional roads and contain much of this view in the foreground. One of the large Meenwaun turbines rises in the background of the view and is framed by two mature trees in the foreground.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed abattoir extension will be almost entirely screened by the existing roadside hedgerow from this viewpoint. Consequently, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be negligible by default.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment The already dense roadside hedgerows will be bolstered here with supplementary hedgerow vegetation which will slightly increase their height and create a more consolidated appearance. The visual impact will remain at negligible.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP4	L3010 local road immediately south of site	0.010km	N

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor Sensitivity **Low**

Existing View This is a view from the entrance of an existing agricultural yard along the L3010 immediately south of the proposal site. The view looks out over a gravel and concrete yard encompassing typical farm buildings and is enclosed by post and wire fencing. Pastoral farmlands encircle this paddock and are similarly bound by post and wire fencing and scrubby hedgerows. A mature tree lined hedgerow to the rear of this farmstead contains the view in the middle distance.

Visual Impact of proposed extension A considerable portion of the west facing elevation of the proposed building will be visible here through the proposed new entranceway of the beef processing facility. Several pieces of ancillary equipment to the rear of the proposed building and the security hut adjacent to the entrance will also be visible from this viewing location. The proposed development presents as a substantial increase in the scale and intensity of rural / industrial built development within this scene especially in a cumulative sense with the existing farm buildings and turbines in the background. Views from the road will be enclosed to a slightly greater degree, but this is not currently an extensive view. The muted green tone of the buildings aids visual assimilation, but the angular geometric roofline will rise slightly above the vegetated skyline beyond. On balance of these reasons, the magnitude of visual impact is deemed to be High medium.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Following the establishment of mitigation planting, the view in the direction of the existing farm sheds will be foreshortened at the roadside, but the lower, more formal hedge around the site entrance will still allow views of the main building, albeit considerably softened by typical hedgerow planting along its southern (road) side. Overall, the magnitude of visual impact is considered to reduce to Medium following mitigation.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Low	High medium	Moderate slight
	Low	Medium	Slight

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP5	L3010 local road southeast of site	0.326km	NW

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor **Low**

Sensitivity

Existing View

This is a relatively contained view from a slight bend in the L3010 local road to the east of the proposal site. The view extends out over the L3010 road corridor and is bound by a grassy mound and some scrubby hedgerow vegetation on its northern verge as well as a mature tree lined hedgerow along the opposite side. Beyond the grassy mound on the northern side of the local road, a narrow pastoral field extends in the direction of the proposal site. The hedgerow at the opposite end of this field and some stacked mature vegetation beyond contains this view in the middle ground.

Visual Impact of proposed extension

A view of the uppermost portions of the proposed building will be afforded from here over top of and between a series of roadside and mature tree lined hedgerows and will be identified by the strong horizontal roofline it creates above the softer hedgerows. While the development will not be a prominent feature of this view, it will represent an increase in the intensity of development in this otherwise relatively undeveloped scene. Consequently it is considered the magnitude of visual impact is **Low-negligible**.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment

Due to the dense tree lined hedgerow that lines the south-eastern boundary of the site mitigation planting is unlikely to be visible from here and instead, will contribute to the strengthening of the existing tree lines and hedgerows. As a result the magnitude of visual impact will remain at **Low-negligible**.

Summary

Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation
Residual

Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
Low	Low-Negligible	Slight-Imperceptible
Low	Low-Negligible	Slight-Imperceptible

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP6	Intersection of L3010 and L3006 southeast of site	1.39km	NW

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor Sensitivity **Medium-Low**

Existing View This is a flat somewhat open view from the intersection of the L3010 local road and the L3006 local road to the east of the proposed development. Low clipped hedgerows line the corridor of the L3010 local road along which the view is directed. A clump of mature broadleaved trees within the pastoral field in the foreground and some stacked hedgerow vegetation beyond contain this view in the middle distance.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed extension to the existing abattoir will not be visible from here due to screening by the dense intervening tree lines and hedgerows. The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible by default.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Mitigation planting will not be visible and the impact remains Negligible.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Medium-Low	Negligible	Imperceptible
	Medium-Low	Negligible	Imperceptible

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP7	R439 south of site	1.08km	N

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor Sensitivity **Medium-low**

Existing View This is a view over a mildly undulating pastoral field along the R439 regional road south of the site. A low hedgerow separates the low rolling field in the foreground from the regional road. In addition to the undulations in foreground field, a mature tree lined hedgerow and some dense conifer plantations beyond contain this view in the middle distance. In the background, the turbines from the Meenwaun wind farm stand clear in silhouette against the sky.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed extension to the existing abattoir will not be visible from here due to screening by the dense intervening tree lines and hedgerows. The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible by default.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Mitigation planting will not be visible and the impact remains Negligible.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP8	Intersection of R438 and R439 southwest of site (Taylors cross)	0.88km	NE

Representative of:

- Local community views
- Major route

Receptor Sensitivity **Low**

Existing View This is an open view over relatively flat pastoral fields from the intersection of the R438 and R439 regional roads known as Taylor's cross. In the foreground, a scrubby, roadside, grass covered mound borders a pastoral field, which is enclosed by a concrete post and wire fence and low clipped hedgerows. A dense coniferous hedgerow cuts across this field in the middle ground of the view. This along with some stacked vegetation beyond contains this view in the middle distance. All of the Meenwaun wind farm turbines stand tall in silhouette against the sky in the background of this view.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed extension to the existing abattoir will not be visible from here due to screening by the dense intervening tree lines and hedgerows. The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible by default.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Mitigation planting will not be visible and the impact remains Negligible.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual

Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
Low	Negligible	Imperceptible
Low	Negligible	Imperceptible

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP9	R438 north of site	0.73km	S

Representative of: • Major route

Receptor Sensitivity **Medium-Low**

Existing View This is a relatively enclosed view from the R438 regional road north of the proposal site. The view looks over the scrubby fringe of a cutaway peatland where natural re-vegetation is already beginning to occur. The layers of scrubby vegetation contain this view at a relatively short distance. The Meenwaun turbines rise above the vegetated skyline in the background of this view.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed extension to the existing abattoir will not be visible from here due to layers of intervening scrub and hedgerows north of the site. The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible by default.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Mitigation planting will not be visible and the impact remains Negligible.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Medium-Low	Negligible	Imperceptible
	Medium-Low	Negligible	Imperceptible

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP10	L7016 local road west of site (Banagher United FC)	1.58km	E

Representative of:

- Local community views
- Amenity feature

Receptor Sensitivity **Medium-low**

Existing View This is a relatively channelled view along the L7016 local road adjacent to the entrance of Banagher United Football Club. Both sides of the local road are bound by dense mature tree line hedgerows that contain much of this view at a short distance.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed extension to the existing abattoir will not be visible from here due to screening by the dense intervening tree lines and hedgerows. The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible by default.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Mitigation planting will not be visible and the impact remains Negligible.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible
	Medium-low	Negligible	Imperceptible

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VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINT		VIEWING DISTANCE	DIRECTION OF VIEW
VP11	L7016 local road west of site	2.44km	E

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor Sensitivity **Medium**

Existing View This is a locally elevated view from a local road on the south-eastern outskirts of Banagher. The foreground context of the view encompasses a number of single storey residential dwellings situated on slightly sloping terrain. The view is directed along the alignment of the local road which descends away from the viewer. Several patches of mature vegetation in the foreground, and areas of stacked vegetation beyond, contain much of this view at a relatively short distance. The rotating blade sets of the Meenwaun turbines are noted just above the vegetated skyline. The broad rolling ridgeline of the Slieve Bloom Mountains can also be discerned in the background of this view.

Visual Impact of proposed extension The proposed extension to the existing abattoir will not be visible from here due to screening by the dense intervening tree lines and hedgerows. The magnitude of visual impact is, therefore, Negligible by default.

Visual Impact following mitigation establishment Mitigation planting will not be visible and the impact remains Negligible.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined at **Section 7.1.3** the significance of residual visual impact is summarised below.

Pre-mitigation Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Medium	Negligible	Imperceptible
	Medium	Negligible	Imperceptible

7.5 CONCLUSION

In terms of landscape impacts it is not considered that this is a highly sensitive landscape setting. The wider context is that of a combination of small-medium sized settlements and a working rural landscape without any particular landscape or visual designations in the Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020. For these reasons the landscape sensitivity judgement is 'Low' – reflecting its robustness rather than its quality / condition.

There will be physical impacts on the land cover of the site as well as temporary construction related impacts from the movement of heavy machinery and stockpiling of materials, however, the main impacts considered are those relating to post-construction effects on the prevailing landscape character. In this respect, the proposal represents a substantial intensification of a rural/industrial land use that already exists within the site in the form of the much smaller meat processing facility. While there is a thematic relationship between the proposed facility and the previous use of the land, this will primarily be a transition from an area of pastoral farmlands to that of a sizable industrial facility and will represent a marked increase in the intensity of development of the immediate vicinity of the site.

Visual impacts are assessed at 11 no. viewpoint locations representing a range of viewing angles, distances and contexts. All of these are within 2km of the proposed extension to the existing abattoir as it is not readily visible from further afield in this flat landscape, which is enclosed by dense hedgerow vegetation and mature tree lines.

Pre-mitigation visual impacts range from Imperceptible at the majority of viewpoint locations beyond 500m of the site, up to Moderate-slight for VP2 and VP4 immediately adjacent to the site. The close view of the nearest portion of the development will result in a marked change in the otherwise typical rural scene from both VP2 and VP4. This arises from the physical enclosure of the views as well as the increased scale and intensity of built development. However, the nature of the development is clearly rural industry and the buildings are readily screened / softened by proposed mitigation planting, resulting in 'Slight' residual impacts in both cases.

7.5.1 OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPACT

Overall, it is considered that the proposed extension to the existing abattoir, though substantial in scale, is appropriately sited; visually well contained; and, where visible, the design helps it to assimilate with the existing landscape and visual context. It will result in visual impacts that are very localised and in the lower order of magnitude. Overall, it is considered that such effects are not significant in EIA terms, especially once landscape mitigation proposals have become established.