14.4 Landscape Baseline

The landscape baseline section reports relevant policy pertinent to this LVIA, as well a description of the receiving landscape of the Proposed Development Site and its wider setting.

This section is divided into:

- **Landscape Designations and Policy Context** pertaining to the location and features of the Site and its surrounding area based on the county development plans:
  - Kilkenny County Development Plan 2021–2027 (KKCDP),
  - Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 (LCDP).
- **Landscape Character of the Proposed Development Site** describing the landscape characteristics of the Site itself and its immediate setting based on site visit findings.
- **Landscape Sensitivity:** assigning 'Sensitivity' rating to the Site and its surrounding area according to the value and susceptibility to change based on appraisal of indicators:
  - Landscape designations,
  - Quality/condition of landscape elements,
  - Scenic/aesthetic qualities,
  - Rarity/conversation status,
  - Wildness/naturalness,
  - Recreational value,
  - Cultural meaning/associations.
- **Landscape Character Types from Wind Energy Development Guidelines,** identifying the landscape character type of the Proposed Development and reviewing the relevant siting guidance for wind energy developments in:
  - DoEHLG 2006 Guidelines,
  - Draft 2019 Guidelines.
- **Landscape Character of the Wider Setting** describing the character of the wider surrounding landscape and preliminary analysis of Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) for assessment in the LVIA.

In the LVIA Study Area, the relevant landscape policy designations identified include:

- 7 No. Scenic Views in Co. Kilkenny,
- 9 no. Views and Prospects in Co. Laois,
- Wind Energy Strategy (WES) designations for both counties,
- 17 no. designated Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in both counties (mapped to 15km for the LCA Study Area).

All landscape designations and WES area boundaries are mapped in the indicated figures and the relevant policies are identified in the subsections below.

14.4.1 Landscape Designations and Policy Context

14.4.1.1 KKCDP Development Management Requirements

6 no. Proposed turbines are located in Co. Kilkenny and 2 no. Proposed turbines are located in Co. Laois. Section 9.2.12 of the Kilkenny County Development Plan (KKCDP) 2021-2017 sets out the management and protection of landscape contained within the county, and specifically states that:

> *"...the onus shall be on the developer to satisfactorily demonstrate that such new development can be adequately absorbed into its surrounding landscape without significant adverse visual impacts to its overall landscape value."*

The KKCDP provides 'Development Management Requirements' as follows:

- *"To protect the landscape character, quality and local distinctiveness of County Kilkenny, and have regard to the guidance set out in the Landscape Character Assessment.*
- *Where necessary, to require that applications are accompanied by a visual impact assessment, particularly in upland areas, river valleys and areas of greater sensitivity.*
- *To facilitate appropriate development that reflects the scale, character and sensitivities of the local landscape throughout the county and require that developments minimise the loss of natural features such as trees, hedgerows and stone walls.*
- *To facilitate, where appropriate, developments that have a functional and locational natural resource requirement to be situated on steep or elevated sites (e.g. reservoir, telecommunications or wind energy structures) with reference to the appropriate County strategies currently in place, and to ensure that any residual adverse visual impacts are minimised or mitigated.*
- *To ensure that development in upland areas or on steep slopes will not have a disproportionate or dominating visual impact (due to excessive bulk, scale or inappropriate siting) and will not significantly interfere or detract from scenic upland vistas, or when viewed from public areas, scenic routes, viewpoints or settlements.*
- *To have particular regard to the potential impacts of new development on sensitive upland areas, and to materially consider the difficulty of establishing and maintaining screening vegetation when assessing development proposals in these areas.*
- *To continue to permit development that can utilise existing structures and settlement areas whilst taking account of the local visual absorption opportunities provided by existing topography and prevailing vegetation and to direct new development whenever possible towards the vicinity of existing structures and mature vegetation in the Lowland Areas, River Valleys and Transitional Areas.*
- *To recognise that in the Lowland Areas which are comprised of low-lying open environments, tall and bulky development sometimes can have a disproportionate impact against the landscape particularly when viewed from the predominantly low-lying areas of the public realm. Visually obtrusive and/or insensitive development shall be discouraged in such instances.*
- *To ensure that development in the River Valleys will not adversely affect or detract from either protected views (especially from bridges) or distinctive linear sections of river valleys (especially open floodplains) when viewed from settlements.*
- *To maintain the visual integrity of areas of greater sensitivity in the county and ensure that any development in these areas is appropriately sited and designed. Applicants shall demonstrate that the proposed development can be assimilated into the landscape and will not have a disproportionate visual impact on the landscape."*

The assessment of landscape and visual impacts reported below in Section 14.7 addresses and is cognisant of the specific Development Management Requirements set out above. This LVIA considers the policies above in the identification and assessment of sensitive landscape and visual receptors.

14.4.1.2 KKCDP and LCDP Scenic Views and Prospects

7 No. Scenic Views in Co. Kilkenny and 9 no. Views and Prospects in Co. Laois were identified in the 20km LVIA Study Area; these are listed in Table 14-2. These scenic designations are of a visual nature and therefore represent visual receptors; they are mapped and analysed in Section 14.5 Visual Baseline.

Section 9.2.12.6 of the KKCDP states the following policy for designated scenic views of Co. Kilkenny:

> *"There is a need to protect and conserve views and prospects adjoining public roads and river valleys throughout the county where these views are of high amenity value. In conserving views, it is not proposed that this should give rise to the prohibition of development along these routes but development, where permitted, should not seriously hinder or obstruct these views and should be designed and located to minimise their impact."*

"Scenic Views are designated in the Development Plan, and these views are also considered to be extremely sensitive to wind energy development, however these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the Development management standards".

Section 11.11.1 of the LCDP states the following policy for designated views and prospects of Co. Laois:

"Scenic routes and protected views consist of important and valued views and prospects within the county."

"The Council recognises the need to protect the character of the county by protecting views and scenic routes. However, it is acknowledged that in certain circumstances, some development may be necessary."

The LCDP provides two Policy Objectives for Views and Prospects:

*"**Objective SV1** - Protect views from designated scenic routes indicated in Table 11.7 and Map 11.8 (Scenic Views and Prospects in County Laois) of the Plan, by avoiding any development that could disrupt the vistas or disproportionately impact on the landscape character of the area, thereby affecting the scenic and amenity value of the views.*

***Objective SV2** - Review and update all Scenic Routes and Views in the county during the lifetime of the Plan."*

Note on Map Ref. numbers: Designated Scenic Views and Prospects are labelled with 'SV' or 'V', and each is prefixed by 'KK' for Kilkenny or 'L' for Laois. The last number corresponds to the designation number assigned in the county development plan (e.g. KK-SV-14 = Co. Kilkenny Scenic View No.14).

Table 14-2 Designated Scenic Views and Prospects identified in the LVIA Study Area

Scenic View No. & Map Ref.	Location and Description from County Development Plan
KK-SV-12	*Views overlooking Castlecomer and Ballyragget on the Castlecomer/Ballyragget Road (R694) between its junctions with road nos. LT5852 and LT5847.*
KK-SV-13	*Views southwest over Kilkenny City and southeast over Carlow on Ballysallagh/Kanesbridge Road No. LP 1851 between the junctions with road nos. LT6654 and LS5886.*
KK-SV-14	*Views north and east on the Johnstown/Gattabaun Road No. LP1805 between junctions with Road nos. LT18054 and LT18056.*
KK-SV-16	*View East towards Kilkenny City on the Kilkenny/Kilmanagh Road No. LP 1011 between the junction with road nos. LT10111-4 and LT10112-10.*
KK-SV-19	*View west towards the Slieve Bloom Mountains on road no's LS5840 and LS5839 from the junction with road nos. LS5839 and LS5846 (Ballymartin Cross Roads).*
KK-SV-31	*Panoramic view of River Nore Valley from Bleach Road*
KK-SV-32	*View of River Nore Valley to east from Ossory Bridge.*
L-V-4	*From the L5753 in Cullahill - Views towards Knockmannon Hill.*
L-V-12	*In the village of Raheen -Views over farmland.*

Scenic View No. & Map Ref.	Location and Description from County Development Plan
LV-13	*From the N77 Abbeyliex - Views over farmland and River Nore.*
LV-14	*From the R639 Cullahill - Views towards Caponellan Hill.*
LV-15	*From the R639 - Views over farmland and River Goul.*
LV-16	*From the R445 Castletown - Views over farmland and Slieve Bloom Mountains.*
LV-21	*From the L5757 Clonaslee - Views of Cullahill Castle and Knockmannon Hill.*
LV-22	*From Heywood Demense - Views of Mass Lough and of Ballymartin Hill beyond.*
LV-23	*From Heywood Demense - Views over farmland and of Ballymartin Hill.*

14.4.1.3 Landscape Character Areas

Landscape Character Assessment, as carried out by the local authorities in all counties in Ireland to meet the objectives of the National Landscape Strategy Framework 2015–2025 (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht [DoAHG], 2015), forms an important basis of this LVIA.

The Landscape Character Assessment is intended to analyse the character, value and sensitivity of landscapes identified within a particular area (i.e. counties) as part of efforts by the DoAHG to achieve national-level consistency in terms of landscape decision-making and uphold compliance of European Landscape Convention best practices. This approach aligns with the best practise guidance (GLVIA3, 2013, p.74), which state that:

> *"Landscape Character Assessment is the key tool for understanding the landscape and should be used for baseline studies".*

Landscape Character Assessments have been carried out by Co. Kilkenny and Co. Laois, producing designated regions known as Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), and in the case of Kilkenny, LCAs and Landscape Character Types (LCTs).

14.4.1.3.1 *Kilkenny LCTs and LCAs*

The *Landscape Appraisal of County Kilkenny 2008-2016* (hereafter, LACK) forms the Landscape Character Assessment of Co. Kilkenny. The LACK identifies four LCTs subdivided into 14 LCAs, see KKCDP Sections 9.2.12.2 and 9.2.12.3. The KKCDP states the following policy:

> *"The Council will protect and sustainably manage the landscape character of County Kilkenny, having regard to the findings of the landscape character assessment and the Development Management Requirements as set out in this chapter for the sustainable development of the county and appropriate conservation of its landscape character."*

The four designated LCTs within Co. Kilkenny are: Upland Areas, Lowland Areas, River Valleys and Transitional Areas. All LCTs occur within the 15km LCA Study Area; the Proposed Wind Farm is located primarily within lands designated as Upland Areas, with one turbine being located in Lowland Areas. The underground cable route forming part of the Proposed Grid Connection passes through Upland Areas, Lowland Areas and Transitional Areas.

13 no. subdivided LCAs identified in the KKCDP are located within the LCA Study Area:

- KK-LCA-A – Slieveardagh Hills (North),
- KK-LCA-A – Slieveardagh Hills (South),
- KK-LCA-A1 – Slieveardagh Western Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-A2 – Slieveardagh Central Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-A3 – Slieveardagh Eastern Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-A4 – Slieveardagh Southern Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-B – Castlecomer Plateau,
- KK-LCA-B1 – Castlecomer Southern Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-B2 – Castlecomer Western Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-F1 – Kilkenny Northern Basin,
- KK-LCA-F2 – Kilkenny Western Basin,
- KK-LCA-H – Nore Valley (South)*.

*It is noted that KKLCA-H: Nore Valley (South) corresponds with one part of a larger land area in Kilkenny (including Brandon Hills and other river valleys) designated as having 'Highly Scenic and Significant Visual Amenity Value' and is considered more sensitive—see next Section 14.4.1.3.2 for discussion.

5 no. Proposed turbines (T3, T4, T5, T6, T8) are located within KK-LCA-A: Slieveardagh Hills (North) and one Proposed turbine (T7) in KK-LCA-F1: Kilkenny Northern Basin.

The LACK describes KK-LCA-A as follows:

> *"Although this area is **generally perceived as having no significant landscape value** (refer to Document 2), **the northern hills are perceived as having** certain ecological and **scenic value**. The zone is also perceived as having development potential."*

The LACK lists six Critical Landscape Factors for KK-LCA-A which are fully considered as part of the impact assessment outlined in *Appendix 14-2: LCA Assessment Tables* and discussed in Section 13.7 for Proposed turbines T3, T4, T5, T6 and T8:

> *"**Elevated Vistas:** As a result of the elevated road level and the lack of tall vegetation, there are long distance views towards the Kilkenny Lowlands and the Castlecomer Plateau.*
>
> ***Slopes:** Sloping land often provides an area with its character and offers a potentially increased elevation, intensifying the visual prominence of any feature over greater distances, as in the case of the Slieveardagh Hills. Slope also provides an increased opportunity for development to penetrate primary and secondary ridgelines when viewed from lower areas of the public realm such as the roads and population centres in this area.*
>
> ***Prominent Ridgelines:** 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). In this upland environment of the Slieveardagh Hills, nearly all ridgelines are primary when viewed from the lowland areas. 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. Therefore, the main concern for the natural linear features formed by the ridgelines of the Slieveardagh Hills is to avoid penetration by development that will interrupt and reduce the integrity of such elements.*
>
> ***Undulating Topography:** Gently undulating topography is presented within the upland area of this character unit. 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. Furthermore, the dynamic and complex nature of undulating land encloses vistas and helps to provide a realistic scale and visual containment not available in open lands.*

> ***Low Vegetation:*** *Low vegetation, represented in this unit by grassland, moorland and generally low hedgerows, is generally uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas and allowing long distance visibility, and therefore, providing an inability to absorb development.*
>
> ***Shelter Vegetation:*** *Shelter vegetation, represented in certain areas of this unit by coniferous plantations and broadleaved woodlands, provides visual screening, enclosing vistas and helping to provide a visual containment not available in open, low-vegetation lands."*

The LACK describes KK-LCA-F1 as follows:

> *"Although this area is* ***generally perceived as having no significant landscape value*** *(refer to Document 2),* ***the northern hills are perceived as having*** *certain ecological and* ***scenic value****. The zone is also perceived as having development potential."*

The LACK does not identify specific value for KK-LCA-F1. Four Critical Landscape Factors for KK-LCA-F1 are fully considered as part of the impact assessment outlined in *Appendix 14-2: LCA Assessment Tables* and discussed in Section 13.7 for Proposed turbine T7:

> ***Smooth Terrain:*** *Smooth terrain and the generally gentle topography and landform that characterised this landscape character unit, allows vistas over long distances since the planar surface does not break up fore and middle ground. As a result development can have a disproportionate visual impact in such terrain, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed.*
>
> ***Low Vegetation:*** *The grassland, tillage fields and generally low hedgerows of this area provide similar characteristics to smooth terrain in landscape terms, and the two are often interrelated due to soil attributes. Grassland vegetation and tillage crops are usually uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long distance visibility. Existing low hedgerows partially screen the lowest land parcels. Nevertheless, the common low vegetation proves unable to absorb new development.*
>
> ***Undulating topography:*** *Undulating topography is presented at some limited sections of this character unit, providing a physical shielding and visual enclosure of a built form within the low-lying valleys. In these areas, where development does not break the skyline it renders visually unobtrusive of the overall landscape scale.*
>
> ***Shelter Vegetation:*** *Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by the presence of trees that grow on field hedgerows. 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.*

The KKCDP indicates that the areas considered acceptable for development generally correspond to the enclosed upland areas of the county. In this sense, the Slieveardagh Hills are generally perceived as being suitable for development, particularly the southern areas of this unit. The upland enclosures are largely considered acceptable for absorbing infrastructure, wind energy, quarrying and forestry-type projects.

Figure 9.2 of the KKCDP also maps the urban area KC – Kilkenny City. As the Proposed Development is located 19km away, the potential for significant effects on its landscape character is not deemed to arise. Notwithstanding, the settlement of Kilkenny City is fully considered as a visual receptor in Section 14.5. It is not deemed necessary to include an impact assessment for the urban environs of Kilkenny City in terms of landscape character.

14.4.1.3.2 Kilkenny Visual Amenity Value Areas – River Nore and Valley

KK-LCA-H: Nore Valley (South) corresponds with one part of the larger land area in Kilkenny designated as having 'Highly Scenic and Significant Visual Amenity Value'. The full land area includes Brandon Hills in the south of Co. Kilkenny and other river valleys (Barrow, Suir), which are outside the LCA Study Area. Section 9.2.12.4 of the KKCDP notes that:

> *"...the special landscape value of several of the Landscape Character Areas illustrated in Figure 9.2 – in particular Brandon Hill Uplands and the **River Valley Areas** of the **Rivers Nore**, Barrow and Suir have been identified as being highly scenic and visually pleasing, and as having significant visual amenity value and tourism potential within the county."*

The Proposed turbines are not located within the high-value landscape of KK-LCA-H; however, they are located approximately 1km from the Nore Valley at its closest point. In addition, the proposed underground grid route is to cross the River Nore to reach the Ballyragget 110kV substation as it travels from the onsite 38kV Substation to the east along the N77 National Road. Therefore, this LVIA focuses on landscape effects particularly for Nore Valley (South) and for the River Nore.

The KKCDP Section 8.2.1.3 states the importance of the River Nore for recreational value in local policy:

> *"The River Nore is the principal river flowing through Kilkenny City, and together with the River Breagagh and River Pococke, offer significant opportunities for recreational opportunities both water and landside, including an interconnecting network of routes for walking and cycling which also provide access for watersports such as swimming, angling, boating, kayaking and nature trails amongst others. Routes along the river have the potential to connect to other trails – such as walking, cycling and driving trails in the county and routes along the River Nore have been extended out of Kilkenny city to link with routes in the countryside".*

It is also stated in KKCDP Section 8.4.1.1 that the River Nore is an important heritage asset:

> *"The setting of Kilkenny city in the Nore River Valley provides an opportunity for establishing open spaces and networks of open spaces of strategic value and importance within the city. During the formulation of the Kilkenny Heritage Plan, the River Nore was identified as one of the county's most important heritage resources. The river encompasses built, natural and cultural heritage; is strongly identified with, and has had a very significant influence on, the life and development of the county".*

14.4.1.3.3 Kilkenny Sensitive Landscapes and Features

The KKCDP provides a description of general landscape sensitivity for the entire county:

> *"In general areas of elevated topography, with low growing or sparse vegetation and little existing development are landscapes of high sensitivity and have a low potential to absorb new development".*

It is noted that the Proposed Development is located in a general area of elevated topography, referred to as Seskin hill in this LVIA, though it is not officially named. However, the area is small and spatially enclosed and features large amounts of mature boundary vegetation; moreover, the area is subject to existing wind farm development within 5km (Lisdowney Wind Farm, see Section 14.6). It can therefore be determined that the criteria for high sensitivity in general does not fully align with the site of the Proposed Wind Farm.

In terms of LCAs, Section 9.2.12.5 of the KKCDP defines the sensitivity of LCAs as:

> *"...its overall resilience to sustain its character in the face of change and its ability to recover from loss or damage to its components."*

The LACK identifies *"areas throughout the county that are highly sensitive to development and have a limited capacity for change."* These areas:

> *"...take account of areas of higher altitude in the county and of land cover. In general areas of elevated topography, with low growing or sparse vegetation and little existing development are landscapes of high sensitivity and have a low potential to absorb new development."*

Section 5 of the LACK establishes five sensitivity classifications assigned to LCAs:

- Class 1 – Degraded (areas characterised by breakdown of natural process/pollution),
- Class 2 – Robust (areas of existing development and infrastructure. New development reinforces existing desirable land use patterns),
- Class 3 – Normal (common character type with a potential to absorb a wide range of new developments),
- Class 4 – Sensitive (distinctive character with some capacity to absorb a limited range of appropriate new developments while sustaining its existing character),
- Class 5 – Vulnerable (very distinctive features with a very low capacity to absorb new development without significant alterations of existing character over an extended area).

The Proposed Wind Farm is comprised primarily of pasture lands and is therefore considered **Class 3 – Normal sensitivity**. Section 5.4 of the LACK defines 'Pasture Lands' as 'Normal Landscapes', and describes them as:

> *"These tend to be confined to low lying or gently undulating areas where conditions are relatively fertile and therefore suitable to support tall vegetation, which could screen and therefore absorb development. The vegetation is often in the form of small copses of trees or mature hedgerows which sub-divide fields."*

Section 4.2.2 of Appendix K of the KKCDP notes that the highest landscape sensitivity arises from a combination of *"elevated steep-sided ridgelines, slopes in excess of 10% and altitudes in excess of 200m"* and further states:

> *"In some areas, where sensitivity arises because of altitude or steepness, a closer focus on features will reveal that the most sensitive area may be the environs of a prominent ridge line, or visibility from a main settlement."*

Sensitive landscape features are mapped in the KKCDP Chapter 9: Heritage Fig.9.3 and LACK Map.14 (reproduced below in Figure 14-4), indicating that no highly sensitive features are within the approximate location of the Proposed Development.

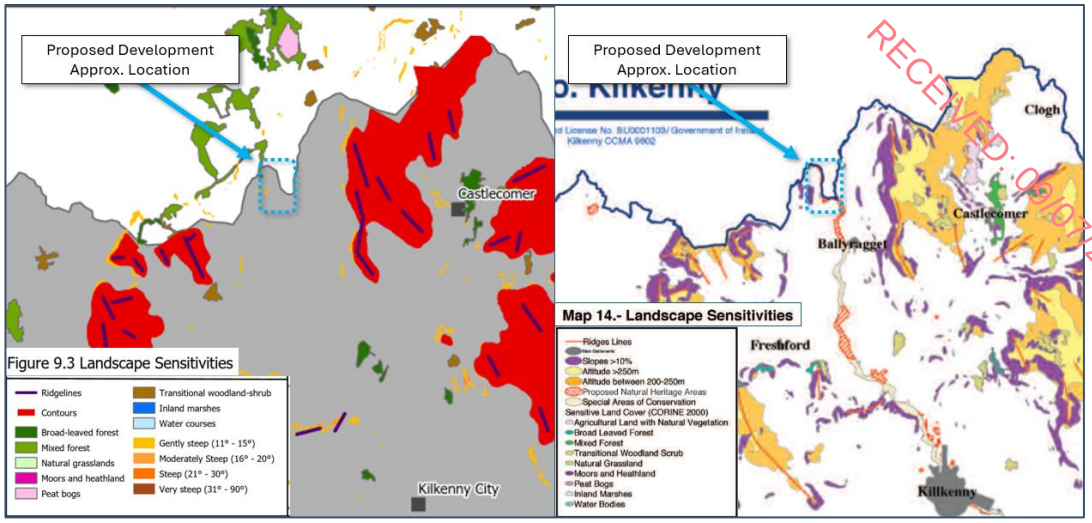


Figure 14-4 KKCDP 2021-2027 extracted maps of Landscape Sensitivity modified, with location of Proposed Development

Section 4.2.2 of the KKCDP notes that:

> *"The mapping of the sensitivity of these areas and features* ***should not be viewed as a prohibition on development****, however the visual impact of any large-scale wind energy development in proximity to these features of sensitivity needs to be addressed in a Landscape Impact Assessment report."*

From an LVIA perspective, the elevated landforms and ridgelines enclosing the Proposed Wind Farm to the east and west are advantageous for reducing the visual exposure of the Proposed Wind Farm from a large proportion of the LVIA Study Area. This LVIA recognises the designations of the ridgelines, and these are thoroughly assessed in Section 14.7.

14.4.1.3.4 Laois LCAs and LCA Policy Objectives

Appendix 6 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021–2027 (LCDP) forms the Landscape Character Assessment for Co. Laois. Section 11.10, Map 11.7 of the LCDP identifies 6 no. Landscape Character Areas reflecting general landscape types that occur throughout the county, called Type 1 through Type 6. These prefixed here with 'L-LCA' for clarity:

- L-LCA-1: Mountains, Hills and Uplands,
- L-LCA-2: Lowland Agricultural Areas,
- L-LCA-3: River Corridors and Lakes,
- L-LCA-4: Peatlands,
- L-LCA-5: Urban Fringe Areas,
- L-LCA-6: Rolling Hills.

Of these, 2 no. Proposed turbines (T1, T2) of the Proposed Development are located within L-LCA-1 Mountain, Hills and Upland Areas, and all LCAs occur within the 15km LCA Study Area. It is noted that L-LCA-3 River Corridors and Lakes comprises linear map features following river corridors and does not comprise a geographical land area boundary suitable for assessment, thus L-LCA-3 is not included in the LCA preliminary analysis in Section 14.4.5.3 below.

Within the LCDP (Vol.1, p.278), L-LCA-1 is divided among two sensitivity classification descriptions: Hills and Upland Areas are classified as 'Medium' sensitivity with the description of *'areas with the capacity to accommodate a range of uses without significant adverse effects on the appearance or character of the landscape having regards to localised sensitivity factors'.*

'Mountains Areas' are classified as 'High' sensitivity with the description of '*Areas with reduced capacity to accommodate uses without significant adverse effects on the appearance or character of the landscape having regard to prevalent sensitivity factors or special sensitivity factors'*. However, the landscape where 2 no. Proposed turbines are sited aligns with 'Hills and Upland Areas' of the LCA and can therefore be considered to have Medium landscape sensitivity.

Section 11.10 of the LCDP provides four policy objectives for LCAs of Co. Laois primarily regarding land areas of high sensitivity:

> *'**Objective LCA 1:** Ensure that consideration of landscape sensitivity, as indicated in Table11.6 of the Plan, is an important factor in determining development uses in areas of high landscape sensitivity, the design, type and the choice of location of proposed development in the landscape will also be critical considerations.*
>
> ***Objective LCA 2:** Protect and enhance the county's landscape, by ensuring that development retains, protects and, where necessary, enhances the appearance and character of the existing local landscape and conserve valuable habitat including any European and National Designations.*
>
> ***Objective LCA 3:** Seek to ensure that local landscape features, including historic features and buildings, hedgerows, shelter belts and stonewalls, are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development.*
>
> ***Objective LCA 4:** Seek to minimise the individual and cumulative adverse visual impacts that local concentrations of one-off housing, outside of settlements, may have on Hills and Upland, River Corridor and Lakes and Mountain landscape character areas or High Sensitivity areas. In this regard, in locations where the Council considers that there is a risk of individual or cumulative adverse impacts, the Council will only consider proposals for housing developments where a need for the dwelling has been demonstrated in accordance with the criteria contained in the Rural Housing Policy contained in Chapter 4.*

It is noted that the 'Hills and Uplands' area of LCA-1 in which the 2 no. Proposed turbines are sited in Co. Laois is 'Medium' sensitivity and therefore the above policy objectives are not primarily focused on the land area of the Proposed Development; however, these policy objectives have been given due consideration in the LVIA.

14.4.1.4 Wind Energy Strategies

The Wind Energy Strategy designations for Co. Kilkenny and Co. Laois identified within the 20km LVIA Study Area are mapped below in Figure 14-5. The KKCDP Section 11 Renewable Energy and KKCDP Appendix K form the Wind Energy Strategy for Co. Kilkenny (hereafter, Kilkenny WES), identifying three classes of suitability for wind energy development: Acceptable in Principle, Open to Consideration and Not Normally Permissible. 6 no. Proposed turbines in Kilkenny (T3-T8) are sited within a land area classed as **'Open for Consideration'** and is designated as having *'normal sensitivity'*.

The LCDP Appendix 5 forms the Wind Energy Strategy for Co. Laois (hereafter, Laois WES), identifying three classes of suitability: Not Open for Consideration, Open for Consideration and Preferred Areas. 2 no. Proposed turbines within Laois (T1, T2) are sited in a land area classed as '**Not Open for Consideration'** though the corresponding LCA (L-LCA-1) is designated as having '*medium sensitivity'* and:

> *'...has areas with **the capacity to accommodate a range of uses without significant adverse effect**s on the appearance or character of the landscape having regards to localised sensitivity factors'.*

Kilkenny Wind Energy Strategy (Kilkenny WES). As outlined in Section 2.4.4 of Chapter 2: Climate Change, the Kilkenny WES is subject to a draft ministerial direction. As the previous County Development Plan has expired, the policies and wind strategy areas named above have not come in effect. At the time of writing this LVIA, there has been no update on the ministerial direction, thus the Proposed Development has been assessed in line with the adopted KKCDP and Kilkenny WES.

The KKCDP Section 11.5.2 states:

> *"A wind energy strategy has been developed for this plan building on the strategies from previous development plans and having regard to Government policy generally and the Draft Revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines."*

The KKCDP states that both quantitative and qualitative factors are used to estimate the potential for impact of wind energy developments on the landscape in accordance with the DoEHLG 2006 Guidelines and Draft 2019 Guidelines, these are:

- *"Landscape sensitivity (ranging from very low sensitivity to very high sensitivity)*
- *Visual presence of the wind energy development (ranging from minimal presence to highly dominant)*
- *Aesthetic impact of the wind energy development on its landscape context (ranging from major positive impact to major adverse impact)*
- *Significance of the impact (ranging from insignificant to major)".*

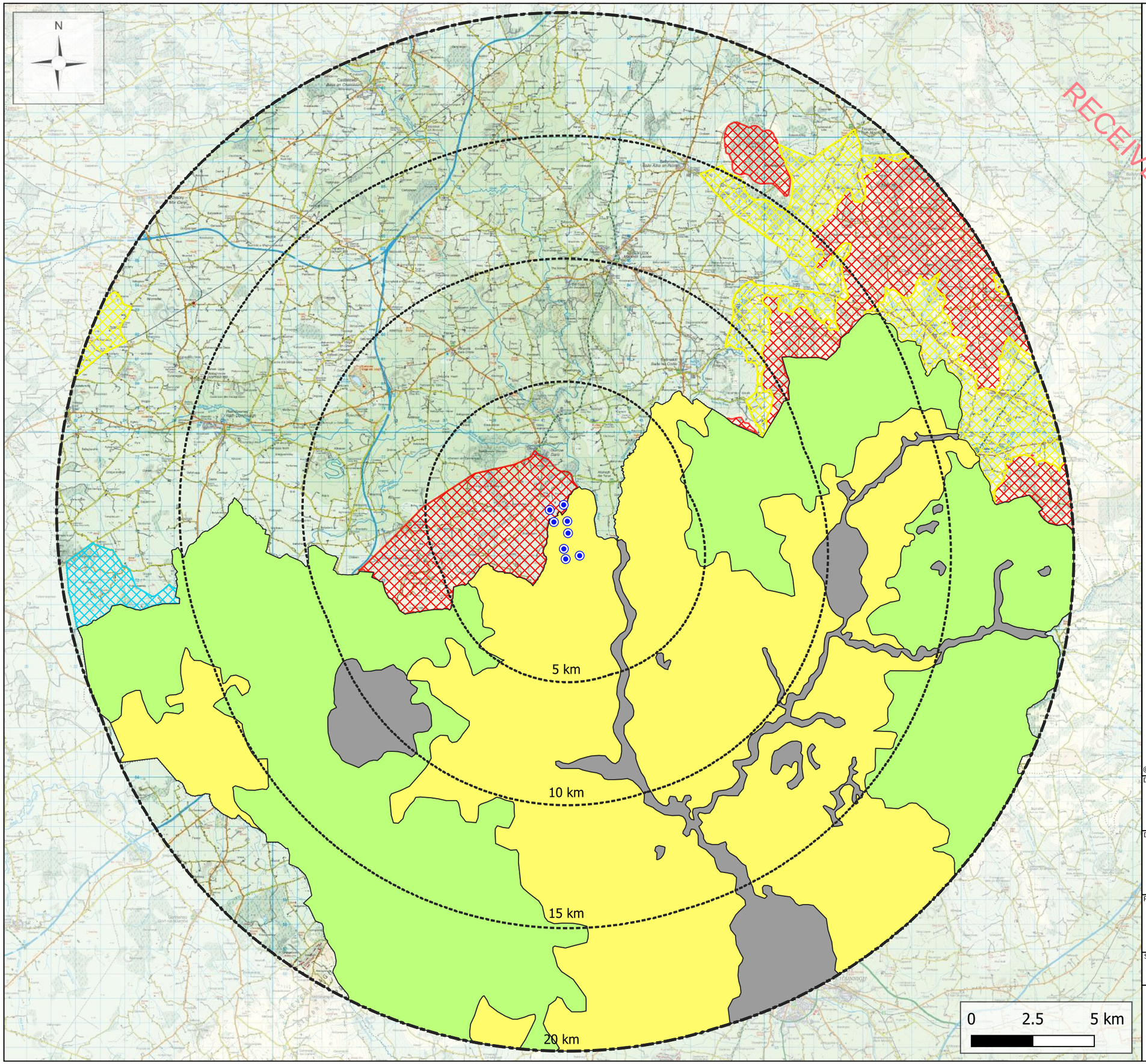
The Kilkenny WES defines ***'Open to Consideration'*** land areas as:

> *"...characterised by no significant conflict with environmental designations or sensitivities."*

The KKCDP 2021-2027 does however state that:

> *"Large-Scale Wind Energy Developments (>5MW) will, in usual circumstances, only be considered in 'Acceptable in principle' areas. The rationale behind this policy is to minimise the visual impacts of such large-scale developments, in addition to effects on the environment of County Kilkenny as a whole, as well as to facilitate appropriate grid connections. These will be assessed in accordance with the Wind Energy Development Guidelines".*

The Proposed Development will be greater than 5MW is in an area that is 'Open to Consideration' but is an area that is extremely suitable for wind energy development as it is a modified working landscape with no sensitive features or values. The Proposed Development also follows the DoEHLG 2006 Guidelines and Draft 2019 Guidelines and facilitates the appropriate grid connection. Rationale has been later provided highlighting the visual effects of the Proposed Development on the LVIA Study Area in Section 14.7.3.2.1.



Map Legend

- LVIA Study Area
- Proposed Turbine Layout

Co. Kilkenny Wind Energy Strategy (KKCDP 21-27)

- Acceptable in Principle
- Not Normally Permissible
- Open for Consideration

Co. Laois Wind Energy Strategy (LCDP 21-27)

- Areas Not Open for Consideration
- Areas Open for Consideration
- Preferred Areas

Drawing No.

Figure 14-5

Drawing Title

Wind Energy Strategy Map

Project Title

Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Scale	Project No.	Date	Drawn By	Checked By
1:150,000	231103	01.04.2025	JC	JW

Laois Wind Energy Strategy (Laois WES). The Laois WES designates areas as ***"Not Open to Consideration"*** for the following reasons:

> *"These are areas identified as particularly unsuitable for windfarm development. This category is used for areas which due to their scenic, ecological or tourism values are unable to accommodate development of this type."*

The land area boundary of *"Not Open to Consideration"* in which Proposed turbines T1 and T2 are sited contains Cullahill Mountain at its southeastern-most end, identified in the Laois WES as one key area recommended for inclusion in this category for its *'major tourism potential'*. T1 and T2 are located approximately 6km north-east of Cullahill Mountain, at the farthest north-eastern point of the land area (see Figure 14-6 below).

A key objective of this LVIA was therefore to determine to what extent does the location of the Proposed turbines in this area potentially impact upon the scenic and landscape amenity provided by Cullahill Mountain and its tourism potential as according to the Laois WES designation.

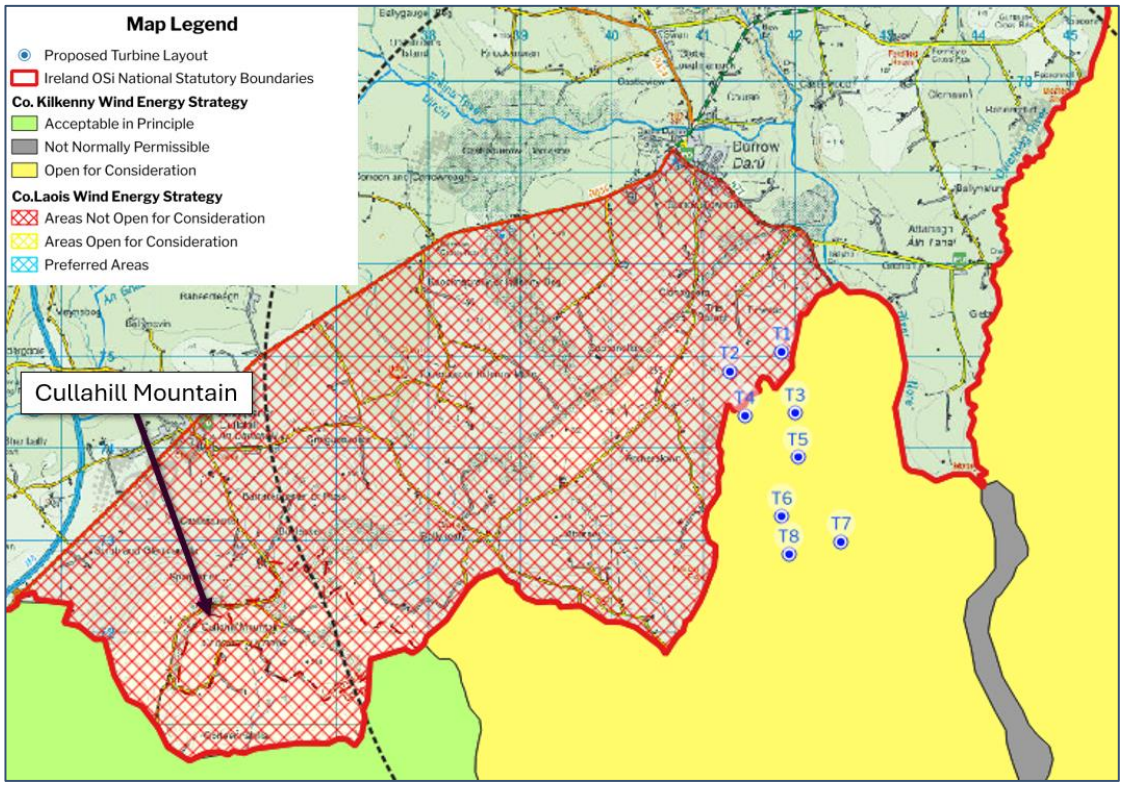


Figure 14-6: Extraction of WES map in Fig.14-5 showing proximity of Cullahill Mountain in Co. Laois

The Laois WES states that strategic areas for wind farming are:

> *'Areas deemed eminently suitable for windfarm development and reserved for such purposes. Applies to useable areas that have economically viable wind speeds, have no designations, are sparsely populated, are in close proximity to a grid connection and have the ability to absorb wind development'.*

It is then stated that, ***'It is considered that there are no such areas in County Laois'.***

The area where T1 and T2 are proposed is designated as an area *'Not Open for Consideration'* because of Cullahill Mountain which is said to be a location of '*scenic, ecological or tourism values'*. It is later discussed in this LVIA (Section 14.7.3.1.6) that Cullahill Mountain and its surrounding areas will

have little to no visibility of the Proposed Development and there will be no significant effects arising as a result of the Proposed Development.

Additionally, in the Kilkenny WES, the delineation of the strategy area borders is primarily driven by wind speed data rather than landscape considerations. This is evidenced by the consistent landscape character across the Proposed Wind Farm and the varying wind speeds, as discussed in the Kilkenny WES Section 4.1. As Proposed turbines T1 and T2 in Co. Laois are sited within the same landscape as T3-T8, it stands to reason that wind speeds are favourable for T1 and T2.

In terms of visual impact, the Kilkenny WES states that *"the rationale behind this policy is to minimize the visual impacts of such large-scale developments."* As discussed in this LVIA in Section 14.5 Visual Baseline and Section 14.7.3.2 Visual Effects during Operation, the turbines within the Proposed Wind Farm are not likely to give rise to significant visual effects, thereby aligning with the wind energy policy's intent. This reinforces the appropriateness of the Proposed Wind Farm's location.

Overall, the physical landscape character of the Proposed Wind Farm is consistent across the two different area designations in the Kilkenny WES and Laois WES, characterised as a modified agricultural landscape of low sensitivity. This consistency reflects the absence of sensitive landscape features, supporting the suitability of the Site for wind energy development. The Proposed Wind Farm being situated within a landscape of low sensitivity aligns with the DoEHLG 2006 Guidelines and Draft 2019 Guidelines.

14.4.1.5 Kilkenny Archaeological Landscapes

Section 9.3 of the KKCDP defines an archaeological landscape as:

> *'...a natural landscape that has been deliberately modified by a group (or groups) of people during a particular archaeological period (or periods). It provides context and meaning to individual archaeological sites and helps us to understand how our ancestors lived. Such landscapes have the potential to be of cultural, economic, social and/or environmental value.'*

The KKCDP identified a number of potential archaeological landscape sites, including three sites which were selected as a priority for protection: Freestone Hill and environs; the Lingaun River Valley– specifically the megalithic monuments within it and the relationships between them; Tory Hill and environs. None of these archaeological landscapes are located within 20km of the Proposed turbines.

14.4.2 Landscape Character of the Site

'Landscape character' in this case refers to the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and how people perceive that pattern. It reflects combinations of geology, human settlement, land use, landform, soils and vegetation, and creates the sense of place found in an area.

This section describes the localised landscape character of the Proposed Wind Farm and its associated Proposed Grid Connection Route, based on site visit findings from 2023 and 2024 where appraisal of the following was conducted:

- Landcover and land use;
- Landform and drainage;
- Views from the Proposed Wind Farm;
- Character and setting of the onsite substation, and Proposed Grid Connection Route.

Drone images supporting the discussion of this section are useful visual aids to provide context of the scale and characteristics of the Proposed Wind Farm within its landscape setting.

14.4.2.1 Landcover and Land Use

The landcover and land use of the Proposed Wind Farm can be seen in the aerial satellite imagery in the figure below. The Proposed Wind Farm and surrounding area is a modified working landscape comprising a patchwork of agricultural fields used as grazing pasture and delineated by mature hedgerows.

The Proposed turbines and hardstands are sited on grassland areas for grazing livestock and farming. Within the EIAR Site Boundary, ground-level infrastructure and the onsite 38kV substation will be visible yet with a degree of visual screening by mature hedgerows. As shown in the plates below, there are existing tracks throughout the Site used for accessing agricultural operations. All Proposed turbines are located in agricultural fields; the images below show that whilst the Site is rural and largely remote in character, it has undergone a degree of human modification from agricultural uses.

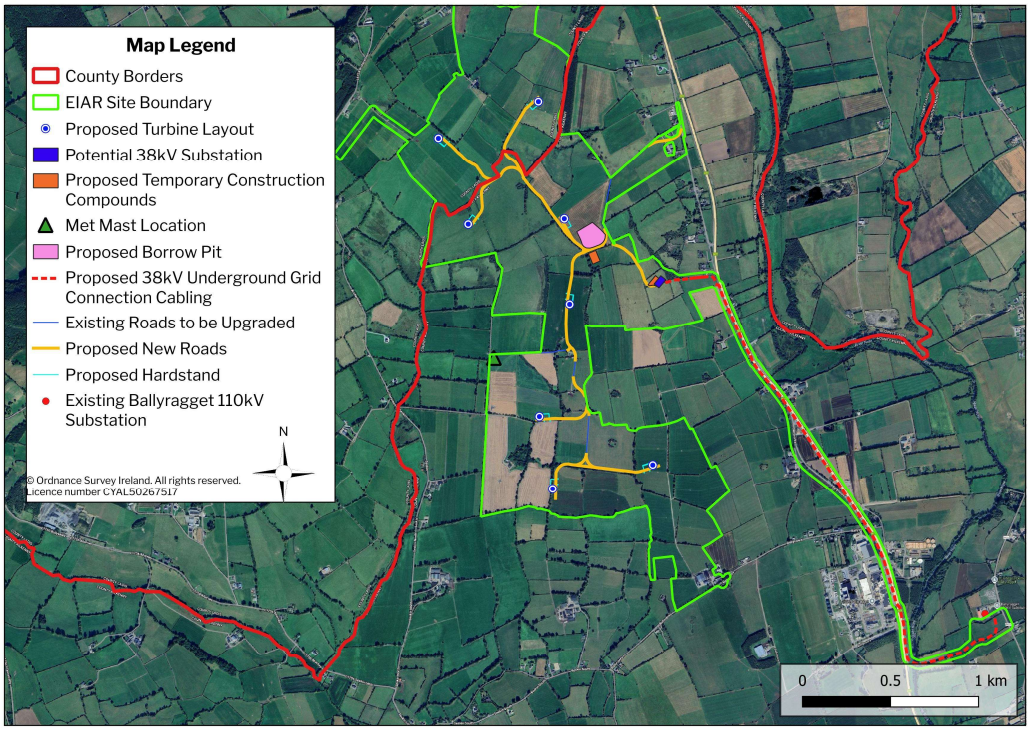


Figure 14-7 Aerial Image of Proposed Wind Farm and Infrastructure Footprint

Plate 14-4 Example of existing track used for accessing agricultural operations to the east of T3 location

Plate 14-5 Existing track leading into the field where T4 is located

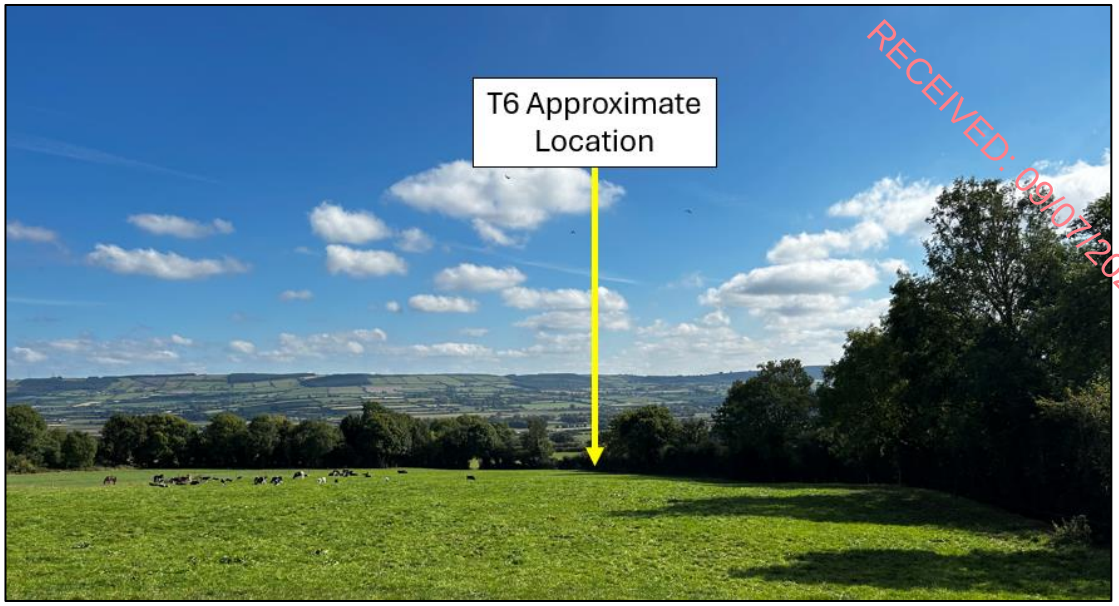


Plate 14-6 T6 location in agricultural field used for livestock

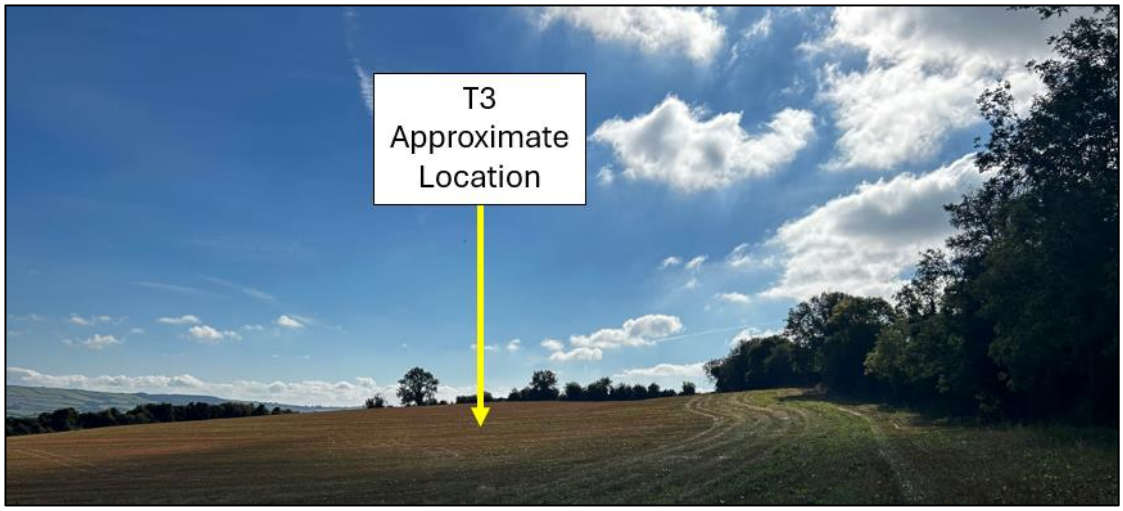


Plate 14-7 T3 location in agricultural field used for crops

14.4.2.2 Landform and Drainage

In relation to the surrounding landscape within the LVIA Study Area, the Proposed Wind Farm is slightly elevated on Seskin hill. There is a difference in the base elevations of where the Proposed turbines are sited; T7 has the lowest base elevation of 95m AOD while T2 has the highest base elevation of 174m AOD. The topography of the Site and its setting within 2km is shown in the topography map below. Visibility appraisals and photomontage visualisations show that the elevated feature of Seskin hill on which the turbines are sited will act as a screening element from the west.

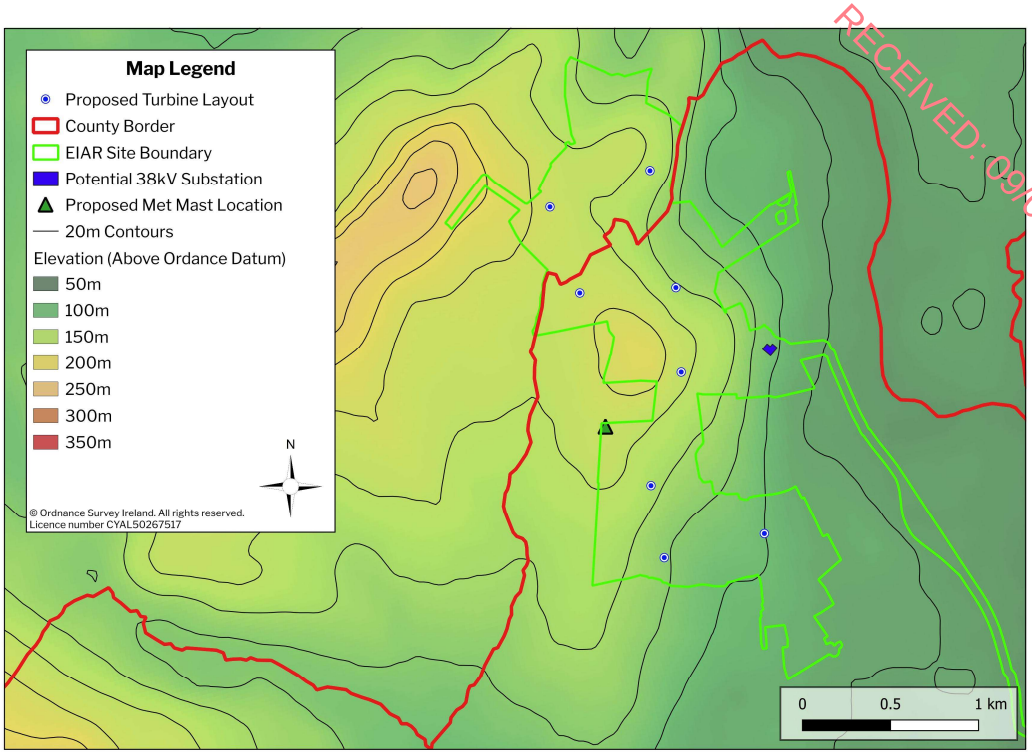


Figure 14-8: Topography of the Proposed Wind Farm

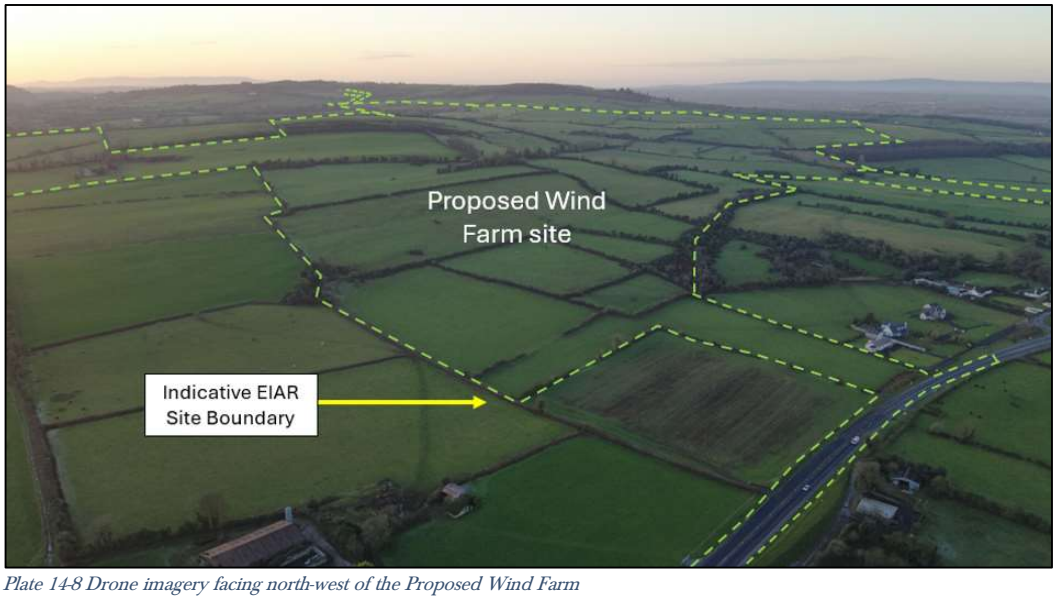


Plate 14-8 Drone imagery facing north-west of the Proposed Wind Farm

The map and annotated drone imagery above illustrate that the highest point within the Site primarily slopes downwards from Capponellan ridge east to west. The elevated part of Seskin hill also slopes slightly downwards in other directions, but the steepest side is depicted in the imagery below. As shown by the drone image below, Seskin hill is elevated compared to the lowlands where the N77 National Road is located, east of the Proposed Development. The landform is gently undulating and features topographic variation, with the Nore valley located east of the Site. The plate below provides a view showing nearly the entire extent of the EIAR Site Boundary.

The Site is located to the west of the River Nore which flows from north to south. As shown by the drone imagery, the Site itself comprises agricultural pastures and field boundary vegetation and drainage follows into the valley where the River Nore is located.

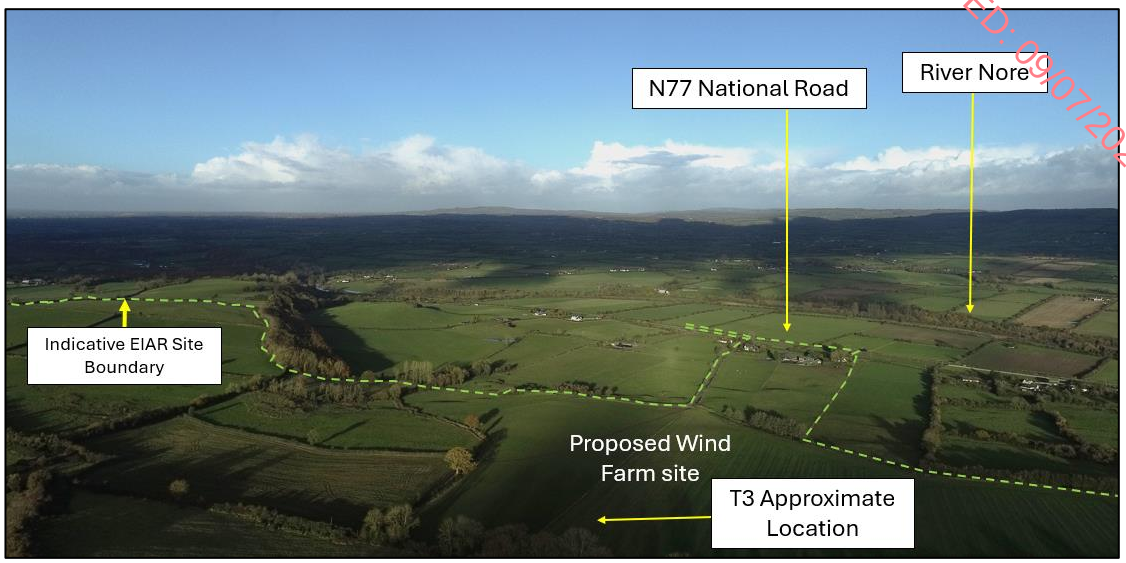


Plate 14-9 Drone imagery facing east from within the Proposed Wind Farm site

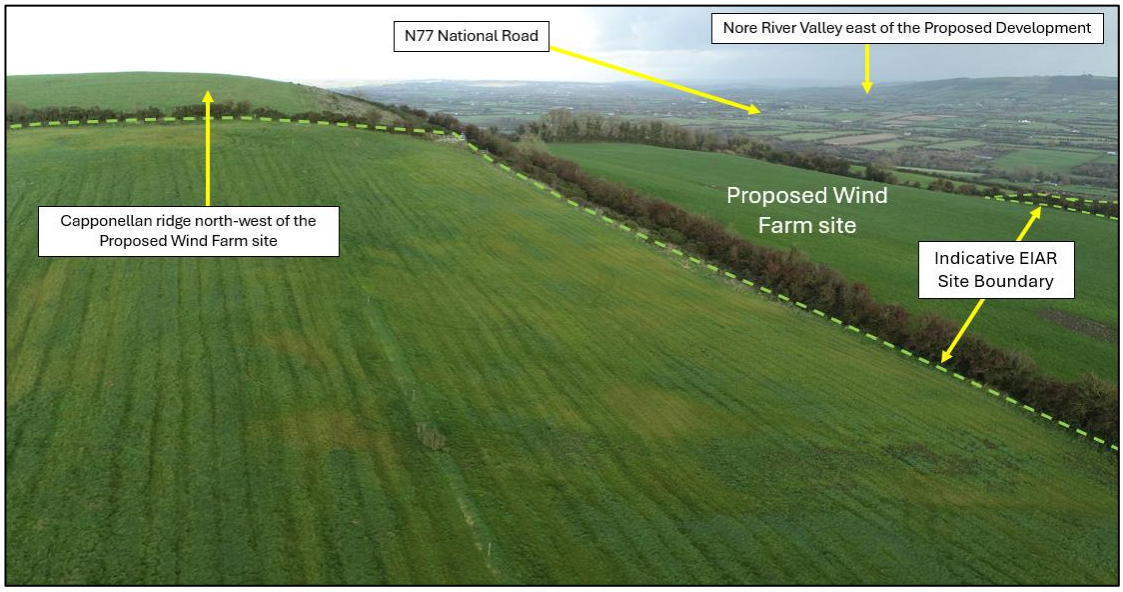


Plate 14-10 Drone imagery showing Capponellan ridge sloping downwards east to west

In general, the Site drains towards the River Nore to the east. A small stream was noted south of the location of Proposed turbine T6. The stream is located between the locations of T6 and T8. Additional minor drainage ditches and watercourses run through the Proposed Wind Farm along field boundaries as seen in the drone imagery.

Plate 14-11 Seepage spring and small stream between T6 and T8 locations

The drone imagery illustrates how the Site slopes gently from west to east and that the elevated western side of the Site comprises Capponella ridge which is not a highly prominent ridgeline. Strategic siting of the Proposed turbines inset to the east of this elevated landform limits visibility in the LVIA Study Area, especially beyond Cullahill Mountain and Knockmannon Hill to the south-west and beyond Ballynalacken Hill to the east.

This strategic siting is also used to limit the visibility from residential receptors in close proximity surrounding the Site as areas of high and low elevation intermittently screen views. This strategic siting minimises the potential for significant visual impacts on many residential receptors in the surrounding landscape. The full assessment of effects on residential visual amenity is reported in Section 14.7.3.2.7.

The plate imagery below shows that the elevation of the Site changes with some areas gently undulating and others being quite steep. The southern portion of the Site has the lowest point in elevation and gently slopes down to the east towards the N77.

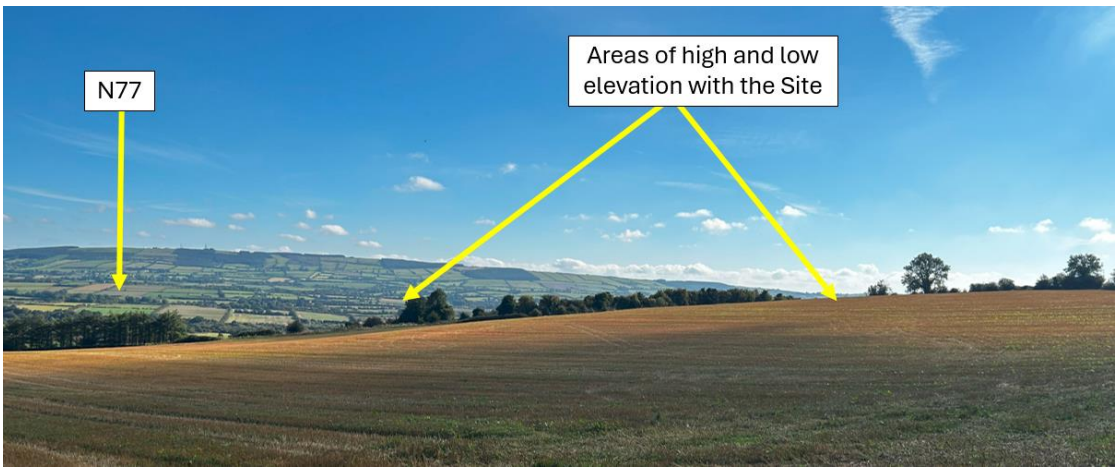


Plate 14-12 Areas of higher and lower elevations as seen from T3 location

Plate 14-13 Image facing north from T3 location

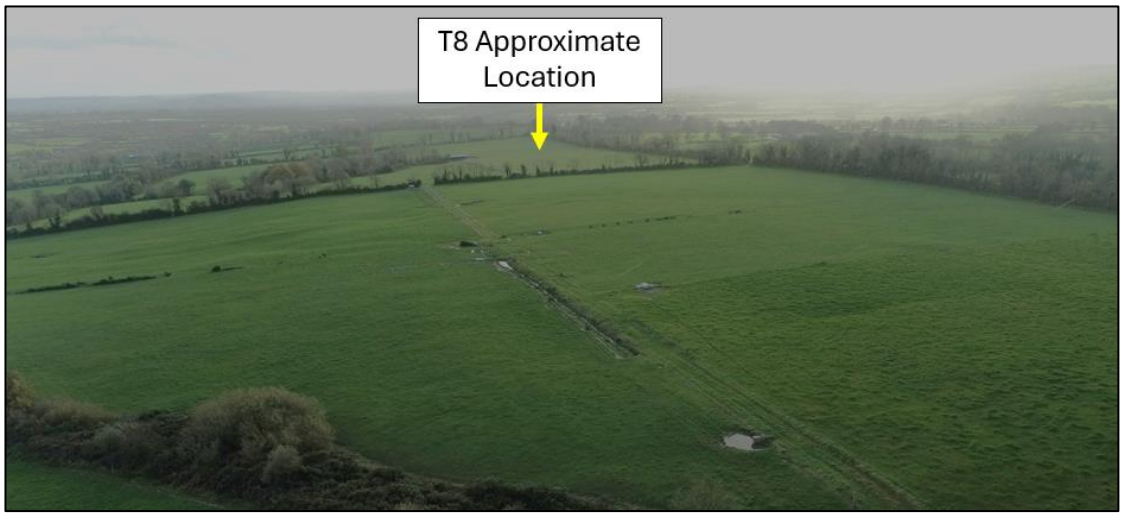


Plate 14-14 Drone imagery showing the gently sloping southern area of the site

14.4.2.3 Views from the Proposed Wind Farm

From within the Proposed Development Site, long-ranging views occur to the east as there is a decline in elevation towards the N77 National Road. Mature boundary vegetation intermittently screens these views. Landscape views to the west are generally restricted due to the elevated Capponella ridge landform to the north-west of the Site; however, long-ranging views occur to the north and south.

Plate 14-15 Long-ranging view from T3 location facing east towards the distant Castlecomer Plateau

The most open and long-ranging views within the Site are directed to the east across the Nore River Valley towards Ballynalacken Hill (6km) and the Castlecomer Plateau in the distance (15-20km). These

broad views generally consist of agricultural fields and scattered, small settlements and individual residences.

Plate 14-16 Long-ranging view from T5 location facing southeast towards the distant foothills of Blackstairs Mountains

The southern section of the Proposed Development has lower elevation and is surrounded by vegetation and there will be no views to the wider landscape. An example of this view from the location of Proposed turbine T5 looking up towards the small-scale Seskin hill in the centre of the Site is shown in the plate below.

Plate 14-17 Views from T6 location facing small-scale Seskin hill in the centre of the Site

From the northern section of the Site, some long-ranging views are directed south-west as shown the plate below. This view is a gently undulating landscape with mature boundary vegetation providing some visual screening by mature boundary vegetation. This view faces the existing Lisdowney Wind Farm (4 turbines) which can be seen in the background of the image.

Plate 14-18 Views to the west from T4 location towards existing Lisdowney Wind Farm

14.4.2.4 Proposed Onsite 38kV Substation, and Grid Connection Route

Plate 14-19 below presents drone imagery of the Proposed Wind Farm facing north-west from the south-east of the Proposed Development. In the image, the N77 National Road can be seen, which the track of the Proposed Grid Connection will follow from south to north. The imagery indicates the extent of agricultural land in the area. The Nore River, which is adjacent to the N77, is located off the right of the image (not pictured).

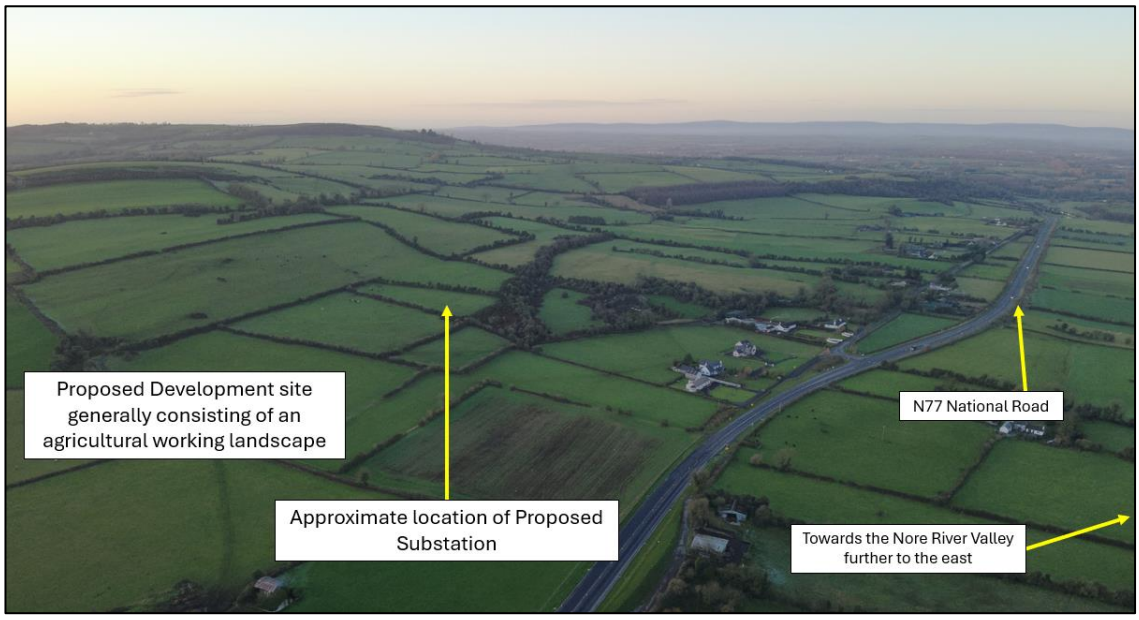


Plate 14-19 Proposed Wind Farm and locations of Proposed Substation.

The approximate locations of the proposed onsite 38kV substation are to the east of the centre of the Site, approximately 300m to the west of the N77 National Road, about 500m east of T5 and 665m south-east of T3. The image below was taken beside the location of T5 overlooking the agricultural field where the proposed substation will be located and shows that the surrounding areas comprise agricultural fields with residential properties located further east towards the N77. The plate imagery show that the Proposed Substation is surrounded by mature boundary vegetation.

Due to its position on the elevated landform of Seskin hill, there is potential for visual impact of the proposed substation from visual receptors to the east in lower parts of the Nore Valley and south along

the N77, a comprehensive assessment of the effects of the proposed substation including graphic visualisations are included below in Section 14.7 Likely Significant Landscape and Visual Effects.

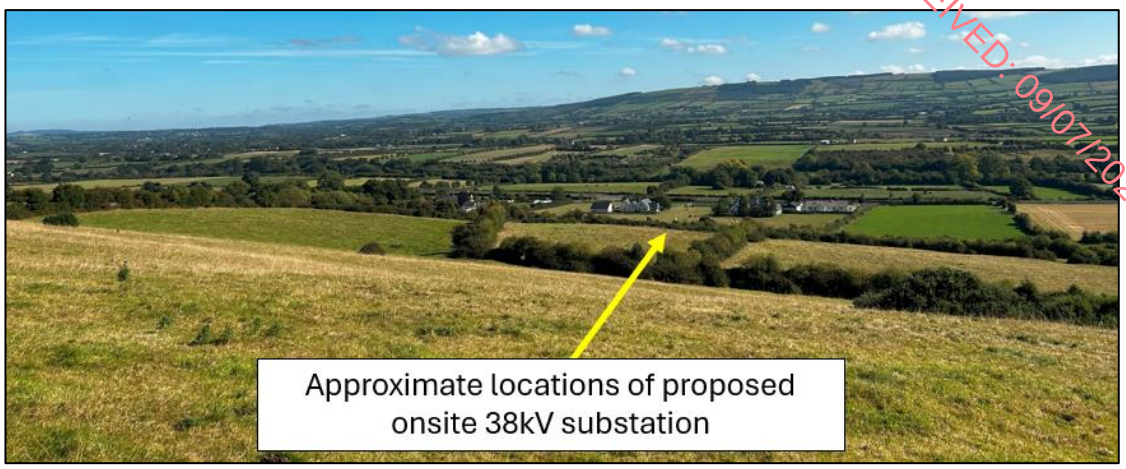


Plate 14-20 View looking down from Seskin hill towards the locations of the Proposed Substation

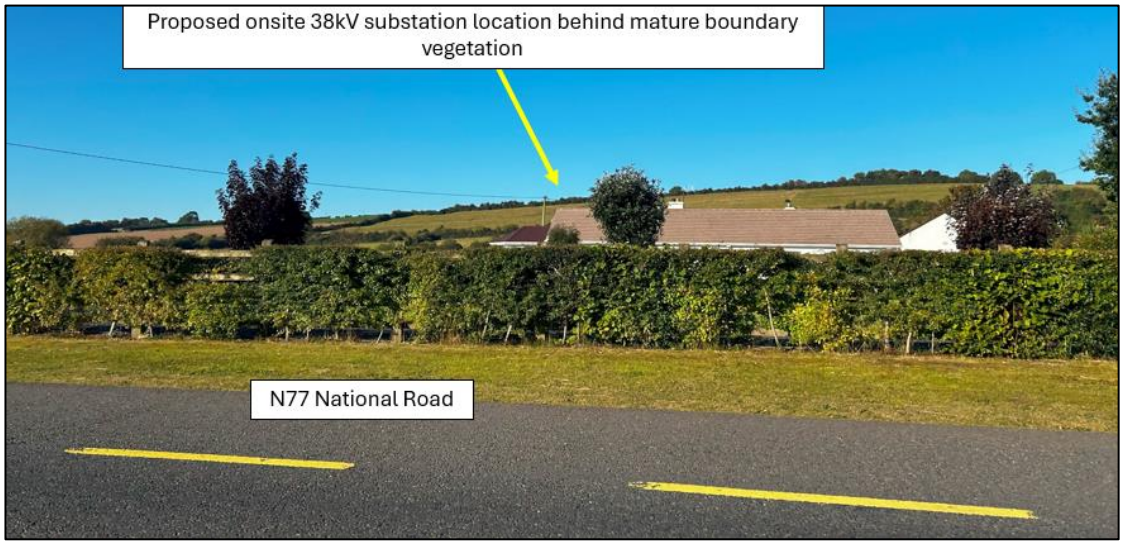


Plate 14-21 View from N77 National Road indicating the location of Proposed Substation

Plate 14-22 Image of the existing Ballyragget 110kV substation

The Proposed Grid Connection Route comprises an underground cable and is primarily located within the public road corridor along the N77 National Road. The route is approximately 8.5km and connects to the existing Ballyragget 110kV substation (pictured above) located in the townland of Moatpark, Co Kilkenny.

The underground Proposed Grid Connection Route traverses no other roads but does enter agricultural fields near the location of the proposed 38kV substation and the 110kV Ballyragget substation. The image below shows the route of the Proposed Grid Connection along the N77. The image was captured beside the location of T5 and does not show the entirety of the route.

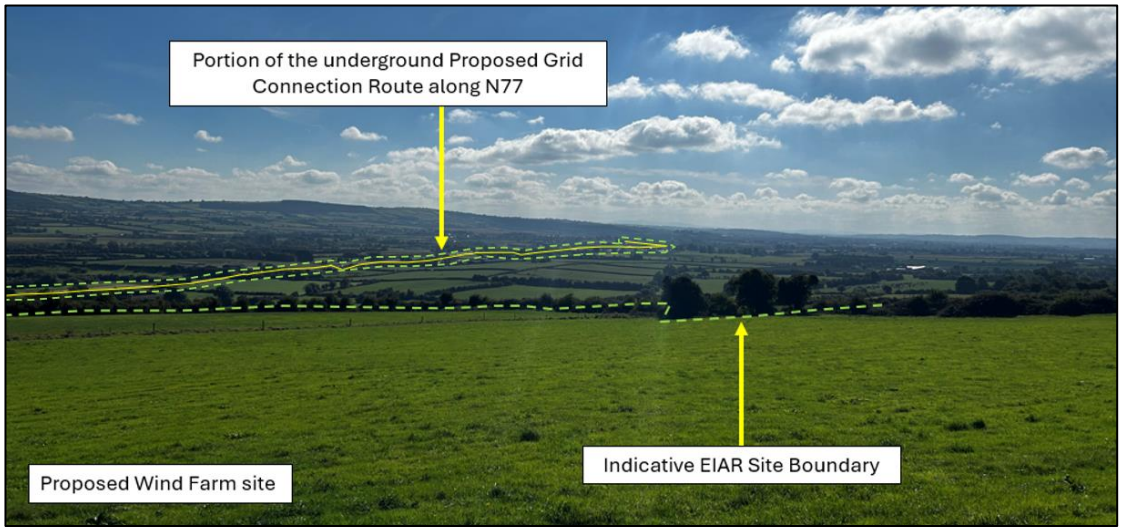


Plate 14-23 View towards the Proposed Grid Connection Route from T5 location

14.4.3 Landscape Sensitivity of the Proposed Wind Farm site

Landscape sensitivity of the Proposed Wind Farm and the wider landscape setting was assessed to establish the capacity of the immediate landscape in which the Proposed Wind Farm will be built, as it is prescribed by best practice guidance (GLVIA3, LI & IEMA, 2013, p.80). Comprehension of the landscape value and its susceptibility to change enables determination of the Sensitivity of the landscape of the Site at a micro level as well as its capacity to absorb the infrastructure of a wind farm development.

The determination of Landscape Value takes into consideration the scenic amenity designations, the landscape sensitivity and value designations found in the local landscape policy as well as other indications of landscape value attached to undesignated landscapes.

Below, Table 14-3 describes the following seven indicators appraised collectively to establish landscape value and susceptibility to change, to inform the overall landscape Sensitivity classification of the Site:

- Landscape designations (LCA setting, Scenic Routes and Views, amenity areas, etc.),
- Quality/condition of landscape elements,
- Scenic/aesthetic qualities,
- Rarity/conversation status,
- Wildness/naturalness,
- Recreational value,
- Cultural meaning/associations.

The Landscape value and susceptibility to change were then considered in forming a landscape sensitivity classification for the Site, of either **Very High**, **High**, **Medium** or **Low**, following criteria

outlined in the full detailed methodology in *Appendix 14-1: LVIA Methodology*.

Table 14-3: Indicators of Landscape Value and Susceptibility to Change

Indicator	Appraisal and Rationale
Landscape Designations	› L-LCA-1: Laois Mountains, Hills and Upland Areas LCA containing Proposed turbines T1, T2; › KK-LCA-A: Kilkenny's Slieveardagh Hills (North) LCA containing T3-T8. › KK-LCA-A3: Kilkennys Slieveardagh Eastern Transition Zone The Hills and Upland Areas of L-LCA-1 are classified as 'Medium' sensitivity with capacity to accommodate a range of uses (e.g. wind energy development) without significant adverse effects on landscape character or appearance (see previous Section 14.4.1) KK-LCA-A is classified as generally having no significant landscape value, though some ecological and scenic value is attributed to the northern hills and are classified as having development potential. No sensitive Co. Kilkenny landscape designations fall within the Proposed Wind Farm itself. KK-LCA-A3 has the lowest sensitivity classification "*Class 1 – Robust" in the LACK* and is the lowest of five sensitivity classes. Within the LACK, the Slieveardagh Transition Area is defined as "*not perceived as being of a special or sensitive nature. Furthermore, A2 and A3 areas are perceived as having high acceptability for potential.* No sensitive Co. Kilkenny landscape designations fall within the Proposed Wind Farm itself.
Landscape Elements Quality/Condition	The landscape of the Proposed Wind Farm is a modified working landscape due to the agricultural land use. The landscape has been modified by artificial drainage, boundary planting, access tracks and agricultural infrastructure.
Scenic/Aesthetic Qualities	The Proposed Wind Farm has some rural aesthetic qualities given the open views of the Nore Valley and its characteristic patchwork of fields and undulating farmland. It is noted that the landscape of the Proposed Wind Farm has clearly been subject to human interference and modification.
Rarity or Conservation Interests	One potentially degraded petrifying spring with tufa formation north-west of the location of Proposed turbine T6 has been identified in the biodiversity assessment; see Chapter 6 Biodiversity of this EIAR. Biodiversity
Wildness/Naturalness	The Proposed Wind Farm is comprised of agricultural land, thus is considered to be modified by human interference. The influence of agriculture around the Proposed Wind Farm has noticeably altered the perceived sense of naturalness or wildness in this landscape.
Recreational Value	The Proposed Wind Farm comprises privately owned land and no known recreational amenities are associated with it.

Indicator	Appraisal and Rationale
Cultural Meaning/ Associations	The Proposed Wind Farm has no known cultural heritage meanings or associations. Two monuments, a ringfort and an enclosure are located within the Proposed Wind Farm, but are not unique and are commonplace features of the rural Irish landscape; see Chapter 13 Cultural Heritage of this EIAR.

Considering the collective appraisal of the indicators detailed above the above table, this LVIA determines the landscape value of the Proposed Wind Farm was deemed to be 'Low' considering the high degree of modification on the land, an absence of any specific landscape receptors of high sensitivity or unique or distinctive characteristics relating to the Proposed Wind Farm site itself. The Site is deemed to have a 'medium' susceptibility to change in mind of the land zoning in local planning policy and the protected scenic amenity designations in close proximity to the Proposed Wind Farm. Overall, the sensitivity of this landscape is deemed to be '**Low'**.

14.4.4 Landscape Character Types from The Wind Energy Development Guidelines

As there is little to no material difference between the DoEHLG 2006 Guidelines and Draft 2019 Guidelines, this LVIA considers the context of the Proposed Development Site based on siting and design guidance in both sets of guidelines, with respect to landscape and visual effects. The appropriate landscape character type defined by the guidance is identified below.

The guidance section called 'Landscape Character Types as a Basis for Guidelines' offers guidance for the siting and design specifically of wind energy developments in multiple landscape contexts, defining six landscape character types representing most situations where wind turbines may be proposed:

- 'Mountain Moorland'
- **'Hilly and Flat Farmland' – category selected for this assessment**
- 'Flat Peatland'
- 'Transitional Marginal Landscape' – category selected by this assessment.
- 'Urban/Industrial'
- 'Coastal'

The guidance is intended to be indicative and general and notes that it represents the 'best fit' solutions to likely situations. The guidelines note that, in the case where a wind energy development is located in one landscape character type but is visible from another, it will be necessary to decide which of the landscape types more strongly influences the approach adopted for the LVIA.

The Landscape Baseline exercise of this LVIA selects the '**Hilly and Flat Farmland** character type as best representative of the landscape in which the Proposed turbines are located. Therefore, the best-practice siting and design strategies prescribed for this landscape character type as defined in the guidance are presented below, to be considered for the Proposed Development.

Overall, the Proposed Development Site and location of the Proposed turbines align with most guidance in relation to siting of turbines. In terms of spacing of the Proposed turbines, they appear as two linear lines of turbines and may appear visually prominent when viewed from the east where there is greatest visibility from the most sensitive receptors.

*"**Location** on ridges and plateaux is preferred, not only to maximise exposure, but also to ensure a reasonable distance from dwellings. Sufficient distance should be maintained from farmsteads, houses and centres of population in order to ensure that wind energy developments do not visually dominate them. Elevated locations are also more likely to achieve optimum aesthetic*

effect. Turbines perceived as being in close proximity to, or overlapping other landscape elements, such as buildings, roads and power or telegraph poles and lines may result in visual clutter and confusion. While in practice this can be tolerated, in highly sensitive landscapes every attempt should be made to avoid it."

***"Spatial Extent** can be expected to be quite limited in response to the scale of fields and such topographic features as hills and knolls. Sufficient distance from buildings, most likely to be critical at lower elevations, must be established in order to avoid dominance by the wind energy development."*

***"Spacing** - The optimum spacing pattern is likely to be regular, responding to the underlying pattern field pattern. The fields comprising the site might provide the structure for spacing of turbines. However, this may not always be the case and a balance will have to be struck between adequate spacing to achieve operability and a correspondence to field pattern. Layout The optimum layout is linear, and staggered linear on ridges (which are elongated) and hilltops (which are peaked), but a clustered layout would also be appropriate on a hilltop. Where a wind energy development is functionally possible on a flat landscape a grid layout would be aesthetically acceptable."*

***"Height** should relate in terms of scale to landscape elements and will therefore tend not to be tall. However, an exception to this would be where they are on a high ridge or hilltop of relatively large scale. The more undulating the topography the greater the acceptability of an uneven profile, provided it does not result in significant visual confusion and conflict".*

***"Cumulative effect** is important that wind energy development is never perceived to visually dominate. However, given that these landscapes comprise hedgerows and often hills, and that views across the landscape will likely be intermittent and partially obscured, visibility of two or more wind energy developments is usually acceptable."*

In terms of location, the Proposed Development Site and immediate surroundings comprising a modified working landscape of patchwork fields and agricultural is not considered highly sensitive. The Proposed turbines are located on ridges and are set-back a reasonable distance from dwellings, adhering to the recommended 4-times-tip-height set-back distance outlined in the Draft 2019 Guidelines. As seen throughout the *Photomontage Booklet*, the Proposed turbines will be visible at a slight elevation, which reduces visual overlap. In terms of spatial extent, the low number of turbines ensures a relatively narrow spatial extent when viewed from distances greater than 1-2km and in close proximity, the sufficient distance from buildings which is critical at lower elevations is achieved through the 4-times-tip-height set-back. In terms of spacing, the Proposed turbines are appropriately spaced responding to the underlying pattern field pattern, appearing in two linear arrays, staggered on sloping hilltops. In terms of height, the Proposed turbines are each sited at a similar height that gives an even profile when viewed in the wider landscape of the Nore Valley. Further, the Nore Valley has undulating topography to the east and west of the site which limits long-ranging views and the potential for visual confusion or conflict.

In terms of cumulative effect, the majority of cumulative developments within the LVIA Study Area are beyond 15km from the site, thereby substantially reducing the potential for cumulative effects. Two cumulative wind farms are within 6km of the Proposed Development Site in opposite directions from the site, thereby effectively providing visual separation: the existing Lisdowney Wind Farm, 4 no. turbines at approx. 5km southwest, and the proposed Ballynalacken Wind Farm, 12 no. turbines at approx. 6km north-east. From the guidance, potential views of two or more wind farms are generally acceptable owing to the nature of the Hilly and Flat Farmland character type featuring hedgerows and undulating hills with the potential to obscure visibility, which is the case for the Proposed Development. Cumulative effects are comprehensively discussed in Section 14.7.3.3 of this LVIA.

14.4.5 Landscape Character of the Wider Setting

This section of the Landscape Baseline provides a description of the wider landscape setting beyond the Proposed Wind Farm Site, including historic landscape characterisation and a preliminary analysis of designated LCAs.

14.4.5.1 Description of the Wider Landscape and Settlements

The landscape surrounding the Proposed Wind Farm is rural and agricultural in nature. It is a sparsely settled landscape with clusters of residential dwellings organised in a linear pattern along the N77 National Road and other local roads to the west and north of the Wind Farm site, while residential dwellings to the south are scattered and sparse.

Across the Nore River Valley to the east of the Site, the broad regional landform of the Castlecomer Plateau is partially included within the LVIA Study Area along the eastern border between 15-20km from the Proposed turbines, visible as a distant, elevated plateau in the imagery below.

Plate 14-24 View east from the Proposed Development Site looking across the Nore River Valley towards the distant Castlecomer Plateau

Plate 14-25 View from N77 National Road facing west towards the Proposed Wind Farm

Two substantial population centres are within 5km of the Proposed Development, Ballyragget and Durrow. These towns comprise patchwork agricultural farmlands around the town centres lined with mature boundary vegetation and the topography features undulations and forested hills. Kilkenny City is located approximately 19km south of the site and will not have significant landscape or visual effects.

Plate 14-26 View from the south-east in Ballyragget overlooking agricultural farmland

Plate 14-27 View from the north outside Durrow overlooking vegetation and hills

14.4.5.2 Historic Landscape Character and Landscape Evolution

The KKCDP Chapter 9 Heritage, Culture and the Arts indicates that local policy places value upon built heritage, including policy objectives focused on the preservation and conservation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protected Areas (SPAs), Archaeological Heritage and landscapes and Historic Landscapes such as heritage graveyards, gardens and designed landscapes. These built heritage receptors are valuable contributors to the cultural character of the wider landscape of the Site. The comprehensive assessment of historic and archaeological landscapes and monuments is detailed in Chapter 13 Cultural Heritage of this EIAR.

14.4.5.3 Preliminary Analysis: Landscape Character Areas (LCAs)

As reported previously, 17 no. designated LCAs were identified in Co. Kilkenny and Co. Laois within the 15km LCA Study Area for assessment of effects on designated LCAs:

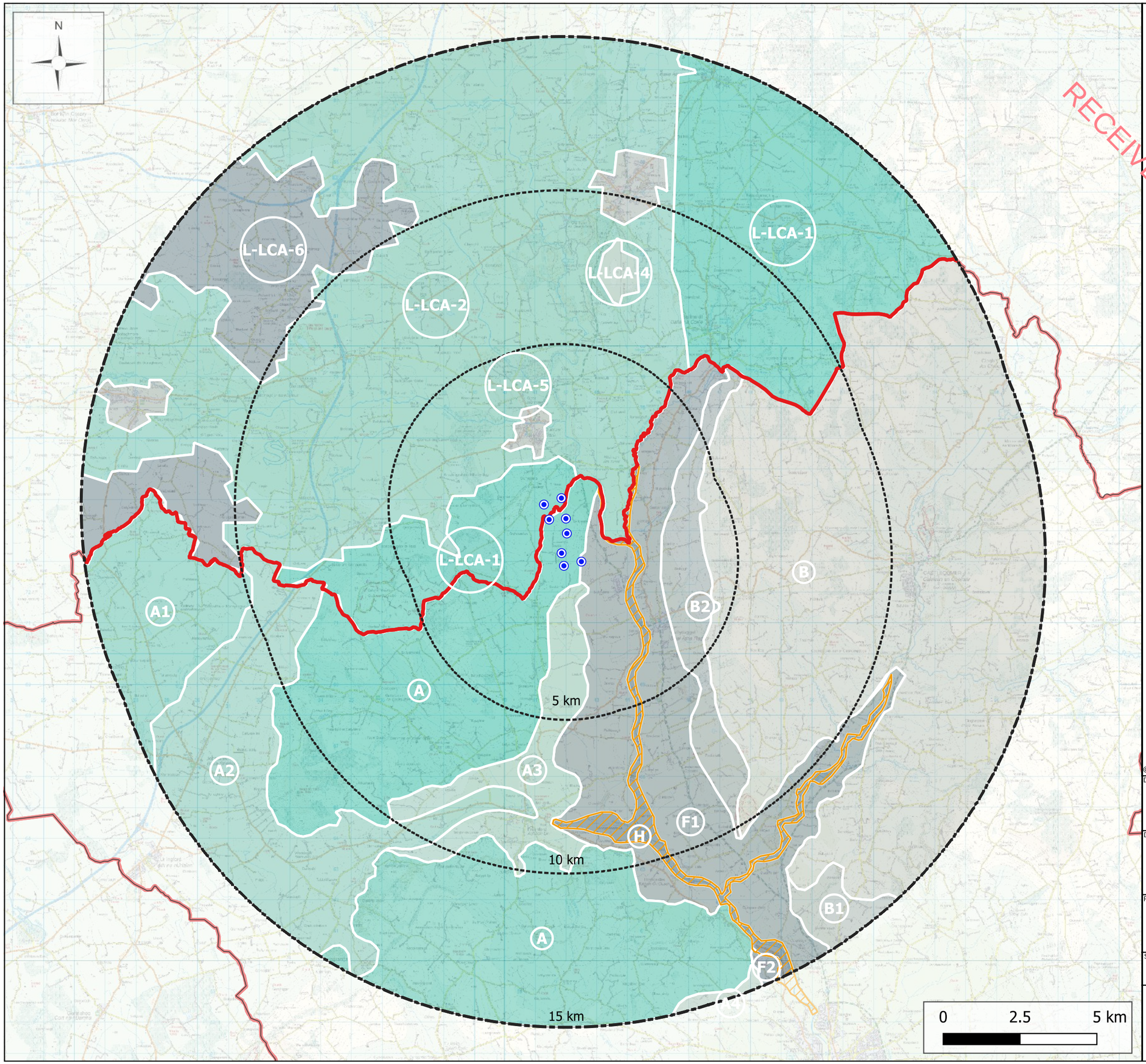
- KK-LCA-A – Slieveardagh Hills (North),
- KK-LCA-A – Slieveardagh Hills (South),
- KK-LCA-A1 – Slieveardagh Western Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-A2 – Slieveardagh Central Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-A3 – Slieveardagh Eastern Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-A4 – Slieveardagh Southern Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-B – Castlecomer Plateau,
- KK-LCA-B1 – Castlecomer Southern Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-B2 – Castlecomer Western Transition Area,
- KK-LCA-F1 – Kilkenny Northern Basin,
- KK-LCA-F2 – Kilkenny Western Basin,

- KK-LCA-H – Nore Valley (South),
- L-LCA-1: Mountains, Hills and Uplands,
- L-LCA-2: Lowland Agricultural Areas,
- L-LCA-4: Peatlands,
- L-LCA-5: Urban Fringe Areas,
- L-LCA-6: Rolling Hills.

Below, Figure 14-9 and Figure 14-10 map the identified LCAs and overlay them with the ZTV of the Proposed turbines. Note that the map also shows the designated 'Highly Scenic Area' for Co. Kilkenny which corresponds to KK-LCA-H Nore Valley (South) LCA; this additional designated area is shown for ease of visualisation to aid discussions on landscape sensitivity of Co. Kilkenny in the following sections.

The preliminary analysis of LCAs is presented in Table 14-4 below and Table 14-5 summarises the findings. The full assessment of selected LCAs is detailed in *Appendix 14-2: LCA Assessment Tables* and discussed in Section 14.7.3.1.1 LCA Assessment Outcomes.

Eight of 17 no. LCAs were scoped out of further assessment; the rationale for each is included in the table. For LCAs with very limited or partial theoretical visibility, the potential for actual visibility of the Proposed turbines was appraised during site surveys; this appraisal along with ZTV mapping and professional judgment of the assessor determined the scoping of LCAs.



Map Legend

- County Borders
- LCA Study Area (15km)
- Proposed Turbine Layout

Co. Laois LCA

- L-LCA-1: Mountains, Hills and Uplands
- L-LCA-2: Lowland Agricultural Areas
- L-LCA-4: Peatlands
- L-LCA-5: Urban Fringe Areas
- L-LCA-6: Rolling Hills

Co. Kilkenny LCAs

- K-LCA-A: Slieveardagh Hills (North)
- K-LCA-A: Slieveardagh Hills (South)
- K-LCA-A1: Slieveardagh Western Transition Zone
- K-LCA-A2: Slieveardagh Central Transition Zone
- K-LCA-A3: Slieveardagh Eastern Transition Zone
- K-LCA-A4: Slieveardagh Southern Transition Zone
- K-LCA-B: Castlecomer Plateaux
- K-LCA-B1: Castlecomer Southern Transition Zone
- K-LCA-B2: Castlecomer Western Transition Zone
- K-LCA-F1: Kilkenny Northern Basin
- K-LCA-F2: Kilkenny Western Basin
- K-LCA-H: Nore Valley (South)
- County Kilkenny Highly Scenic Areas

Drawing No.

Figure 14-9

Drawing Title

Designated Landscape Character Areas (LCAs)

Project Title

Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Scale	Project No.	Date	Drawn By	Checked By
1:120,000	231103	2025.09.05	JC	RS

N

L-LCA-5
L-LCA-1
L-LCA-6
L-LCA-4
L-LCA-2
L-LCA-5
L-LCA-5
L-LCA-1
A1
B
B2
A
5 km
F1
A2
A3
F1
H
10 km
B1
A
F2
A4
15 km

0 2.5 5 km

Map Legend

- 15km LCA Study Area
- Proposed Turbine Layout

Co. Kilkenny LCA's

- K-LCA-A: Slieveardagh Hills (North)
- K-LCA-A: Slieveardagh Hills (South)
- K-LCA-A1: Slieveardagh Western Transition Area
- K-LCA-A2: Slieveardagh Central Transition Area
- K-LCA-A3: Slieveardagh Eastern Transition Area
- K-LCA-A4: Slieveardagh Southern Transition Area
- K-LCA-B: Castlecomer Plateaux
- K-LCA-B1: Castlecomer Southern Transition Area
- K-LCA-B2: Castlecomer Western Transition Area
- K-LCA-F1: Kilkenny Northern Basin
- K-LCA-F2: Kilkenny Western Basin
- K-LCA-H: Nore Valley (South)

Co. Laois LCAs

- L-LCA-1: Mountains, Hills and Uplands
- L-LCA-2: Lowland Agricultural Areas
- L-LCA-4: Peatlands
- L-LCA-5: Urban Fringe Areas
- L-LCA-6: Rolling Hills

Hlaf-Blade ZTV

- 1-2 Turbines Theoretically Visible
- 3-5 Turbines Theoretically Visible
- 6-8 Turbines Theoretically Visible

Drawing No.

Figure 14-10

Drawing Title

ZTV and Designated LCAs Map

Project Title

Seskin Renewables Wind Farm

Scale	Project No.	Date	Drawn By	Checked By
1:120,000	231103	01.04.2025	JC	JW

MKO

Table 14-4: Preliminary Assessment of LCAs within the LVIA Study Area

Map Ref.	LCA Name	Theoretical Visibility from ZTV Mapping	Actual Visibility from Site Visits	Scoped in for Assessment?
Co. Kilkenny LCAs				
KK-LCA-A	Slieveardagh Hills (North)	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
KK-LCA-A	Slieveardagh Hills (South)	Yes.	No.	No. Rationale: No potential for visibility of the Proposed Development due to visual screening from vegetation and the undulating topography.
KK-LCA-A1	Slieveardagh Western Transition Area	Yes.	No.	No. Rationale: No potential for visibility of the Proposed Development due to visual screening from vegetation and the undulating topography.
KK-LCA-A2	Slieveardagh Central Transition Area	Yes.	No.	No. Rationale: No potential for visibility of the Proposed Development due to visual screening from vegetation and the undulating topography. One very small area with theoretical visibility is represented by photowire PWVP-D, demonstrating that there are no views.
KK-LCA-A3	Slieveardagh Eastern Transition Area	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
KK-LCA-A4	Slieveardagh Southern Transition Area	One very small area of full theoretical visibility at nearly 15km.	No.	No. Rationale: Most of the LCA has no theoretical visibility and key landscape sensitivities will not be affected.

Map Ref.	LCA Name	Theoretical Visibility from ZTV Mapping	Actual Visibility from Site Visits	Scoped in for Assessment?
KK-LCA-B	Castlecomer Plateau	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
KK-LCA-B1	Castlecomer Southern Transition Area	Scattered pockets comprising a small amount of land area have primarily full theoretical visibility at greater than 14km.	No.	No. Rationale: Much of the LCA has no theoretical visibility and key landscape sensitivities will not be affected.
KK-LCA-B2	Castlecomer Western Transition	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
KK-LCA-F1	Kilkenny Northern Basin	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
KK-LCA-F2	Kilkenny Western Basin	Comprises small area with primarily full theoretical visibility at greater than 14.5km.	No.	No. Rationale: Key landscape sensitivities will not be affected.
KK-LCA-H	Nore Valley (South)	Yes.	Yes.	Yes. Land area corresponds with 'Highly Scenic Area' designation of Co. Kilkenny (shown on Fig.14-9).
Co. Laois LCAs				
L-LCA-1	Mountain, Hills, and Uplands	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
L-LCA-2	Lowland Agricultural Areas	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
L-LCA-4	Peatland Areas	Yes.	No.	No. Rationale: No potential for visibility of the Proposed Development due to visual screening from vegetation

Map Ref.	LCA Name	Theoretical Visibility from ZTV Mapping	Actual Visibility from Site Visits	Scoped in for Assessment?
				and the undulating topography.
L-LCA-5	Urban Fringe Areas	Yes.	There is potential for visibility from the outskirts of Durrow within 5km.	Yes, with focus on the Durrow urban area.
L-LCA-6	Rolling Hills Areas	Comprises larger area with primarily full theoretical visibility throughout.	No.	No. Rationale: No potential for visibility of the Proposed Development due to visual screening from vegetation and the undulating topography.

Table 14-5: Summary of LCAs Scoped in for Assessment

Map Ref.	LCA Name	Scoped in for Assessment?
KK-LCA-A	Slieveardagh Hills (North)	Yes.
KK-LCA-A3	Slieveardagh Eastern Transition Area	Yes.
KK-LCA-B	Castlecomer Plateau	Yes.
KK-LCA-B2	Castlecomer Western Transition Area	Yes.
KK-LCA-F1	Kilkenny Northern Basin	Yes.
KK-LCA-H	Nore Valley (South)	Yes.
L-LCA-1	Mountain, Hills, and Uplands	Yes.
L-LCA-2	Lowland Agricultural Areas	Yes.
L-LCA-5	Urban Fringe Areas	Yes.

CH.14 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

END OF PART 2