CHAPTER 12

VISUAL AND LANDSCAPE

QUARRY CONSULTING

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CHAPTER 12: Landscape and Visual

Introduction

12.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) chapter describes the landscape context of the proposed development and assesses the likely landscape and visual impacts of the proposal on the receiving environment.

12.2 Landscape Impact Assessment (LIA) relates to assessing the 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.

12.3 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).

12.4 It is noteworthy that the proposed deepening of the quarry is entirely located within areas that have been subject to previous planning applications and Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EIAR). Specifically, the proposed development lies within Area B and Area C as shown on Plate 1.1, both of which have undergone detailed assessments in previous applications (S37L, Section 34) and the associated EIARs. The extraction area targeted for deepening is located beneath permitted reserves that have already been subject to extensive environmental evaluations. The proposal does not introduce new land disturbance beyond that previously permitted or significant changes to the operational footprint. The landscape and visual effects are therefore unlikely to be altered over the baseline, which was established under Plan Ref. File No. 20/77/ ABP Ref: ABP-308748-20) in 2019. The scoping in of Landscape and Visual in this EIAR was therefore in accordance with the precautionary principle and to ensure that the EIAR provides a comprehensive, up-to-date assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development.

Legislative and Policy Context

12.5 This assessment has been carried out with reference to the following legalisation, policy and guidelines:

Legislation

- Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (hereafter referred to as the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive).
- The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, includes a definition of landscape as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors[1]". The Act also includes a requirement that objectives relating to landscape should be included in development plans.

[1]Defined In Article 1a of the European Landscape Convention

- Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.
- Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.
- European Landscape Convention 2000 - Ireland ratified the European Landscape Convention in 2002. The Convention promotes the protection, management and planning of landscapes.

Policy

- Mayo County Development Plan 2022 – 2028.
- Landscape Appraisal of County Mayo.
- Galway County Development Plan 2022 – 2028.
- Galway Landscape Character Assessment, May 2021.
- National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 - published "to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Convention and establish principles for protecting and enhancing the landscape while positively managing its change".

Guidelines

- Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition (GLVIA3), Landscape Institute, August 2024.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (hereafter referred to as the EPA Guidelines) (EPA 2022).
- The Landscape Institute – Technical Guidance Note 02/21 – Assessing landscape value outside national designations (May 2021).
- Landscape Institute – Technical Guidance Note 06/19 – Visual Representation of Development Proposals (2019) (currently under review).
- Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 05/2017 (Revised 2018) on Townscape Character Assessment (hereafter referred to as the TCA) (Landscape Institute 2018).Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (hereafter referred to as the GEIA) (DHPLG 2018).
- Environmental impact assessment of projects - Guidance on the preparation of the environmental impact assessment report (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU) (2017), European Commission.
- Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (hereafter referred to as the GLVIA) 3rd edition (Landscape Institute and IEMA 2013).

12.6 While the EPA Guidelines (EPA 2022) provide a general methodology, impact ratings and assessment structure applicable across all environmental assessments, the GLVIA (Landscape Institute and IEMA 2013) provides specific guidance for landscape and visual impact assessments. A combination of the approaches outlined in the EPA Guidelines (EPA 2022) and in the GLVIA (Landscape Institute and IEMA 2013), and the professional experience and expertise of the assessor, is utilised in the landscape and visual assessment.

Assessment Methodology and Significance Criteria

Assessment Methodology

12.7 Production of this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment involved:

- Identification of the study area.
- Desktop study to identify the relevant landscape and visual designations in the Mayo County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 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;
- Use of full Frame Sensor camera with 50mm lens to capture visualisation from each selected viewpoint. Images are stitched together using photoshop, where a panorama is required to illustrate the view.
- 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.
- Where appropriate, incorporation of mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts and estimation of residual impacts once mitigation has become established.

Landscape Assessment Impact Criteria

12.8 Understanding the character, quality and value of the landscape determines the sensitivity of that landscape to accommodate change through development. 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 assessed as a combination of 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 and the value attached to those elements. The value attached to a landscape is assessed based on Table 1 of Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 2/21, which takes into account factors such as natural heritage, cultural heritage, landscape condition, associations, distinctiveness, recreational value, scenic value, tranquillity and function. Landscape Sensitivity is classified using the criteria set out in

12.9 Table 12-1

Table 12-1: Sensitivity of Landscape to Change

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.

12.10 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. Magnitude is classified using the criteria set out in Table 12-2.

Table 12-2: Magnitude of Landscape Impacts

Magnitude	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.
Positive	Changes that restore a degraded landscape or reinforce characteristic landscape elements.

12.11 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 determined based on the matrix set out in Table 12-3.

Table 12-3: Impact Significance Matrix

Scale/ Magnitude	Sensitivity of Receptor				
	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

12.12 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 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.

Visual Impact Assessment Criteria

12.13 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 is weighed against the magnitude of the visual effect.

12.14 The determination of the sensitivity of visual receptors is based on a combination of the value placed on each of the types of visual receptors and the susceptibility to change of each of these. A further factor affecting visual sensitivity is the activity that the viewers are engaged in and whether this heightens their awareness of the surrounding landscape.

12.15 The determination of sensitivity of visual receptors is informed by the following:

- **Elevated and / or panoramic views**. This relates to the elevation and extent of the view.
- **Sense of remoteness and/or tranquillity.** Remote and tranquil views tend to be static and therefore more sensitive to the introduction of active elements.
- **Degree of perceived naturalness.** Manmade features can appear incongruent in a setting that is considered to be very natural.
- **Presence of striking or noteworthy features.** Features such as a promontory headland, lough or castle can be highly valued, perhaps depicted in paintings and postcards.
- **Historical, cultural and / or spiritual significance.** Visitors can attributed significance to such locations for the purposes of contemplation or reflection heightening the sense of their surroundings;
- **Rarity or uniqueness of the view.** Considers how unusual the landscape is on a local, regional and national level.
- **Integrity of the landscape character.** Considers the condition and intactness of the landscape.
- **Sense of place.** Considers whether the location has a perceived meaning to visitors.
- **Sense of awe.** Considers the impact of the view in terms of the sense of timelessness of nature.

12.16 Table 12-5 classifies the sensitivity of visual receptors:

Table 12-4: Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Sensitivity	Description
High	• Users of an outdoor recreation feature which focuses on the landscape. • Valued views enjoyed within highly sensitive landscape areas – highly sensitive landscape designations are usually defined by a County's Landscape Character Assessment which is then incorporated within the County Development Plan. • Tourist visitors to scenic viewpoint - The scenic value of the view can be defined by County Development Plan designations, guidebooks, touring maps, postcards etc). Occupiers of residential properties with a high level of visual amenity. Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes where such travel involves recognised scenic routes and awareness of views is likely to be heightened. Visitors to heritage assets, or to other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience.
Medium	• Outdoor sports or recreation pass-times which do not offer or focus attention on landscape. • Occupiers of residential properties with a medium level of visual amenity.
Low	• Regular commuters. • People at place of work. • Occupiers of residential properties with a low level of visual amenity.

12.17 The magnitude of visual effects is determined on the basis of two factors; the visual presence of the proposal and its effect on visual amenity. Visual presence relates to how noticeable or visually dominant the proposal is within a particular view. This is determined by a number of factors, including its scale in relation to distance, the complexity of the view, as well as the degree of existing contextual movement experienced. The backdrop against which the development is presented and its relationship with other focal points or prominent features within the view is also considered. The magnitude of visual affects also takes into account the

duration and reversibility off visual effects. Visual presence can be expressed as; minimal, sub-dominant, co-dominant, dominant, highly dominant. The magnitude of visual impacts is classified in Table 1.

Table 12-5: Magnitude of Visual Impacts

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

12.18 As with landscape impact, the significance of a visual impact is a function of sensitivity and magnitude. The significance of visual impacts is determined based on the matrix set out in Table 12-6.

Table 12-6: Impact Significance Matrix

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

12.19 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. Landscape Institute and IEMA (2013) recognises that professional judgement is an important part of the LVIA process. Due to nuances within the constituent sensitivity and magnitude judgements, this may be up to one category higher or lower than indicated by the matrix. In all cases, judgements must be clear and transparent method so that the reasoning can be followed and examined by others. Judgements indicated in orange are considered to be 'significant impacts' in EIA terms.

12.20 In addition to assessing the significance of landscape effects and visual effects, EPA Guidance for EIAs requires that the quality of the effects to be classified as negative/adverse, neutral, or positive/beneficial. This is because visual amenity is perceived by people and therefore subject to variations in the attitude and values of the receptor – one person's attitude to a proposed development may differ from another's. Additionally, in certain situations there may be a policy encouraging a particular development in an area, in which case the policy is effectively prescribing a degree of visual change. If the proposed development achieves the objective of the policy, the resulting effect might be considered positive, even if the landscape character of views are significantly altered. The classification of the quality of the landscape and visual effects seeks to take these variables into account and provide for a rational and robust assessment.

Characteristics of the Proposed Development

12.21 The proposed development comprises the deepening of the existing limestone quarry and is described in detail in Chapter 3.0 (Project Description), a summary of the elements of the project relevant to this chapter is provided below.

- The deepening of 19 ha. of the existing permitted quarry extraction area (Plan File Ref. No. 20/77: ABP-308748-20 & Plan File Ref. No. PL16.SU0132: QD16.QD0009) from 5 mOD to -12 mOD;
- Haulage of material to existing fixed plant within the main quarry for processing.
- All associated ancillary facilities/works.
- Landscaping and restoration of the site.

Restoration (Reinstatement to Nature Conservation Habitat Areas)

12.22 Upon the cessation of extraction operations, it is proposed to return the quarry area to natural habitat after-uses – refer to Figure 3.2 and paragraphs 3.70 – 3.79.

12.23 Where feasible, restoration of exhausted and redundant areas will be carried out at the earliest opportunity. However, it is envisaged that the majority of restoration proposals will be carried out after extraction operations at the site have ceased.

Nature and Quantity of Material to be Extracted

12.24 The total recoverable reserve of limestone from within the proposed extraction area, from 5 m OD to -12 m OD has been calculated as c. 7 million tonnes.

Duration of Extraction

12.25 The duration of quarrying activities at the site will largely be dictated by the rate at which the limestone reserve is extracted from the site, which is affected by prevailing economic climate and related construction industry output.

12.26 Calculation of extraction rates and duration is therefore not an exact science. A planning permission duration of 25 years is therefore sought for the extraction and processing period and a further 2 years to complete final restoration of the site.

Baseline Conditions

Study Area

12.27 The Study Area on which the LVIA focuses is set out in Figure 12.1, extending to include all areas within which significant landscape and visual effects (as defined by EIA Regulations) are considered most likely to occur. The boundary which defines the Study Area was selected on a realistic and pragmatic basis, based on a desk top study, which included an examination of aerial photography and ordnance survey mapping, followed by a site visit to establish the potential visibility of the site from the surrounding landscape.

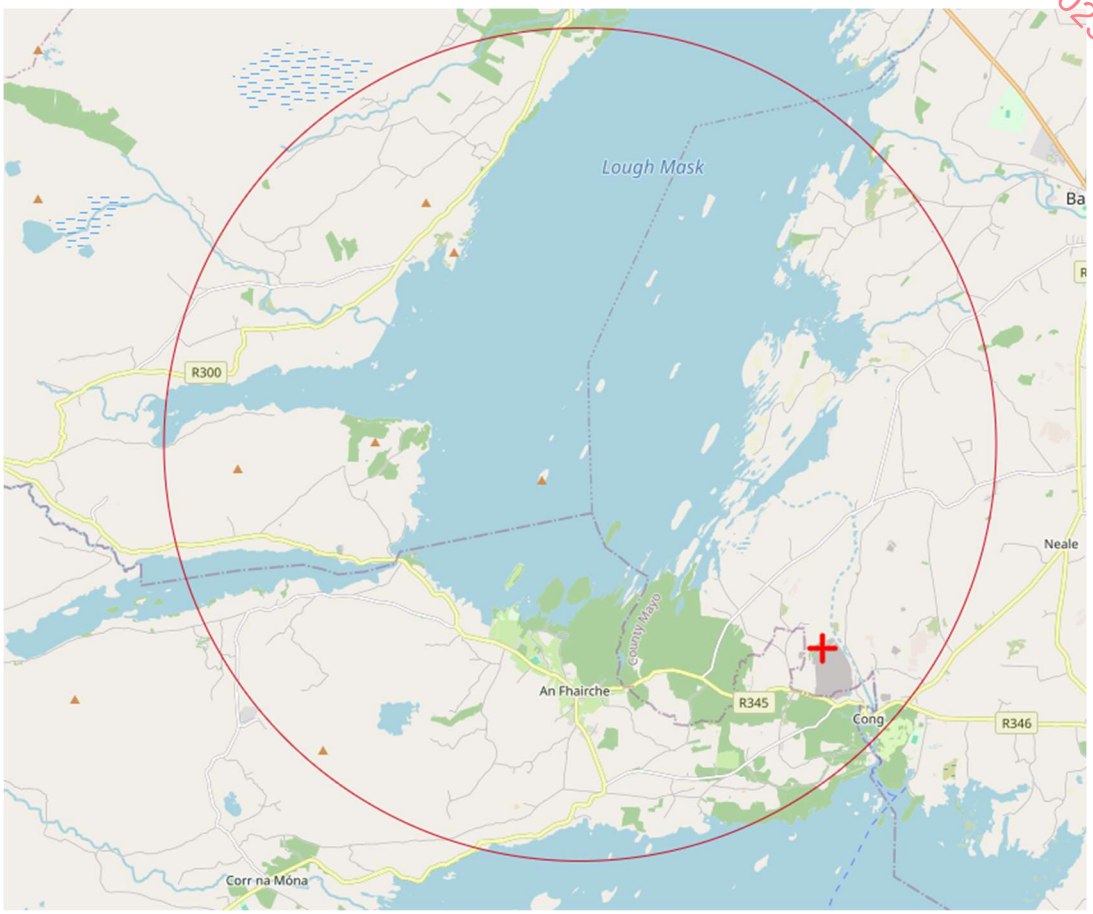


Figure 121: Study Area

Landscape Baseline

12.28 The landscape baseline represents the existing landscape context and is the scenario against which any changes to the landscape context brought about by the proposed development will be assessed in terms of direct physical impacts on landform and land cover and also impacts on prevailing landscape character.

12.29 A description of the landscape context of the site and surrounding area is provided below covering landscape and planning policy, landform and drainage, vegetation and land use, settlement patterns, transport routes and public amenities and facilities. 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. Of relevance to this assessment is the inclement weather (common in this region) which can affect visibility.

Landscape Appraisal of County Mayo

12.30 The Landscape Assessment for County Mayo divides the county into Landscape Character Units which are described in terms of their defining landscape characteristics such as land-use, vegetation, elevation and topography. Within each Character Unit, the landscape broadly conforms to the prescribed character, therein providing a basis to set policies for each Character Unit.

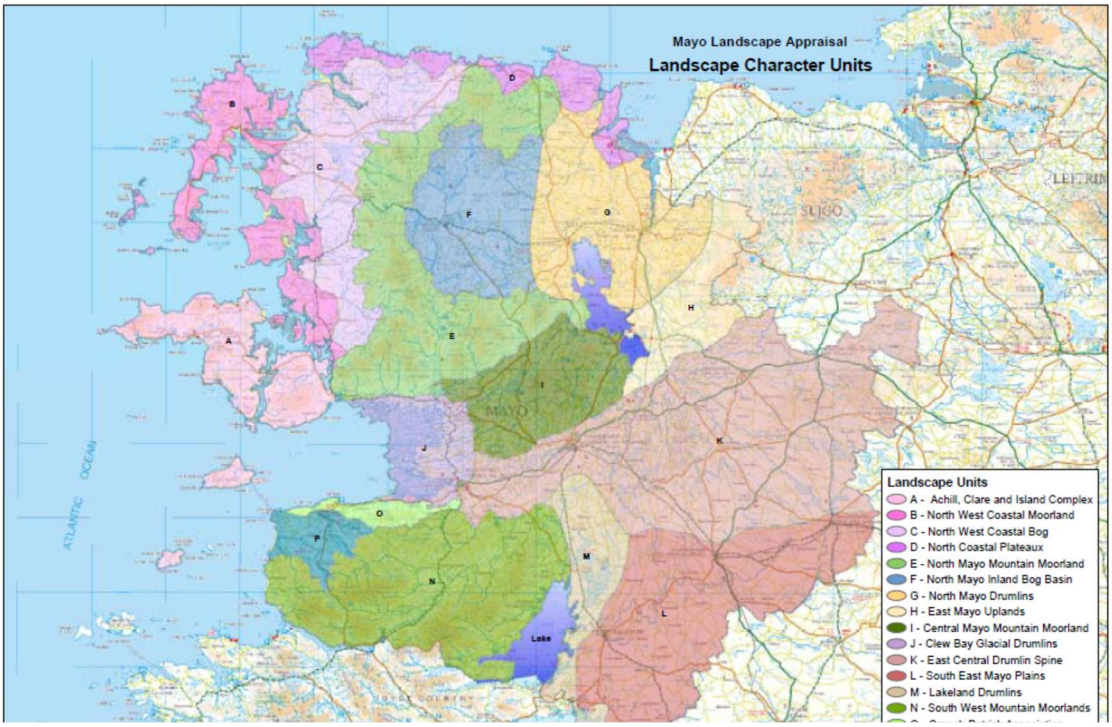


Figure 122: Landscape Character Units of Co. Mayo

12.31 This application site falls within Area M: Lakeland Drumlins. The area is described as follows:

> *This is an area of low-lying drumlins and wetland associated with Lough's Mask, Carra, and Corrib. There is a mixture of wetland land cover around the lakeshores and patches of forestry and moorland to the north and east. A dramatic backdrop of the Partry Mountains falling steeply to the shores of Lough mask occurs to the west. The eastern parts of this unit appear similar to the pastoral landscape of the unit to the east, however, the overriding feature is the proximately and influence of the Loughs.*
>
> *Pasturelands are dominant on the landscape with livestock rearing as the main land use in the area. However, significant areas of conifer forests and some mixed forests can also be found. On the east shores of Lough Mask, moors and heathlands reveal large areas of unused land.*

12.32 The Critical Landscape Factors of the Landscape Character Unit are as follows:

> *<u>Undulating topography</u> - Mildly undulating topography as represented in this character unit by low drumlins, has the ability to both shelter and absorb the visual impact of development. Firstly, the physical shielding of a built form within the lee*

of hill where it does not break the skyline renders it visually unobtrusive and reflective of landscape scale. Secondly, the dynamic and complex nature of undulating country provides fore, middle, and distant ground to a vista that helps to provide a realistic scale and visual containment not available in open country.

Shelter Vegetation - In a similar manner to undulating topography, shelter vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms. It can provide a natural visual barrier and also adds to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

Prominent Ridge Lines - These occur as either primary ridgelines (visible only against the sky from any prospect) or secondary ridgelines (visible at least from some prospects below a distant primary ridge line). There are major primary ridgelines looming over the western boundary of this character unit, associated with the Partry Mountains. Ridge lines perform the important roles of providing an area with its identity, acting as dominant landscape focal points, and defining the extent of visual catchments. As with other natural linear features such as shorelines it is important that development does not interrupt the integrity of primary ridgelines. Due to the dominating influence of ridgelines, in instances where penetration does occur, development can appear insubordinate to the landscape in which it sits.

Localised Lake Vistas - This character unit envelopes large parts of Loughs Cara, Mask and Corrib, around the shores of which, several significant roads pass. Due to the low-lying nature of lakeland environments such as this, low prospect vistas are present from the roads of the Loughs and their shores. The main concern for natural linear features such as lakeshores, coastlines, and ridgelines is to avoid penetration by development that will interrupt and reduce the integrity of such elements. Given the low viewing points around the loughs, visual intrusion by development is likely to be enhanced.

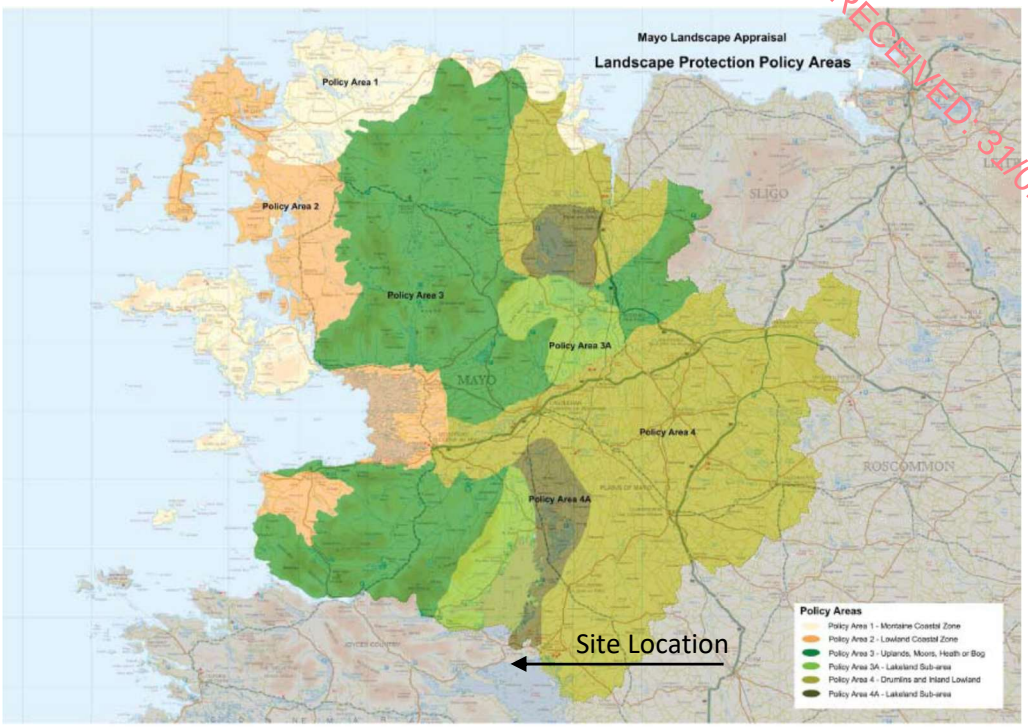


Figure 12-3: Landscape Protection Policy Areas

12.33 The site is located in *Policy Area 4A: Lakeland Sub Area.* This distinctive area of the County comprises the landscapes of policy areas 3 and 4, which bound Lough Mask. It bounds often steep slopes and prominent ridge lines with limited shelter vegetation to the west and undulating areas of pasture, woodland and forest with underlying glacial drumlins to the east.

Policy 25

Ensure all new development utilises the existing infrastructure of the policy area in a manner, which can be best visually absorbed.

Policy 26

Ensure development will not take place on steep slopes, which will have a strong visual impact on the surrounding landscapes, when viewed from areas of the public realm

12.34 One designated Scenic Route is located within the vicinity of the site:

12.35 Local road from Maumtrasna to Cong (south of Lough Mask).

Figure 124: Scenic Routes and Views

12.36 The scenic views within the immediate vicinity of the application site, however there are a number of scenic views on the western side of Lough Mask, the closest of which is approximately 7.5km from the application site.

12.37 Policy 3.6(b) sets out the policy with regard to Scenic Routes, it prescribes "scenic routes indicate public roads from which views and prospects of areas of natural beauty and interest can be enjoyed. Sightseeing visitors are more likely to be concentrated along these routes. The onus should be on the applicant when applying for permission to develop in the environs of a scenic route, to demonstrate that there will be no obstruction or degradation of the views toward visually vulnerable features nor significant alterations to the appearance or character of sensitive areas".

12.38 The Development Impact - Landscape Sensitivity Matrix set out in the Landscape Appraisal for County Mayo indicates that for this type of development in this location there is a medium development Impact:

> *Medium - "medium potential to create adverse Impacts on existing landscape character. Such developments are likely to be clearly discernible and distinctive, however with careful siting and good design, the significance and extent of impacts can be minimised to an acceptable level".*

Mayo County Development Plan 2022 - 2028

12.39 The Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028 includes a number of policies that aim to protect the landscape and visual assets of the county. The following are of relevance to the proposed development subject to this planning application:

Landscape Policy

NEP 14 *To protect, enhance and contribute to the physical, visual and scenic character of County Mayo and to preserve its unique landscape character.*

NEO 25 *To consider applications for development, along Mayo's' Scenic routes, that can demonstrate a clear need to locate in the area concerned, whilst ensuring that it:*

- *Does not impinge in any significant way on the character, integrity and distinctiveness of the area.*
- *Meets high standards in siting and design.*
- *Contributes to and enhances local landscape character.*
- *Satisfies all other criteria, with regard to, inter alia, servicing, public safety and environmental considerations.*

Rural housing applications along Scenic Routes must comply with the requirements set out in Objective RHO 3 (Chapter 3).

NEO 26 *To consider applications for development, within Mayo's Coastal Areas and Lakeshores and within areas along scenic routes with designated scenic views, that can demonstrate a long-standing social link to the area concerned, whilst ensuring that it:*

- *Does not impinge in any significant way on the character, integrity and distinctiveness of the area.*
- *Cannot be considered at an alternative location.*
- *Meets high standards in siting and design.*
- *Contributes to and enhances local landscape character.*
- *Satisfies all other criteria, with regard to, inter alia, servicing, public safety and environmental considerations.*

Rural housing applications along Coastal Areas and Lakeshores must comply with the requirements set out in Objective RHO 4 (Chapter 3).

NEO 27 *To ensure all development proposals are consistent with the Landscape Appraisal of County Mayo and the associated Landscape Sensitivity Matrix and future editions thereof.*

NEO 28 *To review the Landscape Appraisal for Mayo and update this plan, as appropriate, following publication of the statutory guidelines for Planning Authorities on Local Landscape Character Assessments, as detailed in the National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025 and ensure consistency with the provisions of RPO 4.16 and RPO 5.2(b) of the RSES, 2020-2032.*

NEO 29 *Require a Landscape/Visual Impact Assessment to accompany significant proposals, located within or adjacent to sensitive landscapes, where appropriate.*

12.40 A number of the Biodiversity, Designated and Non-Designated Sites Objectives are also of relevance to the proposed development subject to this planning application:

NEO4: *To protect and enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity in County Mayo, including woodlands, trees, hedgerows, semi-natural grasslands, rivers, streams, natural springs, wetlands, stonewalls, geological and geo-morphological systems, other landscape features and associated wildlife, where these form part of the ecological network.*

NEO 5: *To actively increase awareness of the importance of the natural heritage of the county and to promote education, knowledge and pride in our natural heritage.*

NEO 9: *Recognise the importance, in terms of their natural heritage and biodiversity, of woodlands, tree lines, hedgerows, stonewalls, watercourses and associated riparian vegetation and the role they play in supporting bat populations and where possible developments will be encouraged to retain such features*

County Galway Landscape Character Assessment

12.41 The application site is not located in County Galway, however the existing access to the overall quarry site and part of the study area are. A landscape appraisal of County Galway is set out in Appendix 4 (Landscape Character Assessment) – of the Galway County Development Plan 2022 – 2028. The Landscape Character Appraisal describes the county in terms of the landscape character types present and divides the county into Landscape Regions and Landscape Units with the visual sensitivity of these units set out. The Landscape Character Assessment also identifies a number of protected views and scenic routes within the County.

12.42 The access to the overall quarry site is located in West Galway which is described as:

The West Galway Region is a zone that is mostly underlain by bolder, harder geology that gives rise to large-scale rugged, complex landscapes of mountains, lakes, bogs, islands and coastal inlets.

12.43 The access to the overall quarry site is located in *Lake Environs Landscape* Landscape Character Type (Type 4), which is described as:

Lough Corrib is the second-biggest lake on the island of Ireland (after Lough Neagh). It can be divided into very two distinct parts; a shallow basin underlain by carboniferous limestone in the south, and a deeper basin to the north underlain by more acidic granite, schists and sandstones. The uplands to the west of the lake include the rolling, bog covered granite hills of south Conamara, the bare Quartzite peaks of the Maumturk mountains and the high plateau of the Maumtrasna Mountains. Sheep grazing and forestry are the main land uses in these areas. In sharp contrast, the low-lying limestone plain to the east of the Lough Corrib with its large, walled fields, is used primarily for the more intensive rearing of sheep and cattle. Drumlins of glacial origin give rise to the numerous smaller, mostly wooded islands for which the lake is famous. The lake is highly prized as recreational fishery resource and is also the focus of many viewing areas and scenic drives.

12.44 The Character Types are divided into Landscape Character Type Units, the access to the overall quarry site is located in 4a: Upper Corrib Environs, which is described as:

> *Many round-backed, mostly wooded islands throughout lake. Majority of shore is tree-fringed. The hinterlands are a mix of small farms, woodland and bog.*

12.45 This landscape has been assigned a sensitivity rating of "iconic" - Unique landscape with high sensitivity to change. The Landscape Character Assessment however notes: individual projects in any landscape area, notwithstanding its dominant sensitivity rating, may have greater or lesser impacts on the visual quality and character of the landscape depending on the details of the project design and the specific characteristics of the site and its context.

12.46 52 *Protected Views* are set out in Section 6 of the Landscape Character Assessment and are identified on map 08. Viewpoint 22: Droichead an tSnamha is located 7.7km to the west of the application site. The site is however not visible from the viewpoint due to topography the intervening Clonbur Wood, which includes tracts of *Ancient and Long Established Woodland (NPWS).* This designated viewpoint has not therefore been selected as a viewpoint for assessment in this LVIA, however alternative views along the western shore of Lough Mask were selected to demonstrate the potential effects of the proposed development (Viewpoint 10 & 11).

12.47 8 *Scenic Routes* are set out in Section 7 of the Landscape Character Assessment. The nearest scenic route is the Lough Corrib Scenic Route, however the site is not visible from this route, which at its nearest point is situated 4.25km west of the site. Alternative views along the western shore of Lough Mask and higher elevations north of Lough Corrib were selected to demonstrate the potential effects of the proposed development (Viewpoint 9, 10 & 11).

County Galway Development Plan 2022 - 2028

12.48 The following policies of the Galway County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 are of relevance to the application:

> ***LCM 1: Preservation of Landscape Character***
>
> *Preserve and enhance the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation and enhancement, where possible of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest.*
>
> ***LCM 2: Landscape Sensitivity Classification***
>
> *The Planning Authority shall have regard to the landscape sensitivity classification of sites in the consideration of any significant development proposals and, where necessary, require a Landscape/Visual Impact Assessment to accompany such proposals. This shall be balanced against the need to develop key strategic infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan.*
>
> ***LCM 3: Landscape Sensitivity Ratings***
>
> *Consideration of landscape sensitivity ratings shall be an important factor in determining development uses in areas of the County. In areas of high landscape*

sensitivity, the design and the choice of location of proposed development in the landscape will also be critical considerations.

LCM 5: Prospecting and Mining

It is a policy objective of the Planning Authority to give careful consideration in exceptional circumstances for prospecting or mining for gold, silver or base metals in landscapes class 3 or 4.

Landform and Drainage

12.49 The site comprises 19ha of an active quarry (overall quarry site) used for the extraction and processing of limestone. The site supports a range of sub-habitat types created through quarrying operations or remnant patches of habitat that have not yet been stripped. The site and the overall quarry site comprise the following three areas:

Area A: This southern section of the overall quarry site extends to an area of 43.47 hectares (Plan Ref File No. Q18). This existing working area benefits from a pre-1963 authorisation with conditions imposed following registration under Section 261 of the Planning and Development Act.

Area B: This section of the overall quarry site consists of an area of 10.58 hectares which has been authorised by way of a substitute consent application (Reference PL 16.SU0132) and a 37L application (Reference QD 16.QD0009) granted by An Bord Pleanála. Permission granted for the extraction of material to 5 mOD.

Area C: This section of the overall quarry site consists of an area of 8.4ha which has been authorised under a Section 34 Application (Plan Ref. File No. 20/77/ ABP Ref: ABP-308748-20) in 2019. Permission provided for the extraction of material to 5 mOD.

12.50 It is important to note that as the deepening of the existing quarry will not result in any loss of habitat within the application site over and above that has already been consented through existing planning permissions, the baseline for assessment of changes to landform takes existing consents into consideration.

12.51 The site is situated between the 20m and 30m contour lines within an area that is gently undulating, comprising low hills and valleys that form a transition between the higher ground to the west associated with The Twelve Pins, Party and Maumturk mountains and the lakeland drumlins to the east. The existing quarry void has faces rising up to a height of 20m from a floor level of 5m above ordnance datum (mOD).

12.52 Highpoints in the immediate vicinity of the site comprise Droingin Lair (53m above Ordnance Datum (OD)) immediately west of the application site and Drumsheel Lower (52m above OD) north-east of the site. Further west and north-west, the land continues to rise towards the Partry Mountains, which includes highpoints over 600m above OD, including Maumtrasna (673m above OD) and Devilsmother (645m above OD). The closest highpoint over 200m is located 8.8km to the west at Benlevy.

12.53 Lower ground is associated with the shores of Lough Mask 2.5km to the north, and Lough Corrib 1.5km to the south. The shoreline of Lough Mask is situated at approximately 16m above OD while Lough Corrib is broadly at 6m above OD. The two lakes are connected by the Cong Canal, which runs in a north to south direction along the eastern boundary of the overall quarry site. The canal was built over a period of five years by Benjamin Guinness in the 1850s. It was built to allow steamer traffic to travel from Galway port through to Lough Mask and on

to Lough Carra. Due to the porous nature of the limestone, the Canal proved unable to retain water and is commonly known as the "Dry Canal". The water level in the canal can vary during the year but is usually dry during the summer months. Water from the overall quarry site is discharged under licence (Ref: W391/05 R1) to the Cong Canal at a location along the south eastern boundary of the main quarry.

12.54 The site is situated within the "Cong-Robe" Groundwater Body (GWB) (IE_WE_G_0019). The groundwater flow paths are understood to be generally "*towards the River Clare and L. Corrib, but the highly karstified nature of the bedrock means that locally groundwater flow directions can be highly variable*."

Vegetation and Landuse

12.55 The site comprises 19ha of an existing limestone quarry which has a history of extraction dating back to pre 1963. The historic 25 inch, 6 inch and Cassini 6 inch maps all include reference to "Royal Rock" and a lime kiln situated immediately to the west of the application site.

12.56 The surrounding landscape is rural in character, consisting of small field systems interwoven with small tracts of woodland or scrub and patches of outcropping rock. Field sizes range from small to medium and the field pattern is typically linear with boundaries running perpendicular to the local road network, frequently resulting in rectangular shaped fields.

12.57 Field boundaries comprise hedgerows and stonewalls or a mix of both. Some internal hedgerows appear to have been replaced by post and wire fencing, however the majority of roadside hedgerows remain intact. Agricultural use primarily comprises pasture with few examples of other farming types observed.

12.58 There are large areas of woodland in the vicinity of the application site, most notably Cong Woods, which are situated immediately to the south of the R345 and which were formerly part of the grounds of Ashford Estate. The woods are now state owned and managed by Coillte, with several publicly accessible woodland walks. Ashford Castle was built in 1228 by the Anglo-Normans and has now been turned into a five star hotel, located approximately 1.8km to the south of the site.

12.59 Inland Fisheries Ireland maintains a salmon hatchery 300 meters downstream of the quarry. The fish hatchery was established to supplement salmon stocks in the Corrib catchment area. There are two other quarries located in the vicinity of the site with one located approximately 0.9km to east and another located 1.9km to the northeast. Both quarries are in the region of 1.5 hectares in area and are subject to rock extraction and processing on a small-scale basis. The nearest large scale quarry is Colemans Quarries is located approximately 10km east of the site.

12.60 The application site itself presently comprises a broadly triangular shaped site with an area of 19 ha situated within the overall quarry site of 62.45 ha. The overall quarry site is defined by a mix of quarry related uses, including the primary excavation area, processing area, concrete batching plant, asphalt pant and lime plant as well as stockpile storage areas. The boundaries of the overall quarry site are marked by a mix of screening berms and hedgerows with secure fencing in situ.

Centres of Population and Houses

12.61 Residences within the general area typically consist of one-off rural houses and ribbon development along the local road network. The nearest properties to the site comprise two

dwellings situated to the east in the townland of Drumsheel Upper which are within approximately 100m of the site. There are approximately 51 dwellings within 500m of the site.

12.62 Larger centres of population comprise the village of Cong, which is situated approximately 250m south of the overall quarry site and Clonbur, which is situated approximately 4km west of the site. Further afield, Ballinrobe is situated approximately 10km north-east, while Headford is situated 15km south-east and Galway City is approximately 32km south-east of the site (Figure 5.1).

Transport routes

12.63 The site is located between three public roads – the L5657 is to the east of the site, an unnamed local road is to the west of the site and the R345 regional road is located to the south of the site. Access to the overall quarry site is provided directly from the R345. Access to the site is via an internal haul road that can be accessed from the existing operating quarry entrance onto the R345. The existing entrance is an uncontrolled direct access with a width of approximately 7.5m.

12.64 In the vicinity of the site access, the R345 comprises a marked single carriage road with a 60km/hr speed limit. The R345 has an approximate carriageway width of 6.3m, with a partial hard strip and little to no verge in the vicinity of the quarry entrance. The carriageway width (wall to wall) is approximately 9.0m in the vicinity of the quarry entrance.

12.65 Existing traffic along the R345 comprises existing quarry traffic in addition to traffic associated with residential dwellings, agricultural uses, tourists and people travelling to access services in Cong and Clonbur.

Public Amenities and Facilities

12.66 Counties Mayo and Galway have extensive networks of trails which provide a recreational resource for both visitors and locals. Much of the hiking trails are focused on the west of both counties, including The Western Way and Connemara National Park, however the following trails and loop walks are noted in the study area.

- Coillte Trails: Cong Nature Trail.
- Coillte Trails: Pigeon Hole Loop.
- Coillte Trails: Cong/ Clonbur Trail.
- Coillte Trails: Clonbur Village Loop.
- Coillte Trails: Ballykine Loop.
- Coillte Trails: Big Island Loop.
- Coillte Trails: Ardnageeha Loop.
- Fáilte Ireland Activity Listings 2017: Mount Gable Walk.
- Looped Walks: Seanbothar.
- Looped Walks: Cong Loops.

12.67 The Failte Ireland *Visitors to Attractions Dashboard* provides an overview of visitor numbers to various attractions throughout the country. There is one attraction within the study area; The Quiet Man Museum in Cong, which attracted 4,000 visitors. Other tourist attractions within the study area include (but not limited to):

- Lough Corrib – Angling.

- Lough Mask – Angling.
- Ashford Castle.
- Cong Augustinian Abbey.
- Kelly's Cave.
- Ireland's School Of Falconry.
- Ashford Equestrian Centre.
- Petersburg Outdoor Education Centre.
- Seanbothar.

12.68 Other recreational and community facilities and amenities are available in the villages of Cong (250m south of the overall quarry site) and Clonbur (4km west of the site). These include GAA clubs (The Neale GAA Club), shops, community hall and churches. Galway City is approximately 32km south of the site.

Nature Conservation Designations

12.69 The site is not located within any designated European sites, however the following designated sites are noted in the vicinity of the application site.

- Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC – 1.09km.
- Lough Corrib SAC – 1.71km.
- Lough Corrib SPA – 1.71km
- Ballymaglancy Cave, Cong SAC – 2.6km.
- Kildun Souterrain SAC – 4km.
- Clyard Kettle-holes SAC – 6.5km.
- Mocorha Lough SAC – 8.14km.
- Cloughmoyne SAC – 9.4km.
- Shrule Turlough SAC – 10.13km.

12.70 There are 13 NHA's and pNHA's within approximately 15km of the site:

- Lough Carra/Mask Complex pNHA.
- Lough Corrib pNHA.
- Ballymaglancy Cave, Cong pNHA.
- Clyard Kettle-Holes pNHA.
- Mocorha Lough pNHA.
- Cloughmoyne pNHA.
- Shrule Turlough pNHA.
- Maumtrasna Mountain Complex pNHA.
- Skealoghan Turlough pNHA.
- Rostaff Turlough pNHA.

- Oughterard National School pNHA.
- Ardkill Turlough pNHA.
- Kilglassan/Caheravoostia Turlough Complex pNHA.

Archaeological Sites

12.71 An examination of the Record of Monuments and Places for County Mayo and County Galway indicated that there are no Recorded Monuments located within the application site, including the site access. However the area surrounding the site includes the following records:

- MA120-038 : Leacht cuimhne : CREGAREE
- GA027-029: Forge : CREIG AN RÍ
- MA120-039: Enclosure : DRUMSHEEL UPPER
- MA120-041002: Inscribed stone : DRUMSHEEL UPPER
- MA120-072: Megalithic structure : DRUMSHEEL UPPER
- MA120-024002: Building : AGHALAHARD
- MA120-024 : Castle - tower house : AGHALAHARD
- MA120-024001: Bawn : AGHALAHARD
- MA120-038 : Leacht cuimhne : CREGAREE
- MA120-053007: Building : CONG SOUTH
- MA120-053003: Castle - unclassified : CONG SOUTH
- MA120-053010: Graveyard : CONG SOUTH
- 31216008: building misc
- MA120-053: Historic town : CONG NORTH,CONG SOUTH
- MA120-053004: Bullaun stone : CONG SOUTH
- MA120-053005: Inscribed stone : CONG SOUTH

Visual Baseline

Identification of Viewpoints

12.72 The visual baseline identifies locations where people engaged in particular activities or resident in particular settings will be afforded potential views of the proposed development and which may impact on their visual amenity. Only those parts of the receiving environment that potentially afford views of the proposed development are of concern to this section of the assessment, this is known as the Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI). The extent of the ZVI is determined primarily by the topography of the area, buildings, woodlands, berms, hedges or other local features that obscure visibility from the main roads, local viewpoints/landmarks, settlement, etc

12.73 An initial site visit was undertaken to refine the list of viewpoints based on the ZVI and informed by previous work that had been undertaken at the site, including the 2019 EIAR. The site visit was undertaken on 11 June 2024. A subsequent site visit was undertaken in

September 2024 from which images were selected to illustrate the potential visual effect of the development.

12.74 A series of representative viewpoints were selected within the ZVI to illustrate typical views towards the existing and proposed development. Due to the location of the site within a landscape with a high degree of visual enclosure on a local scale, the majority of viewpoints selected occur within a 1km radius of the site, however a number of additional viewpoints were selected to the west to assess the potential effect from scenic routes, scenic views and higher ground to the west . Figure 12-4 illustrates the location of the selected viewpoints.

12.75 In accordance with Landscape Institute and IEMA 2013, the viewpoints selected are from publicly accessible areas. It is acknowledged that there is potential further visibility of the application site from agricultural land and private residential gardens in the immediate vicinity of the site, however as these are not publicly accessible, viewpoints close to those locations were selected wherever possible.

Figure 12-4: Viewpoint Locations

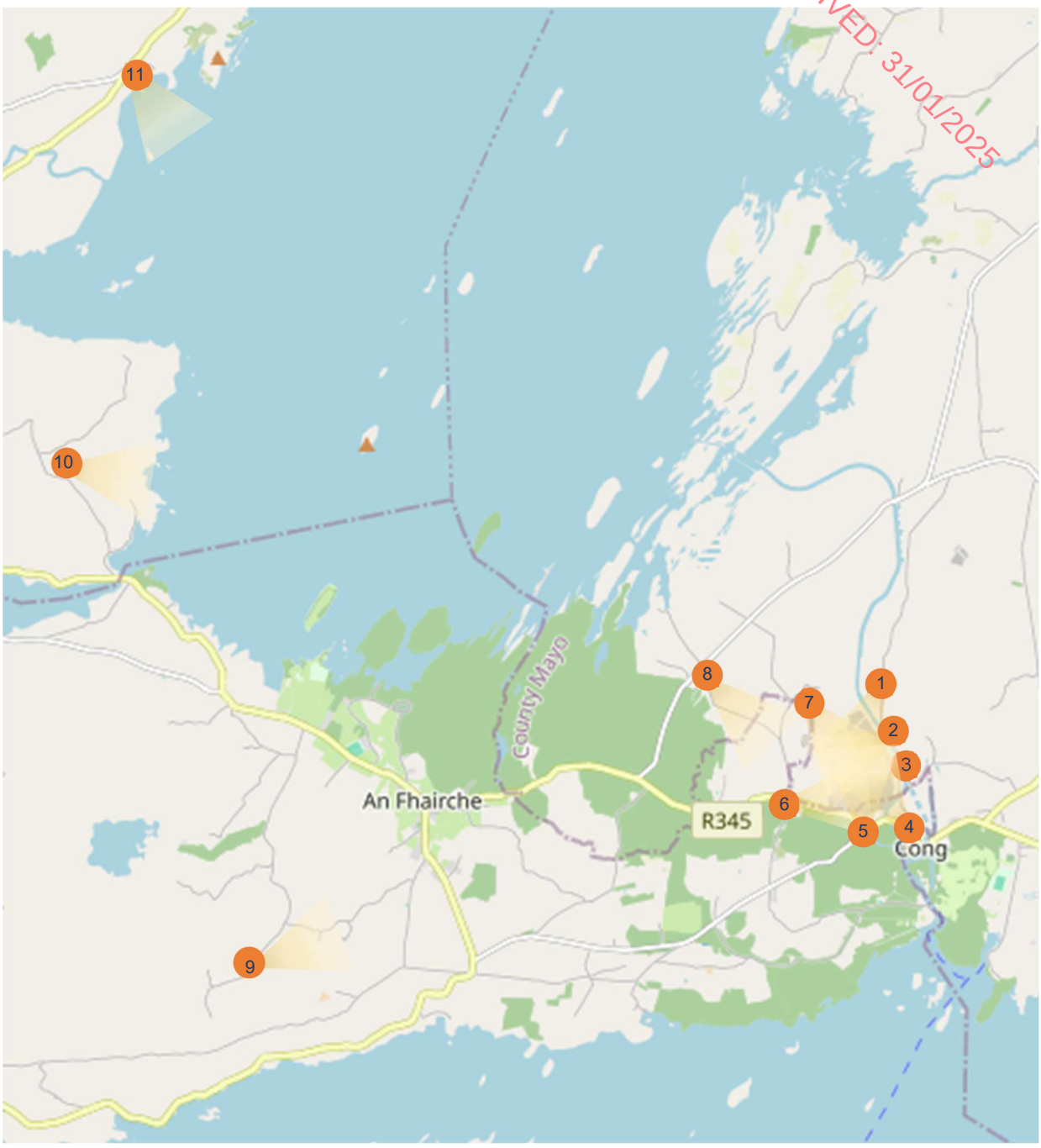


Table 12-8: Description of Viewpoint Locations.

VRP No.	Location	Direction of view
VP1	Unnamed local road, north-east of site	West
VP2	Unnamed local road, east of site	West
VP3	Unnamed local road, east of site	West
VP4	R345 at bridge on Cong Canal	North-east
VP5	R345 at site access	North
VP6	R345 at junction with local road, west of the site	East
VP7	Unnamed local road, north-west of site	South-east
VP8	L1613 north-west of site	South-east
VP9	Gortnarup, south-west of site	North-east
VP10	Fox Hill, north-west of site	South-east
VP11	R300 at Trean	South-east

Assessment of Potential Effects

Assessment of Potential Landscape Effects

Sensitivity of Landscape to Change

Landscape Elements

12.76 The site comprises 19ha of an existing limestone quarry that has been present in part in this location since pre-1963. As a consequence the landscape elements present on the site reflect that use and comprise extraction areas, processing areas and material storage areas. The site also includes a number of existing screening berms and hedgerows, which were installed with the objective of providing visual and acoustic screening for the existing site.

12.77 The landscape elements do not make a significant contribution to the overall aesthetic of this part of County Mayo or County Galway, rather their primary value is associated with their function i.e. screening of extraction works.

Landscape Character

12.78 The site is contained within an attractive landscape setting, for which the Landscape Appraisal of County Mayo has assigned a "medium" sensitivity in respect of quarrying developments. It notes that quarrying/extraction has "*medium potential to create adverse impacts on the existing landscape character. Such developments are likely to be clearly discernible and distinctive, however with careful siting and good design, the significance and extent of impacts can be minimised to an acceptable level*".

12.79 The R345 to the south-west of the site is identified as a Scenic Route between the villages of Cong and Clonbur. The existing quarry is screened from public view from the R345 due to a combination of the existing stone boundary wall, screening berms and woodland vegetation.

12.80 Policy Area 4, within which the site lies is however identified as the area within the lowest sensitivity rating for quarrying/extraction, with all other policies areas having a medium-high or high sensitivity rating. These more sensitive areas are more vulnerable to change and

cannot comfortably accommodate this type of development without more significant landscape effects.

On balance of the factors outlined above, the sensitivity of the site, including the individual elements and the overall landscape character is deemed to be **medium**.

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.

Magnitude of Landscape Effects

Landscape Elements

12.81 The proposed development will not substantially alter the landscape elements that are present on the site. Notably, all existing screening berms and hedgerows will be retained and reinforced where necessary.

12.82 The limestone will be extracted from the site on a phased basis and as a consequence the excavation area will be altered gradually over time, with the entire application site being deepened over the 25 year period proposed. The extent of this effect of this would be very localised - within the site boundaries and would not be easily discernible from beyond the site.

12.83 In addition to the physical disturbance of the landform and land cover, the proposed development would effectively result in the delay in the restoration of the site, which is proposed to include the introduction of a lake within the quarry void, coupled with additional planting.

Landscape Character

12.84 The proposed development would not result in the introduction of new elements into the landscape, nor would it alter the perception of the character of the landscape in this area as a predominately agricultural and wooded landscape. Any changes that would occur would be on a very local level and broadly only perceived from within the site boundaries.

12.85 The main visible effect of the proposed development on landscape character would be as a consequence of vehicles entering and exiting the quarry access for an additional 25 years. The effect of this will be very localised – within the site boundaries and on the R345 at the site access.

12.86 In terms of duration, the operational stage landscape effects will be long term in accordance with EPA definitions.

12.87 On balance of the factors outlined above, the magnitude of landscape impact during the operational phase is deemed to be **Negligible**.

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.

12.88 With reference to the significance matrix (Table 12-3) above, the **medium** landscape sensitivity judgement attributed to the landscape coupled with a **negligible** magnitude of

landscape impact, it is considered to result in an **imperceptible** significance of landscape impact.

12.89 Table 12-9 provides a summary description of the likely landscape effects based on table 3.4 of EPA (2022).

Table 12-9: Assessment Summary based on EPA 2022

Description of Effect	Evaluation	Comment
Quality	Negative	Whilst an evaluation of "negative" has been assigned to the assessment, it should be noted that as the site is not a greenfield site, but rather has an association with quarrying since pre-1963, the landscape effects are minimal.
Extent	Local	The effect on landscape elements and character is restricted to within or immediately adjoining the site boundary. The most notable change beyond the site would comprise the continued activity at the quarry access.
Probability	Likely	The effects described above can reasonably be expected to occur.
Duration	Long-term	The projected life of the quarry is 25 years.
Frequency	Daily	The quarry will operate Monday – Saturday.
Significance	Not significant	The site will continue to appear as a limestone quarry. All existing screening berms and hedgerows will be retained. Activity at the access will continue. These changes will be noticeable though without significant consequences.

Assessment of Potential Visual Effects

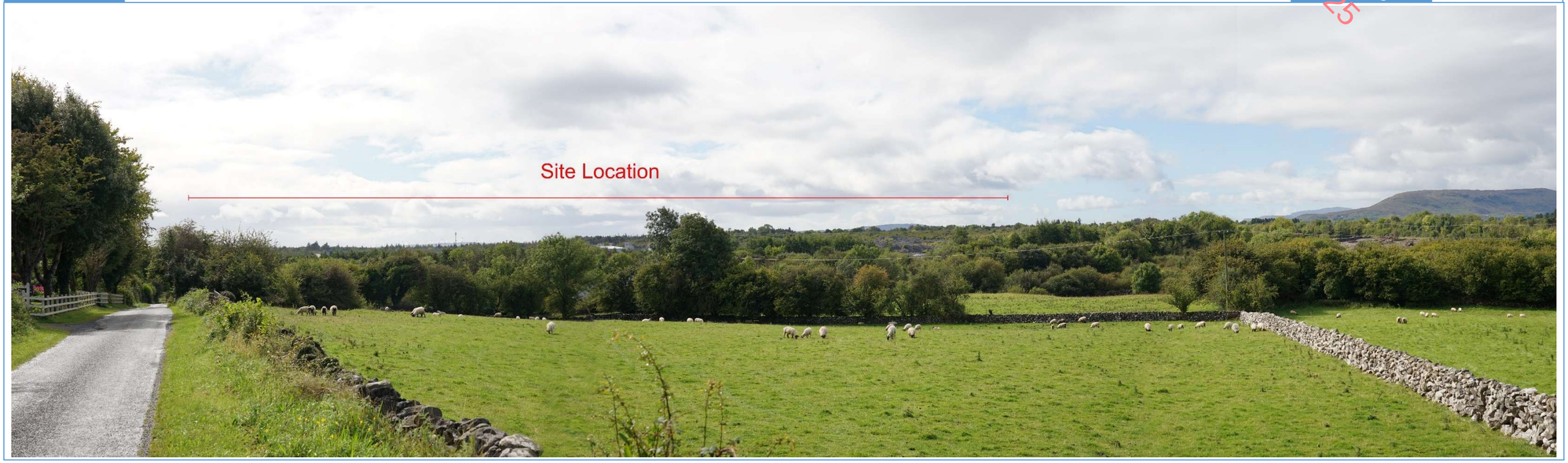
12.90 Table 12-10 below provides a detailed assessment of the visual effect of the proposed development, including clarification on the sensitivity and magnitude ratings and correspondingly the significance of the effects for each of the viewpoints selected and identified in Figure 12-4 above.

12.91 The extent to which the development is likely to result in a negative visual intrusion is determined by a number of factors:

- The extent of the proposed development, what is the site size.
- The contrast in colour between the faces of the limestone quarry in comparison to the surrounding land uses.
- The scale of buildings or plant that may appear incongruous due to their scale or colour.
- The level of activity at the site, is there night time activity and associated lighting.
- Is there likely to be dust deposition that would be notable along public roads.

Table 12-10: Description of Viewpoint Locations.

VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP1 Unnamed local road, north-east of site	**High –** Local road used by residents and tourists	**Negligible -** The existing quarry is not easily discernible as it is largely screened from the road by intervening vegetation, including the existing vegetated screening berm which is in situ along the eastern boundary of the overall quarry site. There are glimpses of some of the higher elements of the existing operation, including conveyors, silos and some overburden storage, however these do not appear distinctive in this viewpoint and remain unaltered by the proposed development. There was no evidence of dust deposition along the road at the time of the site visit. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required

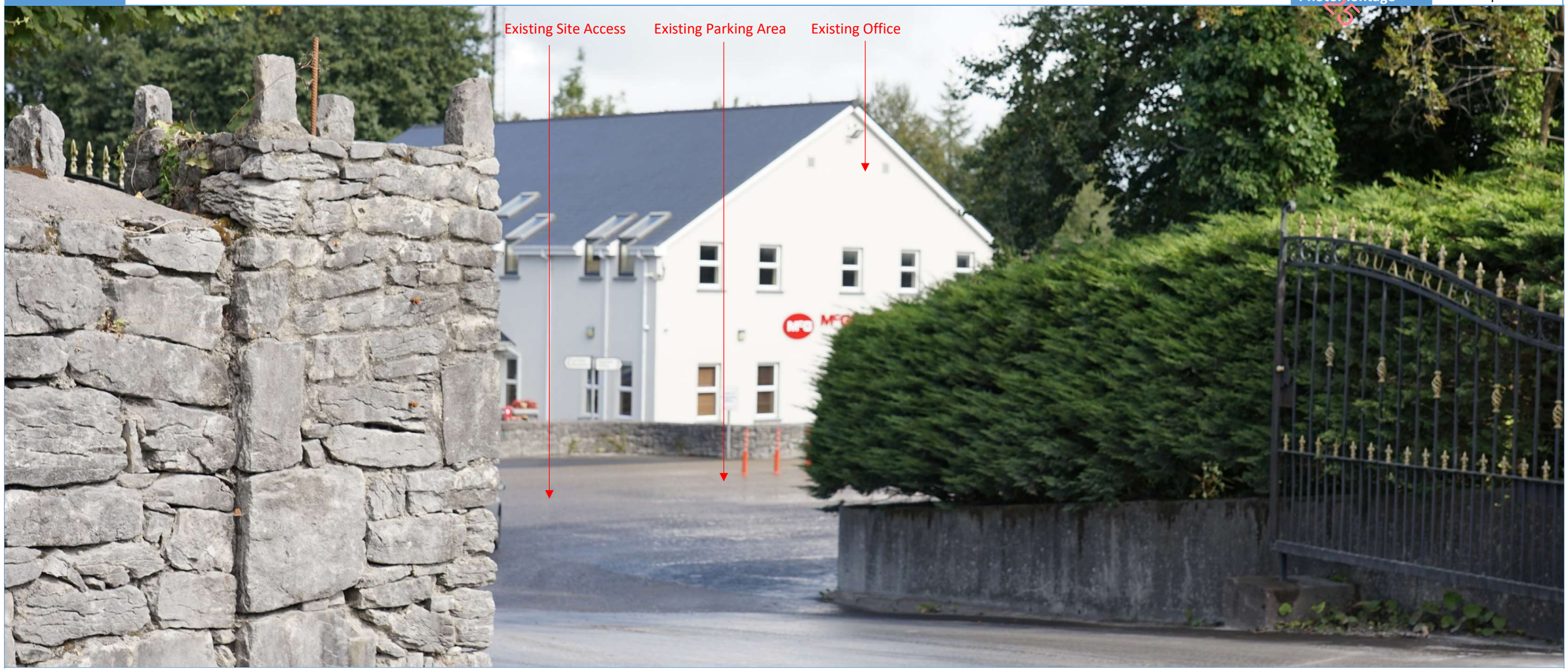


VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP2 Unnamed local road, east of site	**High –** Local road used by residents and tourists	**Negligible -** The existing quarry is not visible as is screened from the road by intervening vegetation, including the existing vegetated screening berm which is in situ along the eastern boundary of the site and the vegetation that aligns the Cong Canal. There was no evidence of dust deposition along the road at the time of the site visit. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to an **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required

VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP3 Unnamed local road, east of site	**High –** Local road used by residents and tourists	**Negligible -** The existing quarry is not visible as is screened from the road by intervening vegetation, including the existing vegetated screening berm which is in situ along the eastern boundary of the site. oundary fencing and an internal track are visible, however they do not appear incongruous or intrusive in this view. There was no evidence of dust deposition along the road at the time of the site visit. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required

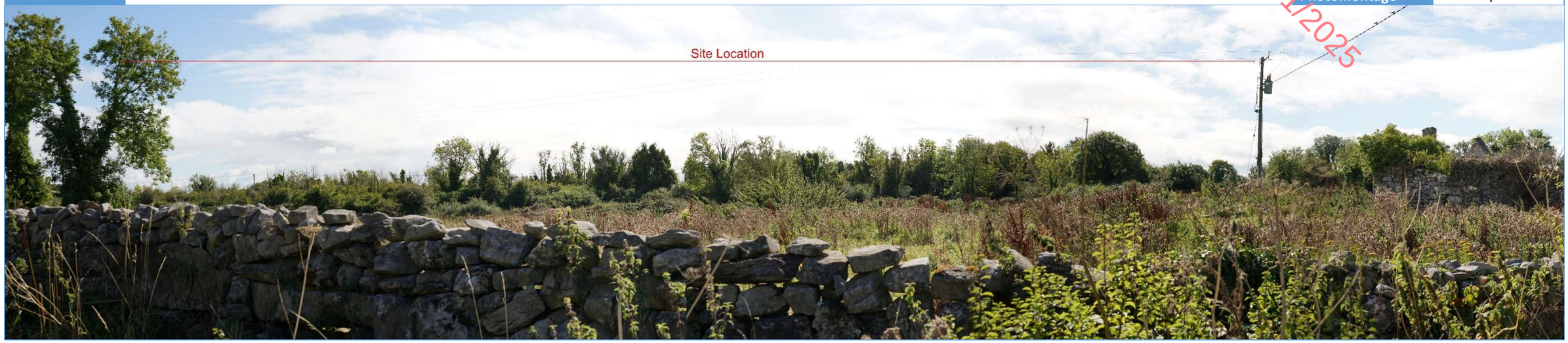
VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP4 R345 at bridge on Cong Canal	**High –** R345 used by commuters, residents and tourists	**Negligible -** The existing quarry is not visible as is screened from the road by intervening vegetation, including the existing vegetation that aligns the R345. There was no evidence of dust deposition along the road at the time of the site visit. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not Required

VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP5 R345 at site access	**High** – R345 used by commuters, residents and tourists.	**Negligible –** The view along this part of the R345 is defined by the existing stone wall, gate and screening vegetation that align the southern boundary of the existing quarry. These existing features do not appear incongruous in this setting and would not be altered by the proposed development. The access point affords some glimpses into the quarry site, though this view is predominately of the office building and car park. As the proposal is for the deepening of the existing quarry, this view would not be altered. The most significant change would comprise the continuation of the use of the access for 25 years.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not Required



VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP6 R345 at junction with local road, west of the site	**High** – R345 used by commuters, residents and tourists.	**Negligible –** The view along this part of the R345 is defined by the existing stone wall with agricultural fields aligned with mature field boundaries in the background. The topography of the area coupled with this existing vegetation provides effective screening vegetation of the existing quarry from this viewpoint. There was no evidence of dust deposition along the road at the time of the site visit. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight-imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required

VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP7 Unnamed road, north-west of the site.	**High –** Local road used by residents and tourists	**Negligible -** The existing quarry is not visible as is screened from the road by intervening vegetation and as a result of the local topography. There was no evidence of dust deposition along the road at the time of the site visit. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required



VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP8 L1613 at Killimor	**High –** Local road used by residents and tourists	**Negligible -** The existing quarry is not visible as is screened from the road by intervening vegetation. There was no evidence of dust deposition along the road at the time of the site visit. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Phohotomontage	Not Required

VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP9 Gortnarup, south-west of site	**High –** Local road used by residents and tourists	**Negligible –** This route provides elevated panoramic views over Lough Mask and towards Cong. The quarry is not discernible within this wide view due to the distance and the effective screening by existing vegetation. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required

VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP10 Fox Hill, north-west of the site	**High –** Local road used by residents and tourists. Scenic View.	**Negligible –** This route provides elevated panoramic views over Lough Mask and towards Cong. The quarry is not discernible within this wide view due to the distance and the effective screening by existing vegetation. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is considered to be not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required

VP No.	Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Effect Description	Evaluation
VP11 R300 at Trean	**High** – R300 used by commuters, residents and tourists. Is a scenic route at this point.	**Negligible –** This route provides elevated panoramic views over Lough Mask and towards Cong. The quarry is not discernible within this wide view due to the distance and the effective screening by existing vegetation. The proposed development would not alter this view as it would comprise the deepening of the existing quarry.	**Quality**	Negative
			Extent	Local
			Probability	Likely
			Frequency	Daily
Significance	The **High** sensitivity judgement coupled with a **negligible** magnitude, corresponds to a **slight/imperceptible** significance of visual impact. In terms of EPA(2022), this is not significant.		**Duration**	Long-term
Mitigation	Existing boundary vegetation should be retained and "gapped up" where necessary.		**Reversibility**	Reversible
			Photomontage	Not required

Table 12-11: Assessment Summary based on EPA 2022

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance	
			Landscape Institute	EPA
1	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
2	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
3	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
4	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
5	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
6	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
7	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
8	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
9	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
10	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant
11	High	Negligible	slight/imperceptible	Not significant

Mitigation and Monitoring Measures

12.92 The main mitigation by avoidance measure employed in this instance is the siting of the proposed development within an existing quarry rather than selecting a new site with no history of excavation.

12.93 It is proposed to retain the existing screening berms along the perimeter of the proposed extraction area. Existing vegetation will also be retained along the perimeter and will be "gapped up" where necessary.

Cumulative Effects

12.94 In the assessment of cumulative effects, any other existing, permitted or proposed developments in the surrounding area have been considered where they have the potential to generate cumulative effects with the proposed development. Chapter 17 sets out the methodology for identifying those developments which have the potential to cause cumulative effects. It excluded developments that were already constructed as these are already assessed as part of the baseline. Also excluded were small scale developments that would not have the potential to cause cumulative effects.

12.95 No developments were identified within the vicinity of the site that would have the potential for cumulative effects. There are two other quarries located in the vicinity of the site with one located approximately 0.9km to east and another located 1.9km to the northeast. Both quarries are in the region of 1.5 hectares in area and are subject to rock extraction and processing on a small-scale basis. Given that no significant landscape and visual effects have been identified in respect of the proposed development the potential for cumulative effects is therefore limited.

Decommissioning Effects

12.96 Decommissioning effects would be associated with the proposed restoration of the proposed development. The application area will be left for natural recolonisation by locally occurring

grass and shrub/scrub species and the void will fill with water. All existing boundary fences and hedgerows will be retained to ensure that the site is secure. All plant and machinery will be removed from the quarry void.

12.97 Restoration will result in an improvement from the current quarried condition in landscape terms the site would experience a Minor (beneficial) impact from restoration.

Residual Effects

12.98 The proposal to deepen the existing quarry would result in permanent changes to the landform, however the effect on landscape character will be a very localised (within the application site). The magnitude of effect is therefore negligible from outside the site boundaries. The significance of landscape impact is deemed to be **slight/imperceptible** which is not considered to be significant in terms of landscape character. The restoration proposals offer opportunities for biodiversity net gain, with a greater variety of habitats present on the site after restoration that would have been prior to the commencement of development.

12.99 The visual effect was assessed at 11 viewpoints, the majority of which occur within 1km of the site. The existing quarry is not visible from any of the selected viewpoints points, however some of the higher elements of the existing activity are visible above the screening vegetation in viewpoint 1. In all viewpoints, the magnitude of change will be typically “negligible”, as the proposal would comprises the deepening of the existing quarry and therefore would not intrude into the view any more that presently occurs. The overall visual amenity would not therefore be altered.

12.100 It is also anticipated that the existing planting would further mature and gaps would close over time which would ensure that any views would be further minimised.

12.101 At the outset of the assessment process, it was recognised that Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment was “scoped-in” in accordance with the precautionary principle and to ensure that the EIAR provides a comprehensive, up-to-date assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development. This assessment reaffirms previous assessments undertaken at the site and has found that the proposed development will not have a significant effect on existing landscape and visual resources.

References

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publication 'Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EPA, 2022)
- Draft Advice Notes on Current Practice in the Preparation of Environmental Impact Statements (EPA, 2015)
- Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment publication entitled Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013).
- Landscape Institute, *Technical Guidance Note 02/21 – Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations* (2021).
- Landscape Institute, *Technical Guidance Note 06/19 – Visual Representation*