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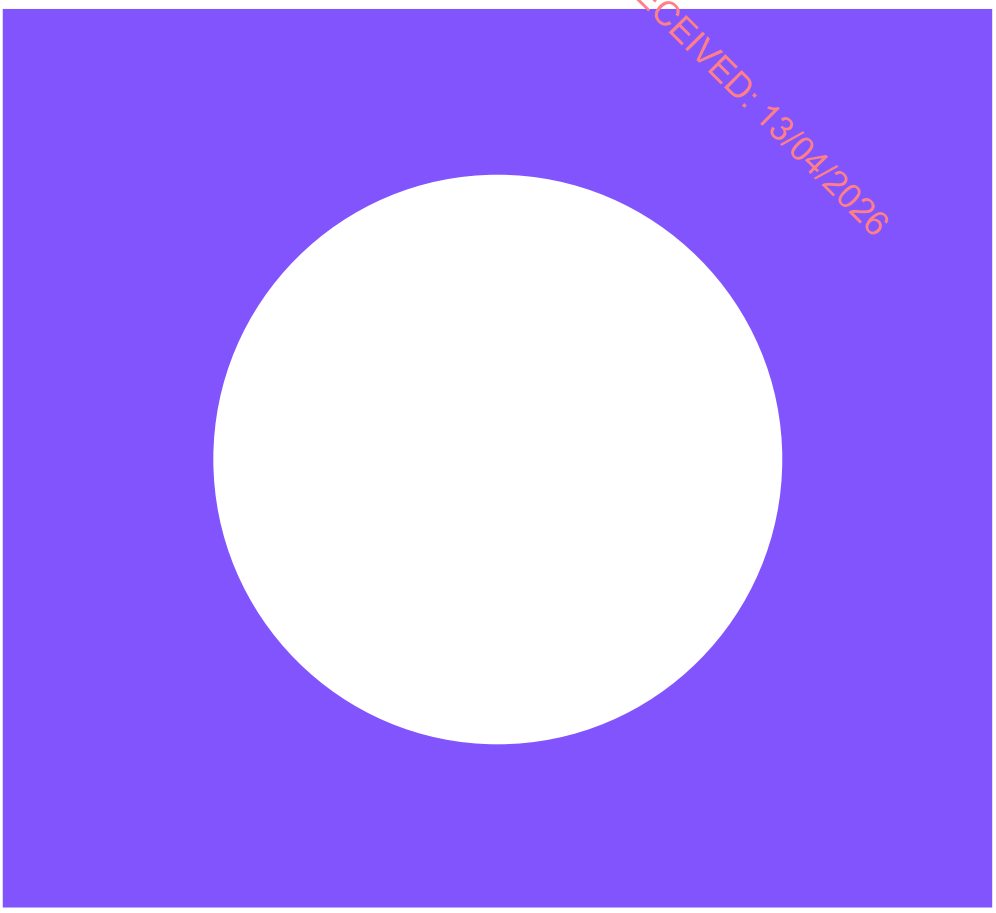

Shelburne Energy Farm Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Chapter 12 Landscape

April 2026

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Shelburne Energy Farm Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Chapter 12 Landscape

April 2026

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12 The Landscape

12.1 Introduction

This chapter has been prepared in relation to the Proposed Project as described in Chapter 5 – *Description of Development*.

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

- Landscape Impact Assessment (LIA) relates to assessing effects of a development on the landscape as a resource in its own right and is concerned with how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape and its distinctive character.
- Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) relates to assessing effects of a development on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people. This deals with how the surroundings of individuals or groups of people may be specifically affected by changes in the content and character of views as a result of the change or loss of existing elements of the landscape and/or introduction of new elements. Visual impacts may occur from; Visual Obstruction (blocking of a view, be it full, partial or intermittent) or; Visual Intrusion (interruption of a view without blocking).

A Glint and Glare assessment has been prepared (contained within Volume 4), which is a standalone report and is not incorporated into this chapter.

12.1.1 Approach and Statement of Authority

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

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

12.2 Methodology

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

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

12.2.1 Scope of the Assessment

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

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

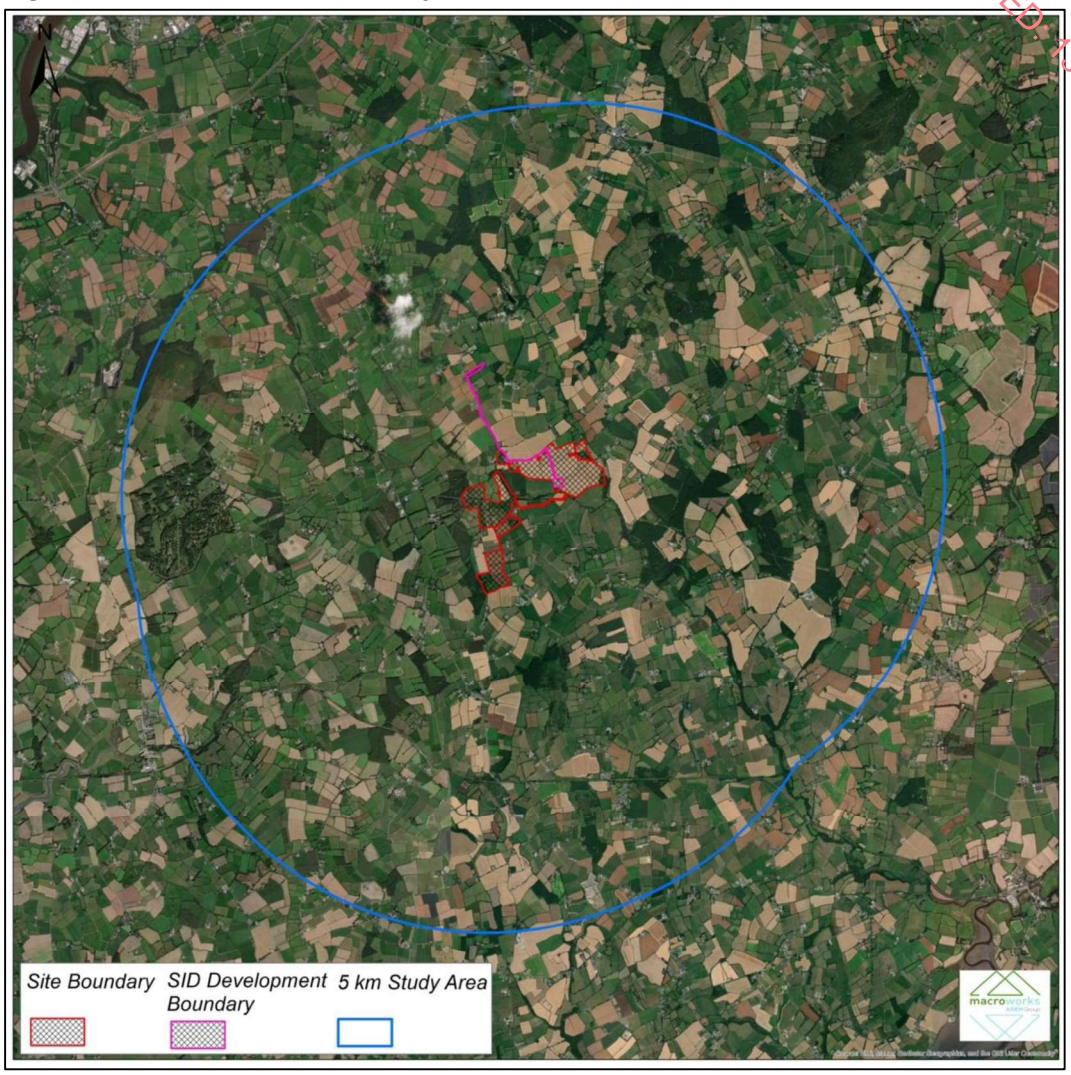
The methodology for this assessment has therefore been developed specifically for this assessment to ensure that it is appropriate and fit for purpose. The LVIA Methodology can be summarised as undertaking the following key tasks:

- Desk study;
- Site visits and photography in September 2024;
- Defining the Baseline Landscape setting and conditions;
- Identification and Evaluation of key components of the proposed project;
- Consideration of Mitigation Measures;
- Assessment of Landscape Effects;
- Assessment of Visual Effects; and
- Summary Statement of Significance.

12.2.2 Study Area

From similar studies, it is anticipated that the proposed project is likely to be difficult to discern beyond approximately 5km and is not likely to give rise to significant landscape or visual impacts beyond approximately 2km. In the interests of a comprehensive appraisal, a 5km radius study area is used in this instance. However, there will be a particular focus on receptors contained within 2km, except where iconic or designated scenic viewpoints exist at greater distances out to 5km (refer to Figure 1.1). A study area of 5km has typically been used for solar projects in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain and this approach has been deemed acceptable by multiple planning authorities including Wexford County Council.

Figure 12.1: 5km Extent of the Study Area



Source: MacroWorks

12.2.3 Landscape Impact Assessment

This part of the LVIA provides an assessment of how the introduction of the Proposed Project will affect the physical features and fabric of the landscape, and then how the proposals influence landscape character with reference to published descriptions of character and an understanding of the contemporary character of the landscape as informed through desktop and site studies.

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

12.2.3.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscape to change is the degree to which a particular setting can accommodate changes or new elements without unacceptable detrimental effects to its

essential characteristics. In accordance with GLVIA3, the sensitivity of a landscape receptor (Landscape Character Area or feature) is derived from combining judgements in relation to its susceptibility to change and its value. The judgement reflects such factors as its quality, value, contribution to landscape character and the degree to which the particular element or characteristic can be replaced or substituted. Landscape Sensitivity is classified using the following criteria set out in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1: Landscape Value and Sensitivity

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

12.2.4 Magnitude of Change – Landscape

The magnitude of change is a product of the scale, extent or degree of change that is likely to be experienced as a result of the proposed project and to a lesser extent the duration and reversibility of that effect. The magnitude takes into account whether there is a direct physical impact resulting from the loss of landscape components and/or a change that extends beyond the immediate setting that may have an effect on the landscape character. Table 12.2 outlines criteria used to inform this judgement.

Table 12.2: Magnitude of Change - Landscape

Criteria	Description
Very High	Change that would be large in extent and scale with the loss of critically important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an extensive change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality.
High	Change that would be more limited in extent and scale with the loss of important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to a considerable change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality.
Medium	Changes that are modest in extent and scale involving the loss of landscape characteristics or elements that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that would lead to noticeable changes in landscape character, and quality.
Low	Changes affecting small areas of landscape character and quality, together with the loss of some less characteristic landscape elements or the addition of new features or elements that would lead to discernible changes in landscape character, and quality.

Criteria	Description
Negligible	Changes affecting small or very restricted areas of landscape character. This may include the limited loss of some elements or the addition of some new features or elements that are characteristic of the existing landscape or are hardly perceivable leading to no material change to landscape character, and quality.

12.2.5 Visual Impact Assessment Criteria

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

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

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

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

12.2.5.1 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

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

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

12.2.5.2 Susceptibility of Visual Receptors to Change

In accordance with GLVIA3, visual receptors most susceptible to changes in views and visual amenity are:

- “Residents at home;
- People, whether residents or visitors, who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focussed on the landscape and on particular views;
- Visitors to heritage assets, or to other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;
- Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area;
- Travellers on road rail or other transport routes where such travel involves recognised scenic routes and awareness of views is likely to be heightened”.
- Visual receptors that are less susceptible to changes in views and visual amenity include;

- "People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation, which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape;
- People at their place of work whose attention may be focussed on their work or activity, not their surroundings and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life".

12.2.5.3 Values attached to Views

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

- Recognised scenic value of the view (Development Plan designations, guidebooks, touring maps, postcards etc). These represent a consensus in terms of which scenic views and routes within an area are strongly valued by the population because in the case of County Developments Plans, for example, a public consultation process is required;
- Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas. These are likely to be in the form of Architectural Conservation Areas, which are incorporated within the Development Plan and therefore subject to the public consultation process. Viewers within such areas are likely to be highly attuned to the landscape around them;
- Primary views from residential receptors. Even within a dynamic city context, views from residential properties are an important consideration in respect of residential amenity;
- Intensity of use, popularity. This relates to the number of viewers likely to experience a view on a regular basis and whether this is significant at a national or regional scale;
- Provision of vast, elevated panoramic views. This relates to the extent of the view on offer and the tendency for receptors to become more attuned to the surrounding landscape at locations that afford broad vistas;
- Sense of remoteness and/or tranquillity. Receptors taking in a remote and tranquil scene, which is likely to be fairly static, are likely to be more receptive to changes in the view than those taking in the view of a busy street scene, for example;
- Degree of perceived naturalness. Where a view is valued for the sense of naturalness of the surrounding landscape it is likely to be highly sensitive to visual intrusion by distinctly manmade features;
- Presence of striking or noteworthy features. A view might be strongly valued because it contains a distinctive and memorable landscape / townscape feature such as a cathedral or castle;
- Historical, cultural and / or spiritual significance. Such attributes may be evident or sensed by receptors at certain viewing locations, which may attract visitors for the purposes of contemplation or reflection heightening the sense of their surroundings;
- Rarity or uniqueness of the view. This might include the noteworthy representativeness of a certain landscape type and considers whether the receptor could take in similar views anywhere in the broader region or the country;
- Integrity of the landscape character. This looks at the condition and intactness of the landscape in view and whether the landscape pattern is a regular one of few strongly related components or an irregular one containing a variety of disparate components;
- Sense of place. This considers whether there is special sense of wholeness and harmony at the viewing location;
- Sense of awe. This considers whether the view inspires an overwhelming sense of scale or the power of nature.

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

It is recognised that a viewer's interpretation and experience of the landscape can have preferential and subjective components. Where relevant, judgements are made on those

elements of the landscape that are considered to contribute more prominently and positively to the visual landscape resource as well as those elements that contribute negatively. Overall sensitivity may be a result of a number of these factors or, alternatively, a strong association with one or two in particular.

12.2.6 Magnitude of Change – Visual

The magnitude of change is again a product of the scale, extent, or degree of change that is likely to be experienced as a result of the proposed project. This is directly influenced by its 'visual presence / prominence', as experienced by visual receptors in the landscape. These terms are somewhat quantitative in nature, and essentially relate to how noticeable or 'dominant' the proposal is within a particular view. Aside from the obvious influence of scale and distance, a development's visual presence is influenced by the extent and complexity of the view, contextual movement in the landscape, the nature of its backdrop, and its relationship with other focal points or prominent features within the view. It is often, though not always, expressed using one of the following terms: Minimal; Sub-dominant; Co-dominant; Dominant; Highly dominant. Criteria used to inform judgements are provided in Table 12.3.

Table 12.3: Magnitude of Change – Visual

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

12.2.7 Significance of Effect

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

The significance category judgement is arrived at using the Significance Matrix at Table 12.4 as a guide. This applies the principle of significance being a function of magnitude weighed against sensitivity, but employs slightly different terminology that avoids the potentially confusing use of the term 'significant' (as recommended by GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13 (Landscape institute, 10th June 2013)).

Indicative criteria descriptions used in relation to the significance of effect category are presented at Table 12.5

Table 12.4: Significance Matrix

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

Table 12.5: Indicative significance of effect criteria descriptions

	Landscape	Visual
Profound	There are notable changes in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or a very intensive change over a more limited area.	The view is entirely altered, obscured or affected.
Substantial	An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the landscape. There are notable changes in landscape characteristics over a substantial area or an intensive change over a more limited area.	An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the visual environment. The proposal affects a large proportion of the overall visual composition, or views are so affected that they form a new element in the physical landscape.
Moderate	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends. There are minor changes over some of the area or moderate changes in a localised area.	An effect that alters the character of the visual environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging trends. The proposal affects an appreciable segment of the overall visual composition, or there is an intrusion in the foreground of a view.
Slight	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the landscape without affecting its sensitivities. There are minor changes over a small proportion of the area or moderate changes in a localised area or changes that are reparable over time.	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the visual environment without affecting its sensitivities. The affected view forms only a small element in the overall visual composition or changes the view in a marginal manner.
Imperceptible	An effect capable of measurement but without noticeable consequences. There are no noticeable changes to landscape context, character or features.	An effect capable of measurement but without noticeable consequences. Although the development may be visible, it would be difficult to discern resulting in minimal change to views.

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

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

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

12.2.8 Quality of Effects

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

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

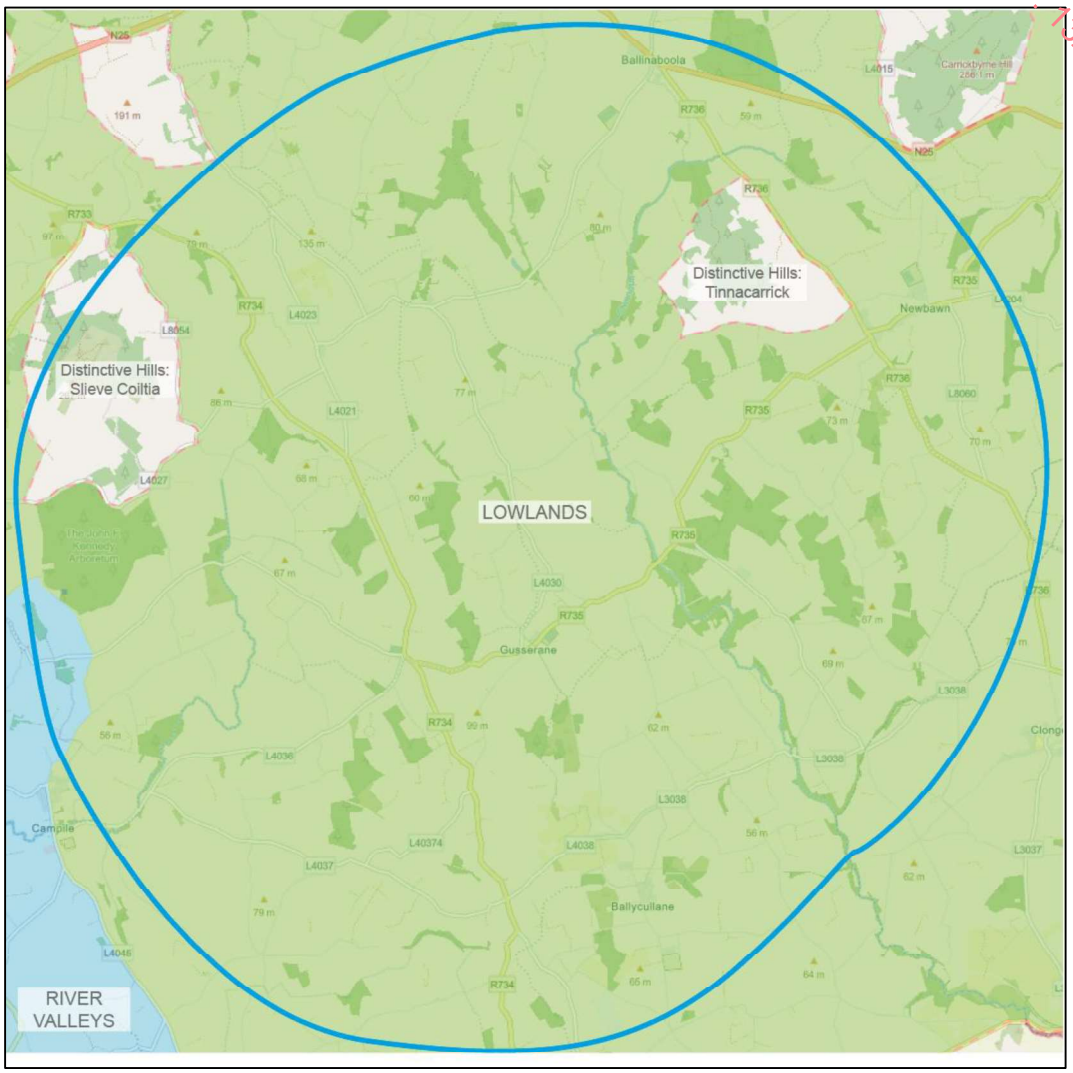
In the case of new energy / infrastructure developments within rural and semi-rural settings, the landscape and visual change brought about by an increased scale and intensity of built form is seldom considered to be positive / beneficial. Effects in these contexts are generally considered to be adverse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

12.3 Landscape and Visual Policy Context and Designations

12.3.1 Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028: Volume 7, Landscape Character Assessment.

A Landscape Character Assessment has been prepared for County Wexford and is incorporated into the current Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028. With the landscape character assessment, the landscape of county Wexford is divided into five landscape character unit (LCUs), which include; Uplands, Lowlands, River Valleys, Coastal and Distinctive. The Proposed project is wholly contained within the 'LCU – Lowlands' (Figure 12.2 refers).

Figure 12.2: Excerpt from the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 showing landscape character units in relation to the 5km study area (blue buffer)



Source: MacroWorks

The Lowlands LCU is the dominant character within the local and wider site context, extending to c. 95% of the study area. There are two other LCUs within the study area: River Valleys and Distinctive, comprising c. 0.5% and 4.5% of the study area respectively. The River Valleys LCU is approximately 4.5km to the west of the Site at its closest point. There are two similarly sized instances of Distinctive Landscapes (Hills) within the study area. The nearest of these to the proposed project is Tinnacarrick, approximately 1.5km to the north-east. The other Distinctive Landscape in the study area is Slieve Coillte, which is located some 3km west of the site at its closest point. Both consist of outlier hills punctuating the lowland plateau.

The Lowlands LCU is described as follows:

> *The Lowlands LCU is generally made up of gently undulating lands and relates to extensive areas of the county. The slopes and topography in this unit are shallower. There are generally higher levels of population and more intensive agriculture. Agricultural lands tend to be characterised by views across larger fields as a result of*

the generally low well-trimmed hedges. This landscape unit hosts the principle towns (except where transected by River Valleys) and major infrastructure such as the main roads and railways.

There are a number of prominent hills within the Lowlands LCU which provide more enclosure and 'punctuation' within the overall landscape.

The predominant agricultural use of most of the Lowlands LCU is expected to continue due, for the most part, to the high quality and fertility of the soils. Intensification of agricultural practices and expansion of urban settlements will be factors of change in this landscape.

The Lowlands LCU generally has characteristics which have a higher capacity to absorb development without it causing significant visual intrusion although, care still needs to be taken on a site by site basis, particularly to minimise the risks of developments being visually intrusive.

To the north and to the south-west of the lowlands there are transitional areas where this landscape unit meets the Uplands LCU and the higher elevations adjacent to the Barrow River Valley. To the north much of the mountain and hill peaks of the Blackstairs and Uplands LCU are inter-visible. To the south west this land rises towards some notable peaks in the New Ross district. These parts of the lowlands have lower population densities and are more sensitive than the rest of the lowlands. They are moderately sensitive to development with capacity to accommodate development subject to appropriate siting and design and consideration of cumulative impacts.

Landscape sensitivity is dealt with in section 3.2 of the landscape character assessment and designates each of the LCUs with a sensitivity rating of 'High', 'Medium' or 'Low'. Overall, the Lowlands LCU in the study area is classified as follows:

Low sensitivity landscapes are more robust landscapes which are tolerant to change and have the ability to accommodate development without significant adverse impacts on the character of the landscape. These landscapes comprise the majority of the Lowlands

The Landscape Character Assessment also outlines 'Other Landscape Considerations', which include; 'Designated Sites', 'Ecological Networks and Wildlife Corridors', 'Geological Sites', 'Ancient and Long Established Woodlands', 'Historical and Cultural Elements', 'Battlefields' and 'Specific Landscape Features'.

The Landscape Character Assessment also includes general landscape objectives for the county, some of which are relevant to the proposed project and are included below:

"Objective L04 - To require all developments to be appropriately sited, designed and landscaped having regard to their setting in the landscape, ensure that any potential adverse visual impacts are minimised and that natural features and characteristics of the site are retained.

Objective L05 - To ensure that developments are not unduly visually obtrusive in the landscape, in particular, in or adjacent to the Upland, River Valley, Coastal or Distinctive Landscape Character Units.

Objective L06 - To ensure that, where a development will have a negative impact in the Upland, River Valley, Coastal, or Distinctive Landscape Character Unit, an overriding need is demonstrated for that particular development and ensure that careful consideration is given to site selection. The development should be appropriate in scale

and be sited, designed and landscaped in a manner which minimises potential adverse impacts on the subject landscape."

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

Views of recognised scenic value are primarily indicated within Development Plans in the context of scenic views/routes designations, but they might also be indicated on touring maps, guide books, websites, road side rest stops or on post cards that represent the area.

The current Wexford County Development Plan "does not designate specific routes but notes that scenic routes may fall into a number of categories:

- Routes through Upland, Coastal, River Valley and Distinctive Landscapes.
- Trails such as the Eurovelo, Normal Way, Greenways and Wexford Walking Trails where sightseeing visitors are more likely to be concentrated along these routes.

Other scenic views might include:

- Views to the sea and views towards land from the sea and rivers in locations which may host tourism or amenity/journeys arrivals by boat.
- Planned views and vistas such as those associated with planned settlement and heritage properties and gardens."

Objectives relating to the preservation of views and prospects in County Wexford are included below:

*"**Objective L09** - To protect views worthy of protection, including views to and from sea, river, landscape feature, mountains, tourism sites, landmark structures such a bridges and urban settlements from inappropriate development that by virtue of design, scale, character or cumulative impact would block or detract from such views.*

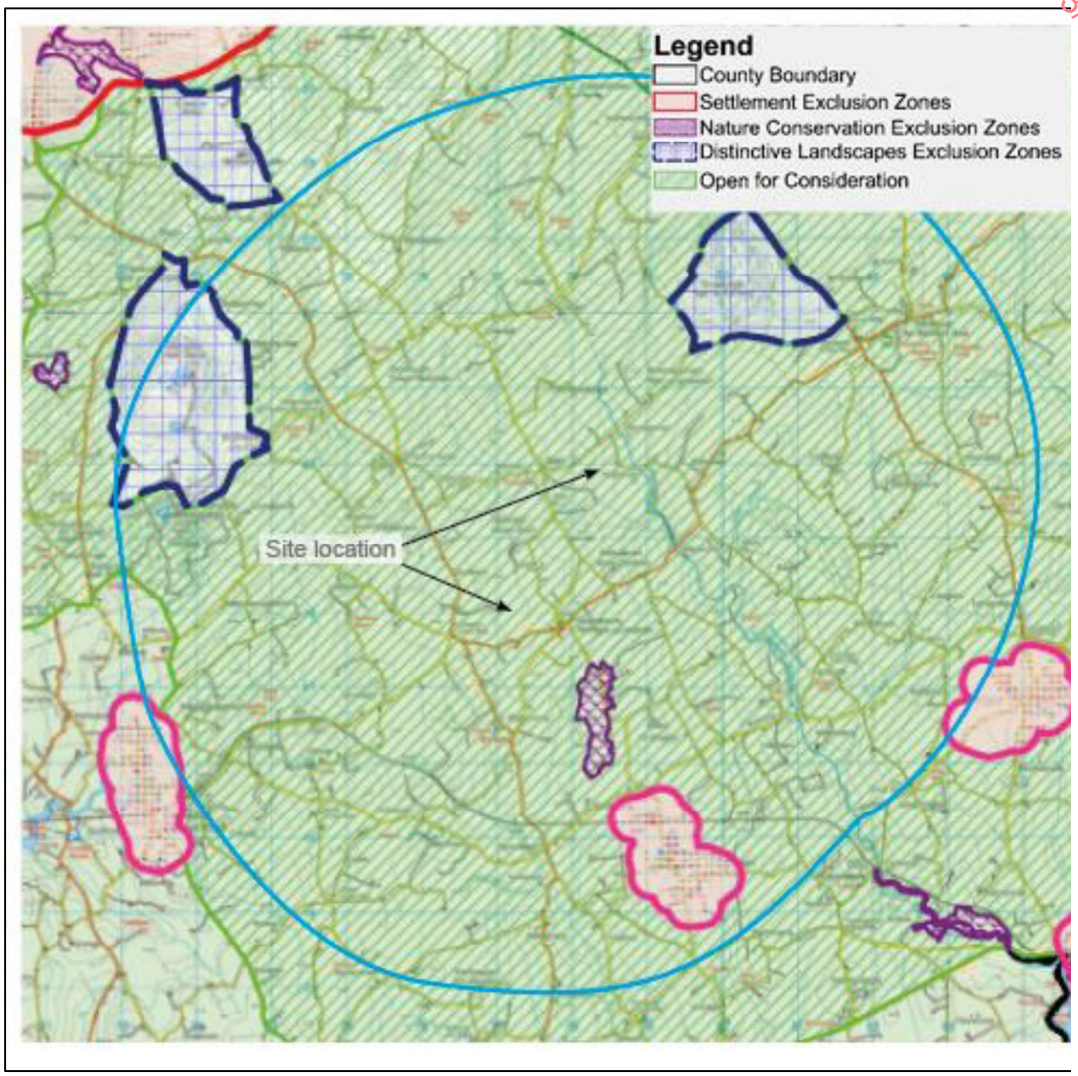
***Objective L10** - To protect planned views and vistas, such as those that might be associated with planned settlements, heritage properties and monuments and ensure that that new development does not detract from such views as may be identified within towns, formal settings and designated landscapes. In evaluating planning applications for development in the foreground of such views and vistas, consideration shall be given to the effect such development may have on the view or prospect."*

12.3.3 Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 – Volume 10: Energy Strategy

The current Energy Strategy includes 'Map 6 – Areas Open for Consideration for Solar Farms' and designates the Proposed Project site as 'Open to Consideration'. The development plan states, "following an analysis of the above criteria, Map 6 shows the area where solar farms will be open for consideration subject to the targets set for the plan period, the constraints and facilitators and the development management standards outlined below." The other constraints and facilitators include; 'Geological Heritage Sites', 'Major Roads and Railways', 'Tourism and Recreation', 'Archaeology', 'Protected Structures', 'Loss of agricultural land', 'Biodiversity' and 'Cumulative Impacts'. The current Energy Strategy includes several objectives in relation to solar PV, some of which are relevant to the Proposed Project and are included below;

"*ES01: To facilitate the development of solar PV developments in the area open for consideration as shown on Map 6 subject to the renewable energy target set for the County, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and the Development Management standards set out below."*

Figure 12.3: Excerpt from the current Wexford CDP 2022-2028 – Volume 10, Energy Strategy: showing the location of the Proposed Project in relation to areas designated 'open to consideration' for solar farm developments



Source: Wexford CDP 2022-2028 – Volume 10, Energy Strategy

Under the development management standards for solar farms (p34) the strategy states:

"Visual Impact Assessment All applications for solar farms should be accompanied by a Visual Impact Assessment which identifies and describes the likely effects of the proposal, 36 identifying magnitude of change as a deviation from baseline conditions. The assessment should include the following:

A zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) should be prepared to indicate the area over which solar panels may be seen.

Representative assessment viewpoints should be identified and discussed with the relevant planning authority and other stakeholders where relevant. The number of viewpoints required will vary with the location and scale of the proposal. Priority should be given to views from

sensitive locations (e.g. residential areas, areas popular with visitors or areas used for outdoor recreation) and views from elevated locations.

Photomontages should be included from each viewpoint showing the Proposed Project with and without any proposed screen planting and detail differing views during different seasons of the year as appropriate.

An assessment of the cumulative visual impacts of the Proposed Project in combination with other solar farms and structures permitted in the area, as well as other planning applications which have been lodged with the Council or An Bord Pleanála. Landscaping

All applications for solar farms shall be accompanied by a detailed landscaping plan.

No high value habitats (trees and hedgerows) should be lost as a result of the Proposed Project and the developer should consider opportunities to provide enhanced management of landscape features and habitats where appropriate. Trees and hedges should be protected during construction.

Screening development will be important – however, letting hedgerows grow higher should only be employed where it fits with local landscape character, restores traditional management practices, does not result in deterioration of the hedge and does not produce unreasonable shading of panels."

12.4 Existing Environment

12.4.1 Landscape Baseline

The landscape baseline represents the existing landscape context and is the scenario against which any changes to the landscape brought about by the proposed project will be assessed. A description of the landscape context of the Proposed Project site boundary and wider study area is provided below under the headings of landform and drainage, vegetation and land use, centres of population and houses, transport routes and public amenities and facilities. 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 project. The visual resource will be described in greater detail in 12.4.2.

12.4.1.1 Landform and Drainage

The Proposed Project is located across a broad lowland plateau with the site's AMOD ranging between c.33-55m. The site lies immediately west of the Owenduff River, a minor watercourse oriented in a general north-west-south-east direction. In terms of the wider landscape there are two notable upland areas that punctuate the lowland plateau within the study area: Tinnacarrick and Slieve Coiltia. Slieve Coiltia rises to c. 250m AMOD whereas Tinnacarrick is c. 135m AMOD. The River Barrow is situated c. 6km west of the site at its nearest point.

12.4.1.2 Vegetation and Land Use

The principal land use within the study area is agriculture with typically medium to large scale fields serviced by a network of country lanes, third class routes and occasional regional roads. Fields are varied in shape with more irregular shapes and generally smaller sizes associated with valley landforms.

The fields in the study area are bounded by hedgerows; these are notably stronger where agriculture is less intensive such as the western parts of the site (Parcel B) where there are canopy hedgerow trees and occasional tree belts and small copses in field corners.

Woodland within the study area is not widespread and consists primarily of coniferous plantations. There are also small patches of mixed and broadleaf woodland present within the study area. Within the site and its immediate context the landcover pattern is as follows:

- Broad north-south swathe of mixed woodland running through lower lying land to the immediate west of the site providing separation between parcels B and C and Dunmain.
- Small patch of riparian natural woodland associated with Owenduff River to the east of Parcel A, field 14
- Notable stands of coniferous plantation forestry approximately 800m south-east of the site at the closest point.

There is no ancient or long established woodland (ALEW) in the study area, the nearest being Oaklands, beyond the N25 to the northwest.

Figure 12.4: Landscape context of the lands surrounding the proposed project

Source: MacroWorks

12.4.1.3 Settlements and Movement Network

There are no large or medium sized towns in the vicinity of the site. The closest small town to the site is Ballycullane, approximately 3km to its southeast. The closest settlement area to the

site is Gusserane, approximately 300m to the southeast. Gusserane has a national school and a regionally registered church (see heritage below).

There are no known recreational routes within the study area. The Eurovelo and similar routes mentioned in the Wexford Development Plan above all lie beyond the 5km study area. The nearest route to the site and the only known occurrence of this type of receptor in the study area, is the discovery trail at the John F Kennedy arboretum, introduced in 2018 as part of the 50th Anniversary celebrations.

The disused Waterford to Wexford rail route passes within approximately 2.4km of the southwest of the site at its closest point.

The N25 national primary route passes within approximately 4.5km of the site at its closest point to the northeast. There are no other national roads in the study area.

The closest regional route is R735 passing through Gusserane to the south of the site. The R734 lies approximately 800m to the west of the site at its closest point and the R736 lies some 3.3km to the east.

- There are several local roads within the site vicinity as follows:
- L8141 Nash running north-south and through the Site with Parcel A to its immediate east and Parcels B to the immediate West.
- L8059 Nash adjacent to the northern Site boundary (Parcel A).
- L8076 Nash running east-west from Parcel A and approximately 175 metres of the north of Parcel B at its closest point.
- L8141 Rathumney passing through Gusserane and approximately 175m to the southeast of the Site at its closest point.

12.4.1.4 Tourism, Heritage and Public Amenities

There are no known tourist attractions within the study area other than the John F Kennedy arboretum visitor centre, approximately 4.1km to the west of the Site. There is a viewpoint atop Sliabh Coillte near to the visitor centre, accessible by car, which at 271m provides a view over the whole arboretum as well as of six counties.

The closest regionally rated heritage asset to the site is Catholic Church of Saint John the Baptist (NIAH ref. 15704001) approximately 300m to the southeast of Parcel C. There is another heritage asset that is regionally rated in the site vicinity at Dunmain House (NIAH ref. 15703938), approximately 520m to the west of Parcel B. Ballygarvan House, a regionally rated farm house (NIAH ref. 15704002 lies approximately 1km southeast of the site.

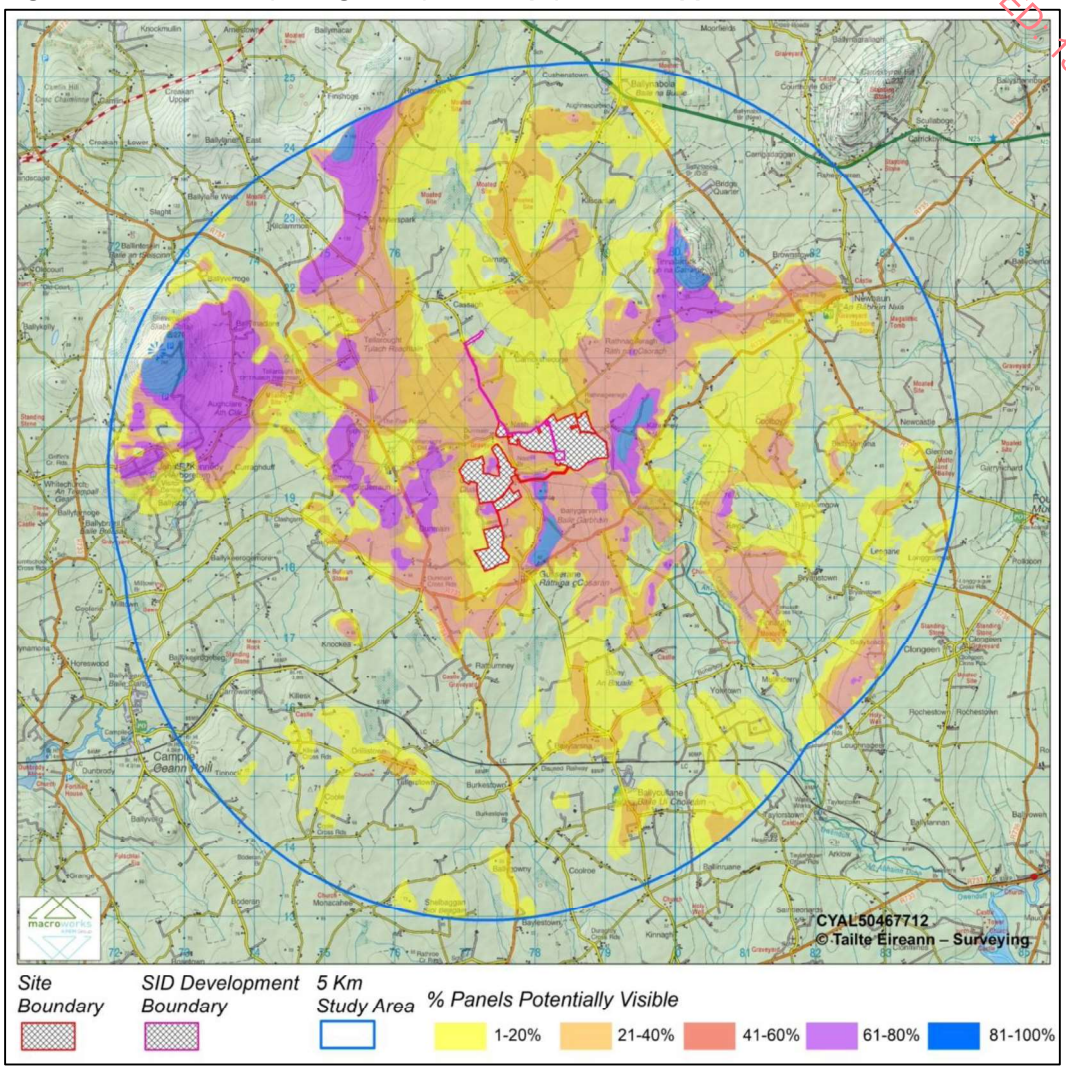
There are numerous local heritage features within the study area, and four including Nash graveyard in the vicinity of the site although none are within the site itself.

12.4.2 Visual Baseline

12.4.2.1 Analysis of ZTV (Zone of Theoretic Visibility) Mapping

Only those parts of the receiving environment that potentially afford views of the proposed project are of concern to this section of the assessment. A computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map has been prepared to illustrate where the Proposed Project is potentially visible from. The ZTV map is based solely on terrain data (bare ground visibility), and ignores features such as trees, hedges or buildings, which may screen views. Given the complex vegetation patterns within this landscape, the main value of this form of ZTV mapping is to determine those parts of the landscape from which the proposed project will definitely not be visible, due to terrain screening within the 5km study area.

Figure 12.5: Standard (bare-ground) ZTV map (Refer to Appendix 12.1 for A3 version)



Source: MacroWorks

The following key points are illustrated by the 'bare-ground' ZTV map (see Figure 12.5 above):

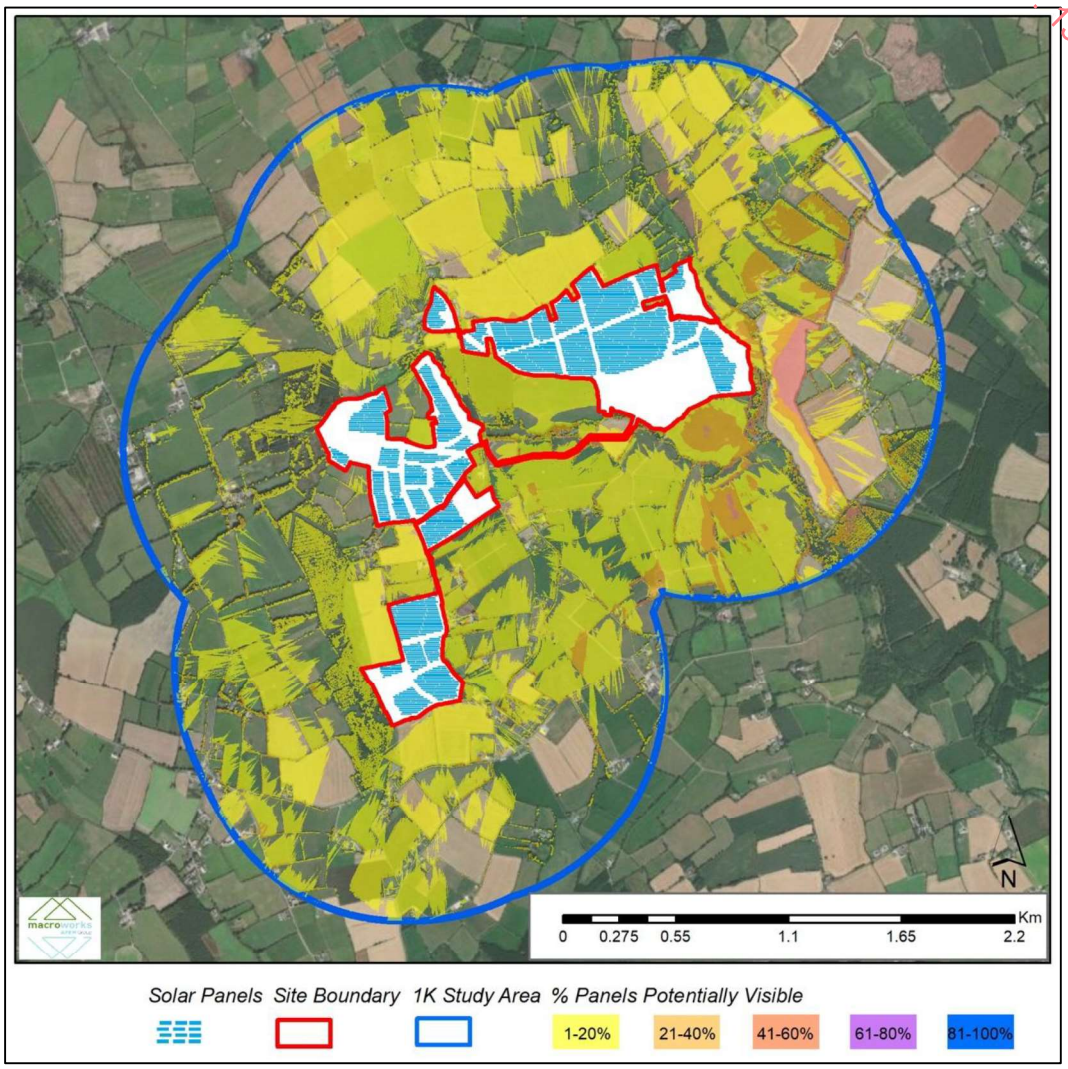
- The proposed solar arrays would be visible from approximately 50-60% of the study area.
- The broad pattern of visibility extends through all points of the 5km study area with the exception of the southwest of the site, where visibility tends to be limited to the summits of low rolling hills and ridges.
- The summit and east facing slopes of Slieve Coillte are notable areas where the majority of the array would be visible.
- The immediate central study area will also encompass some areas of comprehensive theoretic visibility (blue/purple pattern), which principally relate to locally elevated areas of surrounding terrain or lands within the immediate context of the proposed array.
- Whilst there is some potential for visibility of the proposed solar array in the surrounds of the small village of Gusserane, there is limited potential for visibility of the proposed solar array at the settlements of Newbawn and Ballynaboola.

The most important point to make in respect of this 'bare-ground' ZTV map is that it is theoretical. The proposed PV panels will not rise more than 3.860m above the underlying terrain, whilst the BESS structures will only rise to a maximum height of some 3.19m and will therefore be considerably screened by surrounding and intervening vegetation and built form within the study area, resulting in a much lesser degree of actual visibility. Nonetheless, the proposed BESS compound will be enclosed by an 8.5 m high acoustic barrier, which has the potential to result in a higher degree of visual exposure. Despite this, the location of the BESS development is in a discreet part of the site, offset from the nearest surrounding receptors, and benefits from a notable degree of screening provided by terrain and vegetation.

The proposed substation compound, which will form part of a separate application to An Coimisiún Pleanála (ACP), the GIS substation building will rise notably higher, to a maximum height of approximately 17m above the existing ground level. Whilst considerably larger than the proposed panels, the GIS substation building is well offset from all surrounding receptors in a discrete part of the site that benefits from a notable degree of screening provided by terrain and vegetation. In this regard, it is not considered that it will present as a highly prominent feature in the surrounding landscape.

The second form of ZTV mapping relies on a Digital Surface Model ("DSM"), which also accounts for terrestrial land cover elements, such as hedgerows and buildings. This is of far more value in determining the likely visibility of the solar panels. For this finer grain of visibility analysis, a more consolidated area incorporating the surrounding network of roads and dwellings within approximately 1km of the Project site boundary is used.

Figure 12.6: Digital Surface Model (DSM) based ZTV map accounting for screening by surface elements such as hedgerows, trees lines and forestry.



Source: MacroWorks

As can be seen from the comparison of the 'bare-ground' ZTV map (Figure 12.5) and the Digital Surface Model based ZTV map (Figure 12.6):

- There is a considerable reduction in the degree of actual panel visibility in comparison with the bare-ground scenario presented above. Indeed, the DSM mapping highlights the high level of existing screening within the site and its surrounding landscape, resulting in a much lower degree of actual panel visibility.
- Cross-valley views from the west-facing valley flanks of the Owenduff River would consist of up to 60% of the arrays, albeit further to the east of this visibility is almost entirely eliminated.
- Woodland to the west of Parcels B and C would truncate views of the proposals from receptors to the west including Dunmain house and users of the R734.
- The majority of the locations where visibility is predicted would experience partial views of 1-20% of the solar arrays.

12.4.2.2 Identification of Viewshed Reference Points as a Basis for Assessment

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

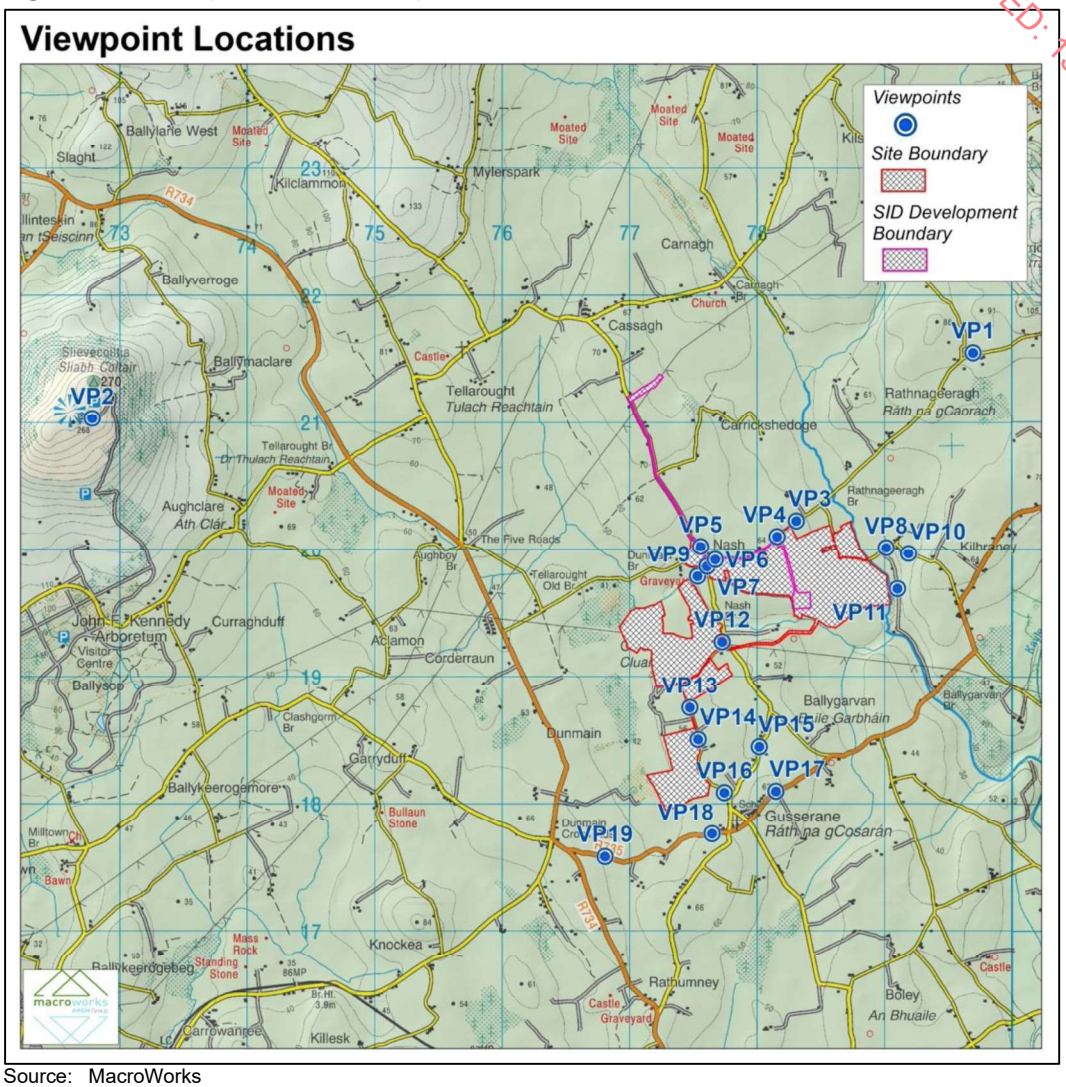
- Key Views (from features of national or international importance) (KV);
- Designated Scenic Routes and Views (SR/SV);
- Local Community views (LCV);
- Centres of Population (CP);
- Major Routes (MR);
- Amenity and heritage features (AH).

VRP's might be relevant to more than one category and this makes them even more valid for inclusion in the assessment. The receptors that are intended to be represented by a particular VRP are listed at the beginning of each viewpoint appraisal. The Viewshed Reference Points selected in this instance are set out in the Table 12.6 and Figure 12.7 below.

Table 12.6: Outline Description of Selected Viewshed Reference Points (VRPs)

VRP No.	Location	Representative of
VP 1	L40232 at Rathnageeragh	LCV
VP 2	Slieve Coillte	AH, SV
VP 3	L40232 at Nash (1)	LCV
VP 4	L40232 at Nash (2)	LCV
VP 5	L4030 at Nash (1)	LCV
VP 6	L40232 at Nash (3)	LCV
VP 7	L4030 at Nash (2)	LCV
VP 8	Local road east of the River Owenduff at Kilbraney (1)	LCV
VP 9	Nash Graveyard	AH
VP 10	Local road east of the River Owenduff at Kilbraney (2)	LCV
VP 11	Local Laneway east of River Owenduff at Kilbraney	LCV
VP 12	Local road west of the L4030 at Cloonagh	LCV
VP 13	Local road at Cloonagh (1)	LCV
VP 14	Local road at Cloonagh (2)	LCV
VP 15	L4030 at Ballygarvan	LCV
VP 16	Local road at Cloonag, north of Gusserane	LCV
VP 17	R735 at Gusserane O'Rahillys GAA	LCV, CP, MR
VP 18	R735 west of Guesserane	LCV, CP, MR
VP 19	R735 at Dunmain	LCV, MR

Figure 12.7: Viewpoint location map



Source: MacroWorks

12.5 Mitigation and Restoration Measures

The main mitigation by avoidance measure employed in this instance is the siting of the Proposed Project in a sparsely populated lowland plateau landscape relatively free of vantage points from which the proposals could be viewed. The location is also within the Development Plan "Areas of Consideration ".

In addition to mitigation by avoidance measures, retention of existing hedgerow boundaries within and around the site aids visual screening, and maintains the existing field pattern. In this respect, the proposed solar farm is not perceived to impose itself on the existing landscape pattern.

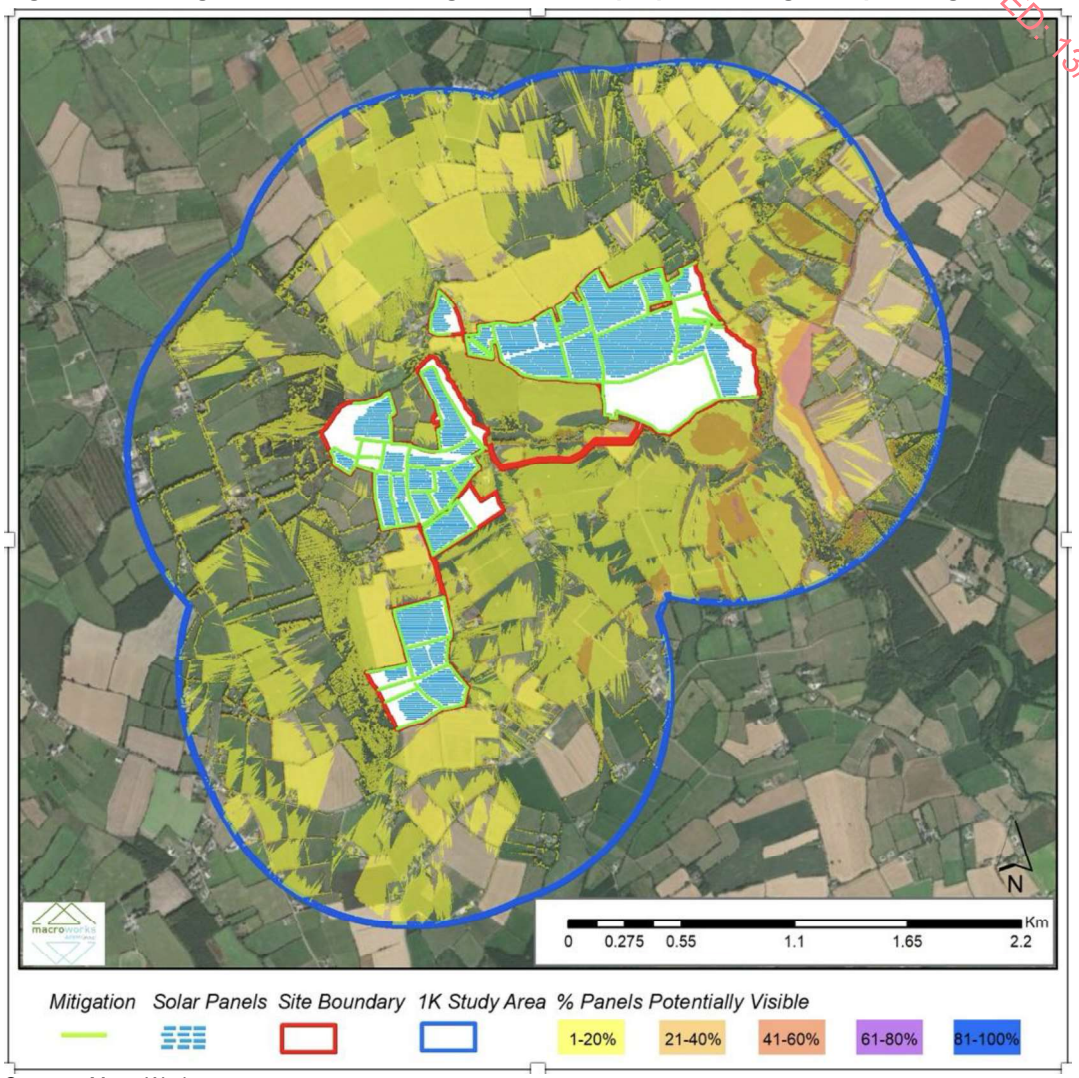
In addition to retaining the existing hedgerows within around the site, it is also proposed to bolster existing perimeter and internal hedgerows with under-planting and inter-planting of whip transplants in order to ensure dense and consistent screening of the site in perpetuity. This will be undertaken where required to thicken and fill gaps in the existing hedgerow network prior to

the construction phase, thus allowing for any growth in the period between a grant of planning permission and construction of the development. Where not already exceeded by existing vegetation, it is intended to manage hedgerows up to 3-4m in height. This height will be achieved by a combination of allowing lower sections of existing hedgerows to mature, filling obvious gaps with advanced nursery stock and providing an additional line of whip planting to selected hedgerows that require densification. Refer to the Landscape Mitigation Plan drawings in Appendix 5.3.

It is also proposed to plant new sections of hedgerows in some localised parts of the site, whilst additional screen planting measures area also proposed in the surroundings of some of the nearest local residential receptors. Indeed, once fully established, these new and bolstered areas of native planting will further screen and soften the development from surrounding local receptors, whilst also reinforcing the existing ecological corridors within the site and surrounding landscape.

As can be seen by the mitigation-based ZTV in Figure 12.8 (below), the combination of consolidated and proposed 3-4m high hedgerows and localised areas of screen planting will further reduce the potential for visual impacts within the surrounding area. Whilst the DSM visibility mapping highlights the potential for residual visibility, this will often be in the form of brief views of less than 20% of the proposed panel area.

Figure 12.8: Mitigation ZTV illustrating the effect of proposed mitigation planting



Source: MacroWorks

The installation method for these types of solar panels and mounting frames is undertaken using local piling to reduce the impact deriving from construction to facilitate the long-term use of the field as farmland. Panels are constructed using small-scale machinery causing very limited effect to the existing grass surface. This process is akin to timber post fence construction, whereby the post is driven a short length into the ground. This ensures that the fields' general green characteristics can be retained or quickly redressed following construction. All new cabling within the site will be buried underground. The proposed perimeter 2m stock proof fence will be set to the inside of the site boundaries. This will be maintained throughout the operational phase of the development to ensure access is prevented for both stray farm animals and human trespass. However, a small gap at the base of the fence will allow wild fauna to continue passage throughout the site. An un-grazed margin between deer fencing and the solar panels will be left for biodiversity enhancement measures. When feasible, ancillary structures such as inverters, transformer cabins and other plant will be coloured in green or muted shades to help blend them in with the surrounding countryside.

Low intensity sheep grazing is anticipated to be the main land use under and beside the proposed panels, to ensure that the areas of shorter swards and scrub will be managed. The proposed layout allows sufficient width between module rows for pastureland to be productive. Upon completion of construction, the area temporarily affected by the construction process, which includes one construction compound areas will be re-seeded with agricultural grassland species.

Wherever possible, the on-site access roads utilise the existing farm tracks and follow existing topography in order to minimise ground disturbance, alteration of physical landscape character and visual intrusion. Reinstatement of temporary construction areas, construction compounds and cable trenches to the preconstruction conditions will be carried out at the end of the construction phase. Restoration of any areas disturbed during the construction process will be undertaken on construction completion by appropriate grass seeding to return a green characteristic.

The decommissioning of the site will involve the removal of all solar panels and associated fencing, storage and operation facilities. The site will be fully restored to agricultural use through reseeding of appropriate grass species to reflect the grass sward mix in the immediate vicinity. Any site access tracks not required for on-going agricultural purposes will be excavated and top-soiled in order to reinstate them to productive agricultural use. The site will be fully restored to agricultural use in accordance with a detailed restoration plan.

Existing hedgerow field boundaries, which will have been maintained and reinforced with additional planting during the construction and operational phases, will remain intact following the restoration phase. Indeed, due to the supplementary planting proposed as part of the landscape mitigation the field boundaries are likely to be more consistent and consolidated than they are at present.

12.6 Impact Assessment

12.6.1 Do-nothing scenario

The ‘do-nothing’ impact refers to the non-implementation of the proposed project. The primary effect of this would be that the impacts and effects identified would not directly occur. In this regard the following issues are relevant. The site, which is currently contained in pastoral farmland, would likely be managed for typical agricultural practices, whilst the surrounding perimeter vegetation would continue to grow out, some of which would be maintained by the current landowners.

12.6.2 Assessment of Receptor Sensitivity – Landscape

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

The site is not covered by any designations that recognise a particular landscape or visual importance, nor is this landscape considered rare or distinctive at a local, regional or national level.

With regard to the landscape values of the site, it is primarily recognised as a productive rural landscape valued for subsistence of the local rural economy. The only scenic values are located within the western portion of the study area; these scenic qualities are not associated with the site or its immediate landscape context. There is little evidence of any naturalistic or scenic elements within and around the site. Thus, the site presents as a robust rural landscape as

opposed to an overtly tranquil, naturalistic or heritage landscape, albeit there are some smaller elements that represent these qualities.

The majority of the study area consists of a plateaux of pastoral farmland intersected by mature mixed hedgerows that provide a notable degree of containment. The principal land use within the study area is that of pastoral farmland, whilst a range of other land uses, including blocks or conifer forestry, and corridors of broadleaf woodland are also evident throughout the 5km study area. There are relatively minor variations in topography within the vicinity of the site, the River Owenduff valley being the most notable of such features. Within the study area the distinctive landscapes at Slaine Coilte and Tinnacarrick are the most notable natural landscape features albeit these are some distance from the site and they would experience indirect landscape effects. Therefore, on balance of these factors and in accordance with the criteria outlined in Table 12.1, the landscape sensitivity is deemed to be Medium-low, with localised areas of medium landscape sensitivity associated with the distinctive landscapes of Slieve Coillte and Tinnacarrick.

12.6.3 Assessment of Receptor Sensitivity – Visual

The study area generally presents as a typical rural landscape, albeit some receptors within the study area have a slightly heightened sensitivity due to the presence of locally elevated terrain that affords broad open views across the wider countryside and areas of high amenity that present with some sense of the naturalistic such as Slieve Coillte.

Within the study area, many of the scenic designations are likely included as a result of their elevated nature, where views are afforded across the working rural landscape. It is important to note that while these routes and views generate a degree of scenic amenity, many of these views present with a longstanding sense of human intervention on the landscape and are influenced by an array of working and anthropogenic land uses such as wind energy, conifer forestry and urban settlements. With regard to the landscape values of the site, despite the landscape having a pleasant, pastoral aesthetic supplemented by characteristics associated with a rural area. It is primarily recognised as a working rural landscape valued for productive reasons. The relevant scenic designations in this instance are contained within Sieve Coillte and Tinnacarrick. All of the scenic views considered herein are deemed to be of High-medium sensitivity based on a balance of the elevated and pleasant vistas they afford but the typical rural context contained within those views.

Views of the working agricultural landscape are generally pleasant in terms of its rolling pastoral aesthetic and ‘green’, settled working character. The network of hedgerows and conifer plantations throughout the study area contribute to some sense of naturalness and combined with its undulating topography, generates a sense of containment in many locations. However, whilst a pleasant pastoral aesthetic is noted throughout some parts of the study area, as noted above, the surrounding local and wider landscape is also influenced by an array of anthropogenic features such as urban settlements. Overall, the sensitivity of visual receptors within the more typical working landscape context tends to range between Medium and Medium-low, with those of Medium sensitivity representing broad elevated views that are not designated for scenic amenity.

Key differentials in terms of visual receptor sensitivity relate to the occupation of the visual receptor and whether views of the surrounding landscape are an inherent part of the experience. Static residential receptors are considered generally more susceptible to changes in views over those where views are experienced transiently by those travelling through the landscape, particularly on transport routes where the road infrastructure and traffic volume draw from visual amenity.

On the basis of the site-specific factors outlined above and in accordance with the general visual receptor sensitivity considerations contained in the methodology Section 12.2.5, visual receptor sensitivity judgement is provided for each representative viewpoint in the table below in section 12.6.7 below

12.6.4 Landscape Effects – Construction Stage

During the construction phase there will be a far higher intensity of activity at the site than during the operational phase. This will consist of heavy vehicle movement to and from the site as well as construction machinery within the site. In terms of physical landscape effects, the proposed solar array will not require any significant excavation that would permanently alter the landform of the site. However, the proposed GIS substation compound and BESS compound will require some areas of cut and fill to facilitate a flat surface for which these built features will be located. This will result in some localised alterations to the land form of the site, however, it is important to note that these elements of the proposed project are discretely located within the southern portion of parcel A, well setback from surrounding local receptors. Indeed, due to the discreet location of this part of the site, the higher intensity construction stage works are likely to have less of an influence on the surrounding landscape character. In addition to the above, the Proposed project includes for 2no. Line Cable Interface Masts (LCIMs) to the north of the proposed solar array. The proposed project also includes for the removal of 1no. existing 220kV overhead line tower adjacent to the proposed interface masts. Whilst the construction stage effects here will be limited and highly localised, they will be contained away from the main solar development and will marginally increase the intensity of construction stage development within the surrounding landscape.

There is likely to be some localised removal of hedgerow vegetation to accommodate the proposed access tracks and site entrances. Notwithstanding these areas of removal, this will be offset by the planting of new native hedgerows and areas of screen planting, together with the reinforcement and protection of all existing hedgerows within the site and around its perimeter.

During the construction phase there will be a far higher intensity of activity at the site than during the operational phase. Such activity will include the movement of construction machinery on-site, as well as HGVs travelling to and from the site. It may also include temporary site lighting and the temporary storage of construction materials. Construction of the Proposed Project is estimated to take 21 – 23 months to complete. Construction and decommissioning-related effects are, therefore, brief in nature and will only result in short-term landscape and visual effects. Overall, the magnitude of construction stage effects is deemed Medium.

Combined with the low landscape sensitivity of the study area, the significance of construction stage effect is deemed Moderate and of a Negative quality.

12.6.5 Visual Effects – Construction Stage

During construction, the main visual impacts will arise from frequent heavy vehicle movements and worker vehicles travelling to and from the site and using the site entrance. In addition, there will be construction machinery on site, which may rise above intervening vegetation and buildings. There will also be stockpiles of stripped topsoil and construction materials awaiting use. There is also potential for some tower cranes to be erected to facilitate the construction of the proposed substation compound (subject to a separate application to ACP). However, aside from the site's immediate vicinity, a large part of this temporary activity within the site will remain screened and partially screened from view the surrounding mature layers of intervening vegetation. Furthermore, construction-related activity is temporary in nature and will cease once the development becomes fully operational. Thus, construction stage impacts are like to result in a visual effect of Moderate within and immediately around the site.

Coupled with the medium and medium-low visual receptor sensitivities in the near surrounds of the site, the construction stage visual impacts in the immediate vicinity of the site will be no greater than Moderate negative, and will reduce considerable beyond 500m-1000m from the site, where the proposed project will be heavily screened. As a result, construction stage visual impacts are deemed to be Not Significant.

12.6.6 Magnitude of Landscape Effects – Operational Stage

The duration of any physical landscape impacts will last only as long as the Proposed Project is in place, which is proposed to be 40 years. Although these impacts may be classified as 'long term' (i.e. 15 to 60 years, as defined in the EPA's EIAR guidelines), within a short period of time following decommissioning there would be relatively minor evidence of the former landuse and the site will be returned to agricultural land use – with the exception of the proposed substation which is likely to remain in place.

Aside from landscape impacts generated from construction of the proposed substation, the landscape impacts from the proposed solar farm are, for the most part 'reversible'– with the exception of the proposed substation compound and underground cables which are likely to remain in place. The mitigation and additional planting within and around the site, which will have consolidated as part of the mitigation strategy, will remain as an enduring and positive legacy of this Proposed Project.

In relation to landscape character, the Proposed Project seeks the introduction of modern technological structures into a rural landscape. Whilst contrasting with traditional agricultural land uses, the layout of the arrays will reinforce the existing field pattern and restore/enhance lost and/or degraded field boundaries. Whilst this provides some consistency with other forms of rural land use, the tone and texture of the panel array is clearly 'built form' and represents an increase in the intensity of built development in the immediate landscape context. The substation compound introduces a large-scale new GIS building into the lowland plateaux landscape, however the scale and appearance of the proposed GIS compound is agricultural/industrial and not incongruous with existing forces for change in the landscape. Indeed, the proposed substation building will be finished in a muted grey/green tone to assimilate with surrounding industrial farm sheds that are a characteristic feature of the surrounding landscape. It should also be noted that the proposed BESS compound will be encircled by an 8.5m acoustic barrier, albeit this is setback from surrounding receptors and will be well screened from the nearest surrounding receptors.

The proposed project will also see an intensity of electrical infrastructure development outside of the main solar site, with the new 2no. Line Cable Interface Masts (LCIMs) contained along the alignment of an existing overhead cable corridor in the northern extent of the study area. In this regard, whilst the proposed structures will result in an increase in the intensity of development in the surrounding local landscape, they will not appear incongruous in the context of the existing overhead cable corridor.

It is also important to note that whilst the proposed solar development is relatively sizeable in scale and occupies several land holdings, there will be very few opportunities to view the proposed development in its entirety due to the dense vegetation that occurs along the perimeter of the site and within the intervening landscape, in addition to the proposed landscape mitigation measures that form part of this application.

On the basis of the factors discussed above it is considered that the magnitude of operational stage landscape effect is Medium within the site and its immediate vicinity, being those lands contained within approximately 500m of the Proposed Project. Thereafter, the magnitude of the operational stage landscape impact is deemed to reduce to Low and Negligible, as the Proposed Project becomes a progressively smaller component of the overall landscape fabric.

With reference to the significance matrix (Table 12.4) above, the Medium-low landscape sensitivity judgement attributed to the study area, coupled with a Medium magnitude of landscape impact in the immediate vicinity (<500m) of the Proposed Project is considered to result in an overall significance of no greater than Moderate-slight within the site and its immediate surrounds, with the remainder of the 5km radius study area likely to experience Slight or Imperceptible landscape impacts.

12.6.7 Magnitude of Visual Effects – Operational Stage

The assessment of visual impacts at each of the selected viewpoints is aided by photomontages of the proposed project (The supporting photomontages are provided in Volume 4 of this EIAR).

Photomontages are a 'photo-real' depiction of the scheme within the view utilising a rendered three-dimensional model of the development, which has been geo-referenced to allow accurate placement and scale. For each viewpoint, the following images have been produced:

1. Existing view;
2. Outline view (yellow outline showing the extent of the proposed solar farm location including all associated overground works overlaid on the photograph);
3. Montage view
4. Montage view with mitigation established.

Table 12.7: Visual magnitude of impact and Significance of effect - operational phase

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
VP1	**L40232 at Rathnageeragh (Distinctive Landscape Unit)** The depicted view is from L40232 Rathnageeragh Road oriented to the SW where the development is located at a distance of approx. 1500 mts. Road level is lower than the land surrounding it, thus foreground contains road with elevated land and in the midground on the western side are some houses situated further along the road interspersed with trees. Further southwest shows more vegetation in the distant background.	Medium	The Proposed Project will not be visible from here; thus, the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible by default. Proposed mitigation planting will not have a bearing on the visual impact from here.	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term	Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term
VP2	**Slieve Coillte (Distinctive Landscape Unit)** This is a scenic panoramic view from Slieve Coillte hill, which is the highest point within several kilometres. The view is from a pathway not far from the Slieve Coillte viewing point and the site is towards SE. The viewpoint is at an altitude of 253mts. The foreground depicts part of the hill and a line of trees in the foreground. In the background the view extends across a rolling landscape cloaked in pastoral farmland and dense layers of vegetation.	High-medium	The proposals will be barely perceptible from this vantage point due to the distance of view and the presence of a backcloth of existing landscape features. Proposed mitigation planting will not have a bearing on the visual impact from here.	Slight-Imperceptible / Neutral / Medium-term	Slight -Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term	Slight -Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term
VP3	**L40232 at Nash (1)** – This viewpoint is established from a local Road. Towards SE and E viewpoint stretches across a field which is adjacent to the site of development. The foreground shows field boundary vegetation with the field in the midground. In the background, there are some mature trees and hedges at the boundary of the field adjacent to site. Towards the south in the foreground, trees and vegetation alongside the road are visible with agricultural fields in the midground and a dwelling in the background.	Medium-low	A number of solar panels are visible behind the hedges in the mid-distance leading to a **medium** magnitude of change. The proposed panels will generate a degree of enclosure at the nearby residential dwelling, which is not readily discernible from the contained local road context. Nonetheless, the terrain descends away from the dwelling, with only the nearest rows of panels visible, viewed partially against the sky. Overall, the built form of the panels will result in an increase in the intensity of built development in this location, and thus the magnitude of effect is deemed Medium. Once the proposed mitigation screen planting has fully established, the view of the panels will be completely screened from both the local road and nearby dwellings. Whilst the mitigation	Moderate-Slight / Negative / Medium-term	Slight-Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term	Slight-Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
			screen planting will result in a marginal degree of enclosure at the nearby dwelling, it will be well assimilated into the surrounding network of established hedgerow vegetation. Post mitigation the magnitude of effect will reduce to Low-negligible			
VP4	**L40232 at Nash (2) –** This is a viewpoint from a local road, where this portion of the road borders the Proposed Project. Towards the east, a gate is visible which leads to a pathway into the development site towards southeast. In the midground, is the pastoral field which will be part of the development. In the background, some glimpses of rolling pastoral hilly landscape are afforded from sections of this local road corridor. Towards SE, the view is directly through the gate, one can see the pathway leading down towards south and in the background are some glimpses of rolling pastoral hilly landscape. Towards S/SW, the road borders the Proposed Project. The road is visible along with well-maintained hedges that block the view of the private residence behind on the South side. Only the chimney of the house is visible. It should be noted that this view represents a very brief view afforded from an otherwise contained local road.	**Medium-low**	The proposed panel array will be visible at a near distance from this local road and the neighbouring pastoral fields. However, it should be noted that this represents a fleeting view into the this solar parcel, which is otherwise well screened by well-established roadside hedgerow vegetation. Whilst the panels will be a noticeable feature from this near distance, they will be largely screened from notable sections of the immediate surrounding local road context. It is also important to note the adjacent residential dwelling, which will be surrounded on three sides by the proposed panels. Although the panels will be well screened from this dwelling, which is enclosed by a dense conifer hedge, there will nevertheless be a perceived intensity of development at the neighbouring property. Overall, the magnitude of effect is deemed Medium–Low due to the fleeting nature of this view. The proposed mitigation planting will screen and soften the built tone and textures of the proposed panel structures. Once the hedges mature, no portion of the panels will be visible, however there will be a loss of openness with solid hedgerow planting truncating easterly views and the magnitude would be **Low-negligible**.	**Moderate-slight / Negative / Medium-term**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Long Term**	**Slight / Negative / Long Term**
VP5	**L4030 at Nash (1)–** This is a viewpoint established from a local road, where a portion of the road borders the Proposed Project. Towards SE, the road is visible and both the road edges have combination of mature trees and hedgerows. On the Eastern side, the well-maintained hedgerows are bordering a residential property. The Proposed Project will be on the opposite side of the road. towards SW, the view primarily consists of	**Medium-low**	The Proposed Project will not be visible in summer months due to the screening effects of foreground vegetation and built form. In winter any glimpsed views would be heavily filtered by layers of intervening vegetation such that the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible. Indeed, the proposed mitigation screen planting measures will reinforce the neighbouring hedgerows resulting in very limited potential visibility of	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Medium-term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long-term**	**Slight-Imperceptible / Negative / Long-term**

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
	reasonably dense vegetation/hedgerows bordering the road. Towards W/NW, the view consists mainly of the vegetation/hedges on the Western side, while the road is visible on the side of the image with hedgerows and trees bordering the other side of the road as well.		the panels even from this neighbouring context.			
VP6	**L40232 at Nash (3) –** This is a viewpoint established from a local road. South side of the road has hedges and occasional mature trees bordering it, visible in the foreground along with a small structure visible to the SE, which is associated with the property neighbouring the site. In the midground is the field which will be part of the proposed site. The background shows mature trees and hedges bordering the field. Towards S/ SW, there is a dwelling visible directly in front with low vegetation and a fence in the foreground. Part of the field, which is the proposed site, is visible in the background on one side of the house while on the other side, there are other buildings as well as some trees visible. There is a slight glimpse of the general gentle hilly landscape in the distant background. Towards W, the T-junction road is visible in the centre of the view. The north edge of the road has reasonably dense hedgerows and trees while the south shows the entrance to the residence and further along the road more buildings and some vegetation on the roadside. In front, in the midground is another building with some more buildings and trees in the background of the small settlement.	**Medium-low**	There will be a clear view of panels in the foreground and midground. The proposals would appear prominently and will increase the intensity and diversity of built form. The proposed panels will encircle the nearby property to the east and south, generating a notable sense of containment. Whilst some sense of openness will remain to the west, due to the terrain descending in that direction from the dwelling, the panels to the south and east will truncate views across the neighbouring and surrounding pastoral setting. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **High-medium** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact. Once mitigation planting has fully established, the proposed hedgerows would completely screen the nearby panels, albeit the quality of impact would remain negative due to the enclosure and truncation of views. Given the foreground intrusion and appreciable horizontal and vertical segment of view affected, the magnitude of impact post mitigation would reduce to **Medium-low.**	**Moderate / Negative / Medium-term**	**Moderate-Slight / Negative / Long-term**	**Moderate-Slight / Negative / Long-term**
VP7	**L4030 at Nash (2) -** This is a viewpoint established from a local road adjacent to the site, the location of the viewpoint is at a T junction with another local road. E/SE side has a view of a gate and a path leading into the site area as well as part of the local road on the SE side. The road has a combination of hedges and trees along the side. The path leading into the site is also surrounded by hedges. One can see the field which is part of the site in	**Medium-low**	There will be a clear view of panels in the foreground and midground. The proposals would appear prominently, albeit visual softened by the surrounding layers of intervening vegetation, and will increase the intensity and diversity of built form. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **Medium** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact.	**Moderate / Negative / Medium-term**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Long-term**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Long-term**

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
	the midground and a combination of mature trees and hedges in the background surrounding the field. On the S/SW, one can see the both sides of the local road heading further south. Left side of the road has hedges and trees and on the right side of the road in the foreground, is a disused stone structure with a wooden gate. NW affords a view of the other perpendicular local road, which has the dilapidated unused stone structure on one side and some residential buildings on the other side.		Once mitigation planting has established the foreground proposals would be screened with a glimpse of panels in the mid distance, notably reducing the visual presence of proposed panels here. The magnitude of impact post mitigation would reduce to **Low-negligible.**			
VP8	**Local road east of the River Owenduff at Kilbraney (1) -** This is a view from a local road from a small settlement located east of the development site. This viewpoint is 168 mts away from the nearest part of the site. The local road visible towards SW is bordered by trees and hedges on both sides. On the left side of the road are two gates/entrances to houses in the foreground and one house is visible in the background. There are views of the road and neighbouring field to the W/NW. The road is bordered with tall hedges/trees and there is a field gate in the foreground with the field in the midground. In the background, the bordering hedges and trees are visible. In the far distance a hill is visible.	**Medium-low**	The Proposed Project will not be visible from here; thus, the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible by default.	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**
VP9	**Nash Graveyard -** This is a view from Nash Graveyard situated in close proximity to the site. Towards NW/N, in the foreground are a number of graves and gravestones and behind the graves is an archway formed by trees. In the background, mature trees are visible. Towards the east, more of the graveyard is visible in the foreground and in the background are trees and hedges forming a boundary to the graveyard. A gate is visible on the righthand side of the image. The S/SW part of the view includes parts of the graveyard and a dense wooded area.	**Medium**	The upper parts of the proposed panel array will be visible at a medium distance resulting in a **low** magnitude of change, where they are partially visible above the nearby hedgerows along the vegetated skyline. Whilst visible, the proposed panels will have a limited visual presence from here. The mitigation screen planting will screen and soften the built tone and textures of the proposed panel structures. Once the hedges mature, no portion of the panels will be visible, and thus, the magnitude of effect will reduce to negligible.	**Slight / Negative / Medium Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Long Term**
VP10	**Local road east of the River Owenduff at Kilbraney (2) -** This is a panoramic view from a small local	**Medium-low**	Glimpses of parts of the array and the substation compound can be obtained. The proposals are at	**Slight / Negative / Medium Term**	**Slight / Negative / Long Term**	**Moderate-slight / Negative / Long Term**

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
	road from a small settlement located east of the development site. This view points towards SW/W, the direction in which the Proposed Project is situated. The nearest solar panels to this view point are about 320 mts away. In the foreground, are two gates of two properties with their driveways. The two story house towards the right is visible in midground with more properties to its right and trees in the background. In the distance, glimpses of rolling hills are visible.		medium and long range and the most noticeable components lie to the west where they break the skyline and obscure parts of the distinctive hill at Slieve Coillte beyond. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **medium-low** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact. The mitigation planting will have limited screening capabilities here as the proposed panels to the west are located at a greater elevation than this local context, and the panels remain noticeable due to their contrasting appearance and tonality compared to the existing view components including the background hill at Slieve Coillte. Thus, the residual magnitude of effect remains **medium-low.**			
VP11	**Local Laneway east of River Owenduff at Kilbraney-** This is a view from a small local road looking West towards the site and represents one of the nearest publicly accessible locations to the east of Parcel A. The view contains reasonably dense vegetation including trees which border the western edge of the road. The nearest solar panels are 140 mts away.	**Medium-low**	The Proposed Project will not be visible from here; thus, the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible by default.	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**
VP12	**Local road west of the L4030 at Cloonagh -** This is a view from a small local road adjacent to the site. Towards SW/W, in the foreground are low height shrubs and hedges, with a field visible in midground which is part of the development site. In the background, a combination of mature trees and hedges border the field. The nearest visible solar panels from this view will be situated about 77 mts away. In NW, The small road bends towards the right and is surrounded by a combination of hedges and trees. On the left side of the road, the field is visible, which forms part of the site. At the back, trees and hedges border the field. On the N/NE, the right edge of the small road is visible which contains trees	**Medium-low**	The proposed panel array will be visible at a close range towards SW/W. The panels are located slightly offset from the local road corridor to mitigate the presence of the proposed development from the local road a neighbouring residential receptor. A partial side-on view and view of the backs of panels is afforded here, where the array presents with a jegged edge profile partially against the sky and backed by surrounding vegetation. Whilst the proposed development will increase the intensity of development here, only a small portion of the overall project is visible here. Indeed, the true scale and extent of the proposed project is heavily diminished here due to the contained nature of this local context. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to	**Moderate-slight / Negative / Medium-term**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Long-term**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Long-term**

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
	and hedges affording very little view beyond.		have a **medium** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact. The mitigation planting is set back from the road side and will screen and soften the built tone and textures of the proposed panel structures. Once the hedges mature, no portion of the panels will be visible albeit the new section of hedgerow will generate a marginal sense of enclosure with regard to views to the southwest. Overall, the residual magnitude of effect will reduce to **low-negligible** and the nature of effect would remain negative.			
VP13	**Local road at Cloonagh (1) -** This is a view from a local road within close proximity to site. There are a few houses along this road, the nearest house to this viewpoint is 30 mts away. Towards S/SW, the view shows the closest house mentioned, which is located on the right hand side of the road. The road is surrounded by low vegetation beyond which the two story house is visible. The nearest solar panels from the house are about 70mts away in NE direction. Towards NW/N a field entrance is visible in the midground with hedges and trees seen in the background. The road is flanked by hedgerows on either side.	**Medium-low**	Glimpses of the proposed panel array will be visible between the gaps in vegetation while facing NW/N. The nearest visible solar panels are located about 45 mts away. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **Low-negligible** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact. Once the proposed mitigation screen planting has fully established, the proposed panels will be fully screened from this local context and the magnitude of visual effect will reduce to Negligible.	**Slight / Negative / Medium Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**
VP14	**Local road at Cloonagh (2) -** This is a view from a local road bordering the site. This viewpoint is in three parts. Part 1 (14a) points towards S/SW. Right side of the road is visible and is bordered by hedgerow, the field behind is part of the site and will have solar panels. Part 2 (14b) points towards W/NW. This is the view looking towards the opposite side and the field with solar panels now will be on the left hand side. The road is again bordered in this part with hedgerows. Part 3 (14c) points towards N. This shows the right side of the road, with entrance going into one of the residential properties just off the image. The fence to the property and is visible and behind which there is a field in the midground with trees and hedges bordering the field in the	**Medium-low**	There is potential for small glimpses of the proposed panel array to be afforded between the gaps in vegetation, however the development will have no notable visual presence here and is likely to go unnoticed due to the degree of intervening screening in the immediate surrounding landscape. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **low-negligible** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact. Once the vegetation is planted for mitigation, no portion of the panels will be visible. And thus, the magnitude of visual effect will reduce to Negligible.	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Medium Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
	background. This field on the right side is not part of the site area.					
VP15	**L4030 at Ballygarvan -** This is a sweeping panoramic view afforded from a local road. The viewpoint is roughly 470 mts east and 575 mts south of the redline boundary. There are several residential properties and pasture land on this road. This viewpoint is in two parts. Part 1 (15a) points towards W/NW and is an expansive view. The road is bound by shrubs and a series fields in a gentle rolling landscape are visible behind, each bordered by a combination of trees and hedges. Part 2 (15b) points towards NW/N. This expansive view is of the left side of the road, which is bordered by shrubs and hedgerows and a mature road side tree is visible further on the roadside. In the midground is the field adjacent to the left side of the road as well as a house with its well-maintained hedge boundary. Cattle is grazing on the fields, which are bordered by trees and hedge combination.	**Medium-low**	The Proposed Project will be completely screened by foreground vegetation such that the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible. There would be no material effect on the view.	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Medium Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**
VP16	**Local road at Cloonag, north of Gusserane -** This is a view from a local road in close proximity to the site. There is a school situated roughly 85 mts south of this point. The nearest solar panels to this viewpoint are 130 mts West. This viewpoint is in two parts. Part 1 (16a) points towards W/NW. The road edges have hedgerows and trees. The left side of the road is visible with a boundary fence and hedge to a neighbouring property and a gate to the bordering field next to it. In the background is the vegetation that creates a border to the field. Part 2 (16b) shows the right-hand side of the road which is bordered by trees and high hedges.	**Medium-low**	The Proposed Project will be completely screened by foreground vegetation such that the magnitude of visual impact is Negligible. There would be no material effect on the view	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**
VP17	**R735 at Gusserane O'Rahillys GAA -** This is a panoramic view from a regional road. The nearest red boundary is located 519 mts West and approx. 1 km North of this viewpoint. This viewpoint is in two parts. Part 1 (17a) points towards NW. Gate to the bordering field is visible in the foreground and the field in the midground with bordering hedges and trees in the background.	**Medium-low**	Small glimpses of the proposed panel array will be visible between the gaps in vegetation, however these will be difficult to discern and are unlikely to draw the eye of the casual observer. Overall, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **Negligible** magnitude visual impact. Once the vegetation is planted for mitigation, no portion of the panels	**Imperceptible / Negative / Medium Term**	**Imperceptible / Neutral / Long Term**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Long Term**

VP No.	Existing View	VP Sensitivity	Magnitude of visual effect (pre & post mitigation)	Pre mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect	SUMMER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (This scenario represents the visual effects stated in the original assessment – EIAR dated September 2025)	WINTER SCENARIO Post mitigation significance / quality / duration of effect (Winter scenario assessment was undertaken in March 2026)
	In the distance one can glimpse a gentle hilly landscape. Part 2 (17b) points towards N. Again a gate to the field is visible in the foreground with the pastureland in the midground and bordering vegetation in the background with the distant landscape.		will be visible, reinforcing the Negligible magnitude of effect.			
VP18	**R735 west of Guesserane -** This is a view from a regional road and it points in the NW/N direction. The closest solar panels to this point are located 332 mts North. The view is of the field directly north of the road bordered by hedgerows and then the field beyond which is part of the development site. In distant background, glimpses of gentle hilly landscape are visible.	**Medium-low**	Discreet parts of the proposed panel array will be visible at a medium distance. The panels are viewed offset from the regional road corridor, with this part of the proposed development contained within a pastoral field bounded by established hedgerow vegetation. Whilst the visible panels will contrast with the surrounding pastoral land uses, they will not block or obstruct views but are more likely to be perceived as an alternative form of land use. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **Low** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact. The mitigation screen planting will screen and soften the built tone and textures of the proposed panel structures. Parts of the array would remain visible post mitigation, and thus, the magnitude of effect is deemed to remain **low.**	**Slight / Negative / Medium-term**	**Slight / Negative / Long-term**	**Slight / Negative / Long-term**
VP19	**R735 at Dunmain -** This is a view from a regional road and it points in the N/NE direction. The nearest solar panels are at a distance of 660 mts in the NE direction from this point. The pasture field is visible in the foreground bordered by a mixture of trees and hedgerows. On the righhand side (further E) are taller trees while on the left (N) are medium height hedgerows.	**Medium-low**	Discreet parts of the proposed panel array will be visible at a medium to long distance. Prior to mitigation, the Proposed Project is considered to have a **low-negligble** magnitude and negative quality of visual impact. The mitigation screen planting will screen and soften the built tone and textures of the proposed panel structures. However, due to the locally elevated nature of this viewing context, parts of the array would remain visible post mitigation. Thus the residual magnitude of effect will remain **low-negligible.**	**Slight-imperceptible / Negative / Medium Term**	**Slight-Imperceptible / Negative / Long Term**	**Slight-Imperceptible / Negative / Long Term**

As outlined in Table 12.7 above, in relation to the post mitigation scenarios, while there may be a marginal increase in the visual exposure of the proposed development during the winter months, once the proposed screen planting has fully established, this increase is expected to be limited. Established winter vegetation continues to provide a notable degree of screening of the proposed panels and other built features that form part of the proposed energy park. Furthermore, where the proposed hedgerow vegetation and additional screening measures are appropriately managed and maintained in accordance with best practice for hedgerow management, they will effectively screen the solar panel structures in combination with the surrounding existing intervening hedgerows, with only brief and fleeting glimpses of the proposed panel structures afforded through gaps in the winter vegetation.

Importantly, the residual significance of visual effects remains within the range of between Moderate–slight and Imperceptible for the post-mitigation significance / quality /duration of effect. Therefore, it is concluded that the winter visibility scenario does not give rise to materially different visual effects from the summer visibility scenario.

12.6.8 Cumulative Impact Assessment

The closest other existing array to the site lies just beyond the extent of the study area at Rosspile, some 6.5km to the east of the site. Due to the heavily contained nature of the Proposed project, which is likely to give rise only to localised effects, it is not considered that the development will generate any notable cumulative landscape or visual effects in relation to other solar schemes.

12.6.9 Monitoring

12.6.9.1 Construction Phase

Landscape tender drawings and specifications will be produced to ensure that the landscape work is implemented in accordance with best practice. This document will include tree work procedures, soil handling, planting and maintenance. The contract works will be supervised by a suitably qualified landscape architect.

The planting works will be undertaken in the next available planting season after completion of the main civil engineering and building work.

All tree protection requirements will be installed on commencement of the development and removed on a phased basis as stages of the development are completed.

12.6.9.2 Operational Phase

This will consist of weed control, replacement planting, pruning etc. All landscape works will be in an establishment phase for the initial three years from planting. All works will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure the quality of the development is maintained.

12.7 Conclusions

In terms of landscape impacts, the Proposed Project is considered to have only a modest physical impact on the site as it is consolidated within the existing hedgerow network and will not require significant excavation works to construct either the solar panels or the access and maintenance tracks, battery storage, underground cable connections or substation compound.

In terms of impacts on landscape character, the Proposed Project represents the introduction of a new and relatively unfamiliar form of built development into a rural setting. Nevertheless, the solar array will hug the ground plain and be consolidated within the existing field pattern, which will be enhanced as part of a comprehensive mitigation strategy. Furthermore, whilst the Proposed Project comprises several distinct solar parcels, the overall scale and intensity of the development will seldom be fully apparent due to the dispersed nature of the site and dense layers of intervening vegetation located between the proposed parcels. Indeed, the limited residual visibility of the site will limit the Proposed Projects' potential to notably alter the character of the surrounding local and wider landscape, which is currently influenced by a broad array of other productive land uses.

The site and its immediate surroundings constitute a productive modified rural landscape with associated landscape values. Whilst the Proposed Project may alter the local 'landscape fabric', it does not markedly affect the prevailing landscape pattern or overriding rural landscape character of the area. It is also important to note that once decommissioned, there will be little evidence (aside from the proposed substation, which will continue to transport renewable electricity as per national policy) that the proposed solar development ever existed.

Therefore, combined with the 'Medium-low' magnitude of operational stage landscape impact, the overall significance of operational stage landscape effect was deemed no greater than 'Moderate' and of a Negative quality.

Visual Impacts were assessed at 19 viewpoints throughout the immediate and wider landscape context, representing various viewing distances, angles and receptor types. At the vast majority of these viewpoints (12 out of 19) both the pre-mitigation and residual visual effect is deemed to be in the lower range of Slight to Imperceptible, which belies the overall extent of the solar array and highlights how readily it is visually absorbed within the well vegetated and relatively flat landscape.

VP6 and VP10 are the only representative viewpoints classified with a residual significance of visual effect of Moderate-Slight (in the summer and winter post-mitigation scenario), with all other residual visual effect classified as Slight or lower. The proposed project will result in a notable truncation of views from this local context, most notably from the adjacent dwelling. Nevertheless, the proposed mitigation screen planting will fully screen the view of panels here, whilst this dwelling still benefits from open views across the wider surrounding landscape to the west, which is the principal aspect of visual amenity at this dwelling.

All other representative viewpoints were classified as Slight or less, and in most cases, this is as a result of close and clear views of the proposed solar array in adjacent fields being fully or substantially screened by proposed mitigation screen planting at the road side of the nearest fields. Only the containment of the view by this planting results in the negative residual effect, but it is preferable to the close and unobstructed view of the panels. It should be noted that in all of these instances only a fraction of the overall array is actually visible prior to mitigation screen planting establishment.

It should be noted that mitigation screen planting is much more effective for close views of the proposed solar array than medium and long distance views of it. This occurs because any views of the solar array from mid to long distances tends to be on sloping ground where sections of it rise above intervening vegetation. That same characteristic renders screen planting around the perimeter of those sloping fields less effective.

Overall, the proposed development, whilst sizeable, is considered to be well sited in a robust part of County Wexford that is not regarded as highly rare or sensitive at a regional or national level. Indeed, the overall scale and extent of the project will never be fully perceived by surrounding receptors, due to the dispersed nature of the layout combined with the high degree of intervening vegetation. Some of the largest built structures forming part of the proposed project are set well back from the nearest surrounding visual receptors and will be barely discernible, as evidenced in the visual impact appraisal. In this regard, the proposed project is not considered to be at odds with landscape and visual policy set out in the current Wexford County Development Plan.

12.7.1 Overall Significance of Effect

Based on the landscape and visual impact judgements provided throughout this LVIA, the proposed Shelburne Energy Farm is not considered to give rise to any significant residual impacts. Instead, the residual effects are all in the mid to low range, which belies the overall extent of the proposed project and highlights how readily its dispersed arrangement that is generally set back from nearest roads, is visually absorbed within the well vegetated and relatively flat landscape.

12.8 References

Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) publication entitled Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 2013 (GLVIA3);

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publication ‘Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements (2022); and

'Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/2019.