CHAPTER 12

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LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

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CHAPTER 12: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

Introduction

12.1 This Landscape and Visual Assessment report has been prepared in relation to the proposed continued development of an existing limestone quarry and existing concrete manufacturing facility at Barrettspark, Athenry, County Galway.

12.2 This Landscape and Visual Assessment was undertaken by Bridget Macfarlane (BLA), LVIA consultant of Macro Works Ltd. Macro Works is a specialist LVIA company with over 20 years of experience in the assessment of effects from a variety of energy, infrastructure and commercial developments. Relevant experience includes LVIA work on over 100 extractive industry developments throughout Ireland. Macro Works and its senior staff members are all affiliated with the Irish landscape Institute.

Proposed Development

12.3 The proposed development comprises the following:

- Continued use of the existing quarry to the permitted depth of minus 5 mOD, including drilling, blasting, crushing, processing, stockpiling of materials, associated roads and ancillary services (granted under Planning Ref. File No.: 09/1958 and ABP Ref.: PL07.235821);
- Continued use of open storage areas;
- Continued use of existing permitted concrete manufacturing facility (granted under Planning Ref. File No. 09230 and 19/517: ABP-304769-19);
- Continued use of the existing office (granted under Planning Ref. File No.: 09/1958 and ABP Ref.: PL07.235821);
- Continued use of the existing maintenance shed (granted under Planning Ref. File No. 09610);
- Continued use of the existing water management system (including settlement lagoons), weighbridge and wheelwash;
- Lateral extension of the existing permitted quarry area over a previously permitted extraction area (granted under Planning Ref. File No. 06/4125) of c.4.6 ha. area to a final floor level of minus 5 mOD. The total quarry extraction area will be c. 13 Ha.;
- Restoration of the application area to natural habitat after uses following completion of extraction.

12.4 The proposed development is within an overall application area of c. 27.5 hectares and is for a total period of 22 years (comprising an operational period of 20 years followed by 2 years for restoration).

Study Area

12.5 A 1km study area has been adopted in order to understand the site's wider landscape and visual context. A development of the scale and type proposed is likely to be difficult to discern beyond this distance, and so 1km is considered conservative and comprehensive.

Landscape and Visual Policy Context and Designations

Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

12.6 Chapter 8, Section 8.13 Landscape of the Galway CDP (2022-2028), addresses both the Landscape Character and Landscape Sensitivity relevant to the proposed development. The site is located within the 'Central Galway Complex Landscape' LCA, described in Appendix 4 Landscape Character Assessment as; '

"An extensive plain of grasslands comprising of medium-to-large fields with low enclosures and many areas of low stone walls used for field boundaries. ... This area contains the majority of the county's population with associated high levels of urban generated rural housing, roads and settlements.

These range from large to small settlements with associated infrastructure, services and commercial activity. The western and southern parts of these landscapes are underlain by karst limestone which results in many unusual hydrological features - such as turloughs and large springs..."

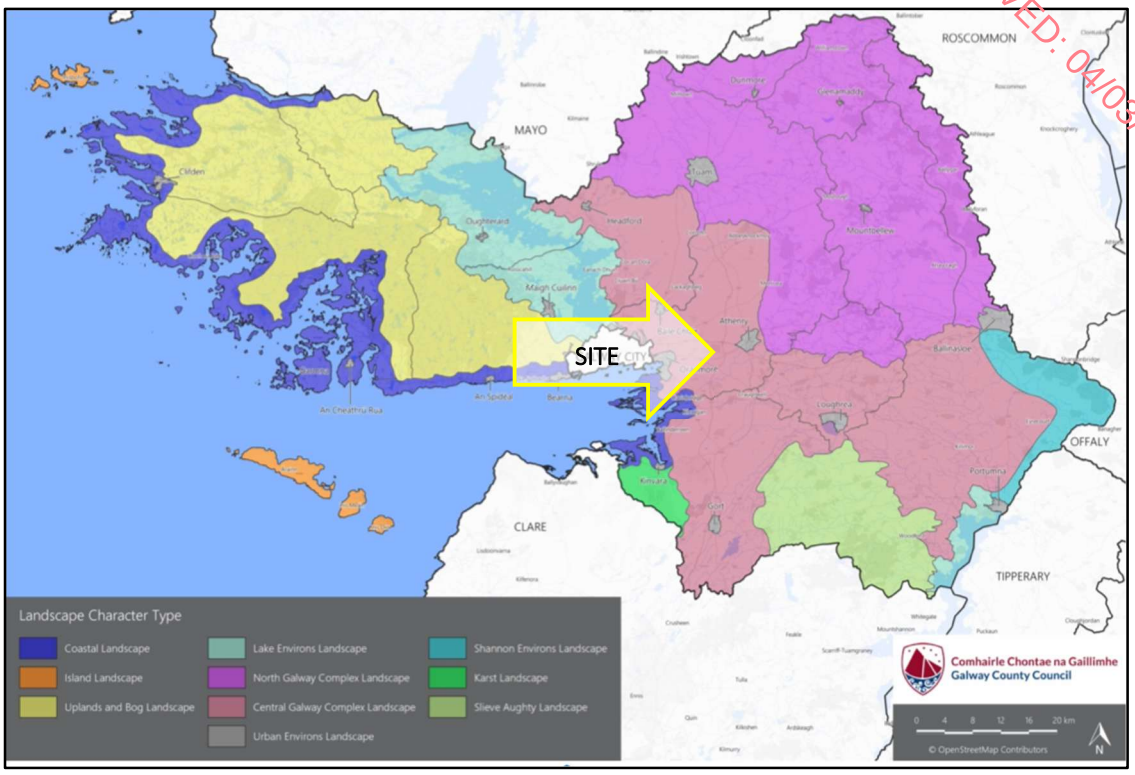

Figure 02.1 Landscape Character Types in the Galway County Development Plan in relation to the application site

12.7 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are then broken down within the Landscape Character Assessment in to Landscape Character Units. The proposed development is contained within 'LCU 6b Southern River Clare Basin' (refer Figure 02.2) described as;

"Undulating long-occupied working landscape with high levels of settlement. Large regular fields and numerous parkland remnants. Extensive wetland areas near Lough Corrib. Low enclosure except for localised areas of mature parkland trees."

12.8 Section 8.13.2 of the Galway CDP addresses Landscape Sensitivity, the CDP outlines four separate Landscape Character Units as follows:

- Class 1 - Low: Unlikely to be adversely affected by change
- Class 2 - High: Elevated sensitivity to change
- Class 3 - Special: High sensitivity to change
- Class 4 - Iconic: Unique Landscape with high sensitivity to change

12.9 The proposed development and entire study area is contained within the Class 1- Low Sensitivity.

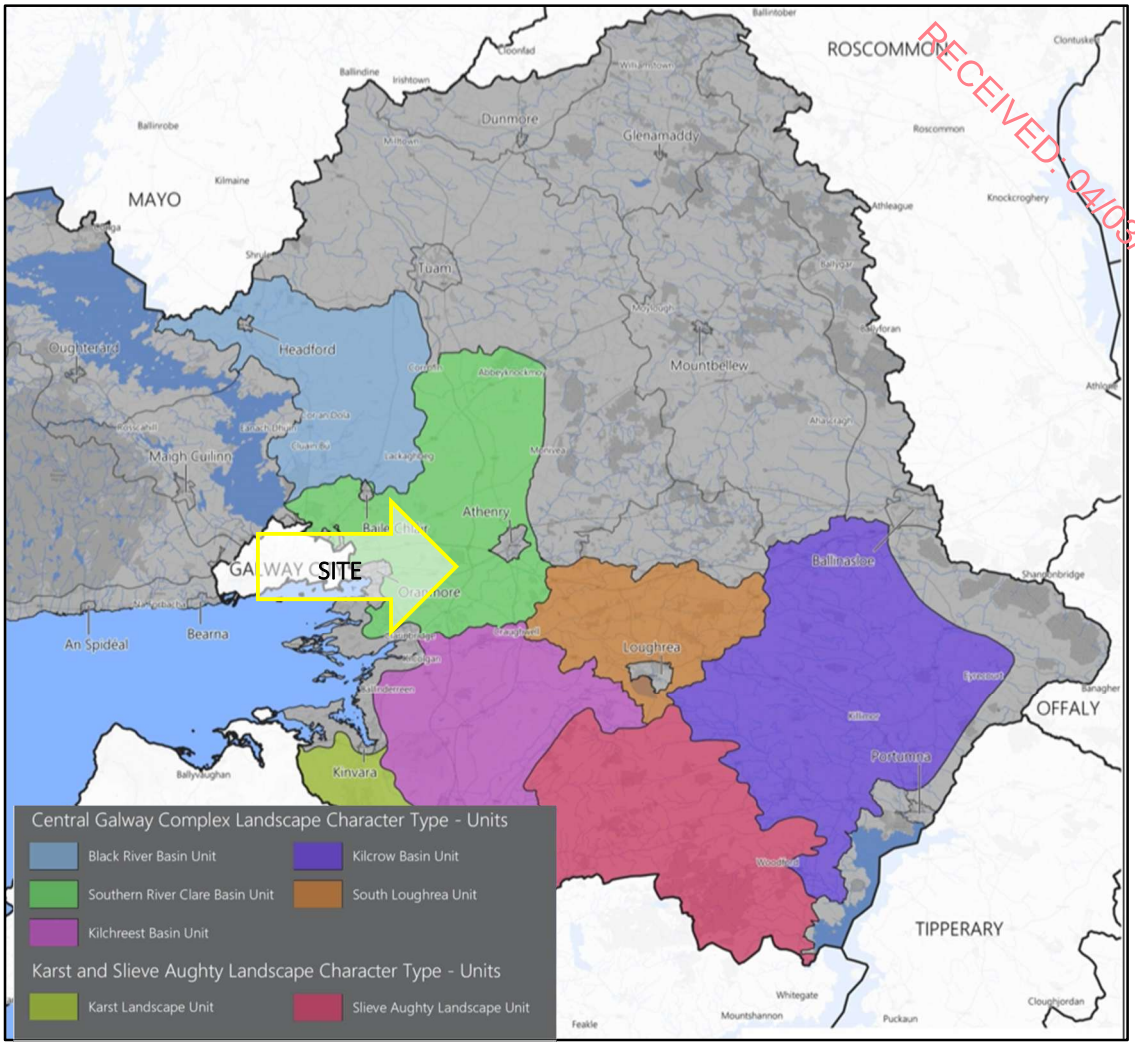

Figure 02.2 Landscape Character Units in the Galway County Development Plan in relation to the application site

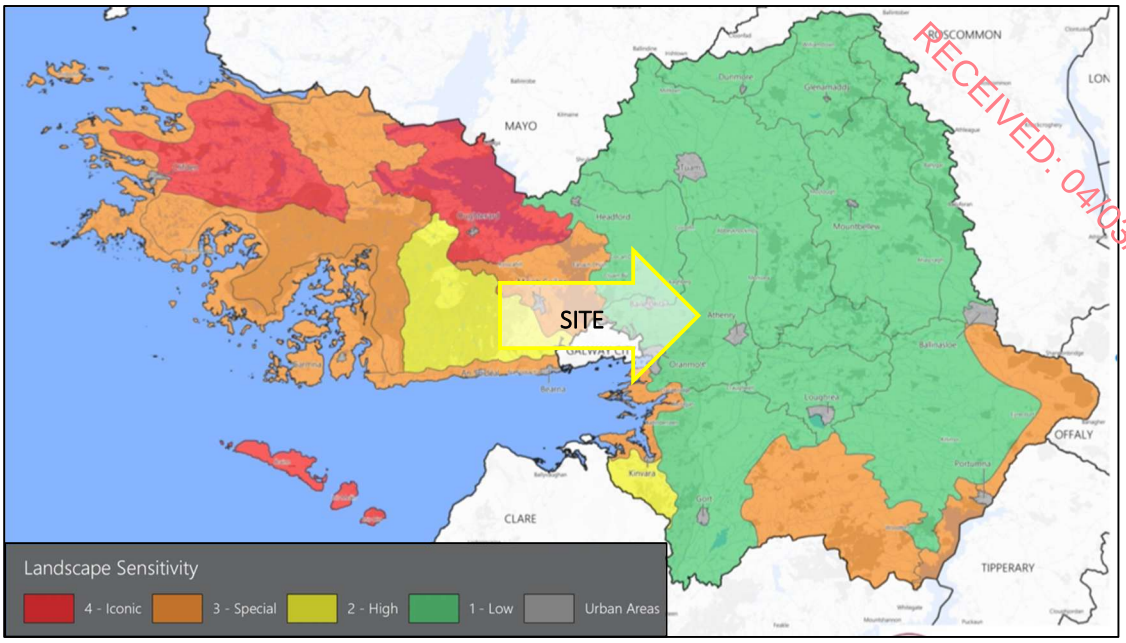

Figure 02.3 Landscape Sensitivity within County Galway in relation to the application site

Landscape Policy -Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

12.10 Policy relating to landscape sensitivity is outlined within the Galway County Development Plan in subsection 11.9. Those deemed relevant to the proposed development are included below:

- 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 Classification: 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.*

Views of Recognised Scenic Value – Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

12.11 The Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 includes scenic designations, based on a review of the 1km study, there are no scenic designations within the study area.

Existing Environment

Landscape Baseline

12.12 The landscape baseline represents the existing landscape context and is the scenario against which any changes to the landscape brought about by the proposed development will be assessed. A description of the landscape context of the proposed application site and wider study area is provided below. 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 below.

Existing Landscape Context

12.13 The existing Coshla Quarry site is located 155m north of the M6 motorway between the settlements of Galway and Athenry. Immediately northeast of the quarry is the Cashla Substation comprising an array of electric infrastructure and to the northeast of this is the C & F tooling factory containing a large industrial size warehouse and accompanying features. Topography across the study area is generally flat in nature, however gentle undulations are located across the site with more elevated terrain in the eastern periphery of the study area. In terms of land use there is a strong anthropogenic theme across the entire study area. Besides the quarry, substation and C & F factory, agricultural farmland is the dominant land use comprising of small to medium-sized pastoral fields. Field boundaries in the surrounding vicinity are most commonly mature hedgerows or stone walls. The quarry site itself is bound by a series of mature hedgerows, which aid in screening the site from nearby receptors. Furthermore the site is offset from the roads that surround it to the south and east. These aid in mitigating views and assimilating the quarry into the existing landscape fabric. Site access is provided on the northern side of the quarry via a local road that runs in a north-south direction. A dispersed population of residential dwellings and associated farm infrastructure are loosely clustered along the roads and intersections of the study area. The most notable road within the study area is the M6 which traverses east to west through the southern portion of the study area and has a notable influence of the surrounding landscape character. Otherwise, a network of local roads criss-cross through the study area primarily concentrated around the eastern portion. The site itself is accessed by a local road to the north of the site. This local road is oriented in a north-south direction and provides vehicle access to the quarry via the centre of the north of the site. There are no towns or villages within the study area, although several dwellings from the outskirts of Galway are located within the northern periphery.

Figure 02.4 Aerial view showing the application site boundary (red line) and the immediate landscape context (Google Earth Pro)

Visual Baseline

Mitigation measures

12.14 The main mitigation measure employed in this instance is via 'mitigation by avoidance'. The proposed extraction area is contained within the existing quarrying facility, that is located in a robust and well-contained rural area that also avails of both terrain and hedgerow screening such that the proposed development will not be visually prominent within the surrounding landscape. Indeed, all works related to the proposed development will be contained within the existing site boundary and will not result in an increase in the overall extent of the existing quarry facility. In this respect, the proposed development is not perceived to impose itself on the existing landscape pattern.

Visual Receptors

12.15 As already well-established, the application site is currently well-screened by a combination of existing mature vegetation and undulating topography. As a result of this, views into Coshla Quarry are limited. A site visit has been undertaken to identify potential views of the application site.

12.16 Based on the site visit the key visual receptors are outlined below;

- VP1. M6 motorway south of Coshla Quarry

- VP2. Local Road east of Coshla Quarry beside C&F Tooling Factory
- VP3. Local Road at entrance to Coshla Quarry

12.17 These potential visual receptors are all deemed to be of a 'Medium-low' landscape sensitivity representing a combination of 'Local Community Views' and 'Major Road Corridors' (M6). In the case of this development, where much of the potential visibility is precluded by built form and vegetation, these viewpoints also demonstrate the absence of visibility.

Landscape Impact Assessment

Landscape Value and Sensitivity

12.18 The study area depicts a productive working landscape that encompasses a blend of highly anthropogenic land use. Although parts of the wider study area (wider western and eastern periphery) present as a pleasant rural landscape with associated character, generated by its sparsely settled, agrarian characteristics, the study area is also notably influenced by the presence of anthropogenic activity. The Cashla Substation and the C&F Tooling Factory all clustered within the immediate context of the site. The presence of the existing established quarry also contributes to this being a working landscape where landscape values are generally associated with productivity and rural subsistence rather than any sense of rarity or the naturalistic.

12.19 The highly anthropogenic land uses such as the existing quarries, substation and major routes highlight the working and modified nature of this landscape context. The combination of the existing vegetation as well as being set back from the public road minimises any disruption to the landscape character of the surrounding area.

12.20 Overall, it is considered that this is a robust, working landscape set amongst several other utilitarian activities, where quarrying is an existing activity that has a notable influence on the surrounding landscape. On balance, the landscape sensitivity of the application site is deemed to be **Low** and the wider vicinity is deemed to be **Medium-Low**.

Magnitude of Landscape Effects

12.21 In terms of physical landscape effects, the proposal involves a lateral extension to the east and southwest of the existing quarry permitted extraction area (granted under Planning Ref. File No. 09/1958).The physical landscape impacts are classified as ‘Negative’ and their duration is ‘Long-Term’ (effects defined as lasting 15 - 60 years in accordance with EPA guidelines). Although there is potential that the quarry could be subject of an infill proposal in the future, quarrying activities are generally not readily reversible. The proposed works will involve creating a broader void in the landscape, which although has the potential to generate some minor landscape impacts. The lateral extension will be into disturbed lands within the quarry area, where soil stripping has already occurred. The duration of any physical landscape impacts will last only as long as the proposed development is in place, which is proposed to be 22 years (classified as long-term under the EPA's EIAR guidelines of 15 to 60 years).

12.22 This is a productive extractive and rural landscape containing the existing quarry, along with other industrial and intensive agricultural activities. The proposed development will not exceed the existing boundaries of the site. Therefore, it is not considered that the proposed lateral extension will noticeably detract from the integrity of landscape patterns or the productive landscape character that prevails in the area. Quarry-related activities are already commonplace in the immediate context of the application site and it is therefore considered that there will is very limited potential for impacts on the surrounding landscape character.

12.23 For the reasons outlined above there will be a minor increase in impacts on the visible physical landscape from a lateral extension of existing the quarry and no change to landscape character. Thus, the magnitude of landscape impact is deemed **Low** and of a **Negative** quality.

12.24 With reference to the significance matrix, the Medium-Low/ Low landscape sensitivity judgement attributed to the study area coupled with a Negligible magnitude of landscape impact is considered to result in an overall significance of **Slight / Negative.**

Visual Impact Assessment

Visual Impact Magnitude

12.25 As the proposed works will be the lateral extension within the existing permitted area it is unlikely to be visible beyond the site, therefore it is not considered necessary to prepare photomontages of the proposed development. During the site visit, several nearby receptors which are deemed to be most susceptible to change were identified. These are listed below and assessed accordingly;

Figure 02.5 Nearby visual receptors of Coshla's Quarry

Figure 02.6 M6 south of Coshlas Quarry

VP1. M6 south of Coshlas Quarry:

12.26 This represents the M6 major road corridor which runs in a general east to west direction approximately 180m south of the existing quarry. A series of open agricultural fields, framed by low hedgerows and stonewalls occupy the foreground, separating the quarry from the road. The Quarry itself is revealed behind a perimeter screen of immature trees and mounding scrub. Heavy machinery and equipment, some small sheds and mounds of gravel can all be partially observed in the middle distance. However, it should be noted that during the summer months when the trees are in-leaf majority of views will be screened and this will reduce as the trees mature. Overhead pylons and transmission lines are a notable feature of this view, leading to the Cashla Substation behind the quarry to the northeast. This view depicts an array of highly anthropogenic utilitarian activity. As a result of the 180m setback of the quarry from this receptor along with the partial screening by the perimeter vegetation, the proposed physical works to laterally extend the quarry are not deemed to be any more visible than what exists currently. This receptor may experience some visibility of minor offsite vehicle movements- principally the continuation of truck movements for a longer period than would occur if the quarry is not granted permission to its extend to allow continued extraction. However as a major road corridor, truck movements represent a long-established feature of productive activity in this area and will therefore be barely discernible. On the basis of the increased duration of vehicle movements on this local road, the impact on visual amenity is deemed to be Negligible and of a Neutral quality. When combined with the Medium-low sensitivity of this receptor, the significance of effect is deemed to be **Imperceptible** and of a long-term duration (25 year).

Figure 02.7 Local Road beside C&F Tooling Factory

VP2. Local Road beside C&F Tooling Factory

12.27 This viewpoint is observed from the local road, opposite the C&F Tooling factory, that runs in a general north-south direction at approximately 480m northeast from the Quarry boundary. The view looks out over a stone wall at an open agricultural field that encompasses majority of the foreground with the Cashla substation to the south. The substation is framed by perimeter vegetation which extends to the south. Due to a combination of distance and screening the Quarry is unable to be seen from here. Similar to the motorway, this receptor will likely experience an increase in the intensity of offsite vehicle movements to and from site due to the longer period it will take to extract material from the proposed development. On the basis of the increase duration of vehicle movements on this local road, the impact on visual amenity is deemed to be **Low-negligible** and of a negative quality. When combined with the **Medium-low** sensitivity of this receptor, the significance of effect is deemed to be **Slight-imperceptible** and of a long-term duration.

Figure 02.8 Local Road at entrance to the Coshla Quarry

VP3. Local Road at entrance to the Coshla Quarry

12.28 This is the nearest local road to the site which provides the vehicle entrance for Coshla Quarry at a distance of approximately 380m. This view is afforded to several nearby residential receptors located to the south, as well as road users. The view depicts the entranceway that runs in a general east-west direction bordered on both sides by open agricultural fields. The view is truncated to the southwest by a treeline that limits any view of the quarry beyond this. Further agricultural farmland bound by hedgerows can be seen to the northwest with the Cashla substation located to the north, framed by a dense vegetation. The vegetation extends towards the south which heavily precludes views of the existing quarry beyond this. Although it is possible to get glimpse views of the quarry from this location, at a distance of 380m the proposed works will not be readily discernible from the existing activity. Although, the proposed physical works to extend the quarry are not deemed to be any more visible than what exists currently, this receptor is most susceptible to offsite quarrying activities, principally the continuation of truck movements for a longer period than would occur if the quarry is not extended to allow continued extraction. Such truck movements are not typically associated with visual impacts, but they do relate a minor reduction in sense of tranquillity and amenity of viewers. However, truck movements represent a long-established feature of productive activity in this area.

12.29 On the basis of the increased duration of vehicle movements on this local road, the impact on visual amenity is deemed to be **Low-negligible** and of a negative quality. When combined with the **Medium-low** sensitivity of this receptor, the significance of effect is deemed to be **Slight-imperceptible** and of a long-term duration (25 year).

Do Nothing' Scenario

12.30 If the proposed development did not proceed, quarrying would continue under the terms of the existing planning permission, after which the site would be restored in line with the approved restoration plan. Restoration of the site would result in an improvement from its current quarried condition, leading to a Minor (beneficial) impact in landscape terms.

Transboundary Impacts

12.31 EIA Directive 2014-52-EU invokes the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, 1991, and applies its definition of transboundary impacts. Given the position of the site at >120km, approximately, from the border with Northern Ireland, the nature, size and scale of the proposed development, it is expected that the development will not have any significant transboundary effects with respect to landscape and visual.

Cumulative Effects

12.32 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. 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.

12.33 No developments were identified within the vicinity of the site that would have the potential for cumulative effects.

Decommissioning Effects

12.34 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.

12.35 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

12.36 The proposal to laterally the existing quarry would not result in any significant residual landscape and or visual effects and the proposal would not be discernible within the landscape. With the further maturing of the existing screen planting any existing views will be further minimised.

Conclusions

12.37 Overall, it is not considered that the proposed continuation of activities and lateral extension of the existing Coshla's Quarry will result in any significant landscape or visual impacts with the only material effects relating to the increased duration of an already long established activity in this rural area.