

LVI/A

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT



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LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

This Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared in respect of a planning application for a proposed infill development within an application site located c. 600m southwest of the centre of the settlement of Saggart, in the townland of Saggart, County Dublin. The LVIA report describes the landscape context of the proposed development and assesses the likely landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development 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).

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

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publication 'Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements (updated August 2017) and the accompanying Advice Notes on Current Practice in the Preparation of Environmental Impact Statements (updated 2015); and
- Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment publication entitled Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013).

1.1 STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY

This LVIA was prepared by Macro Works Ltd. Relevant experience includes landscape and visual assessments for a range of industrial, commercial and infrastructural developments. Experience includes landscape and visual assessments for a range of industrial, commercial and infrastructural developments including numerous landfill, quarry and mining projects.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development is to infill a c 2.3ha size area within a planning application site boundary of approximately c 4.9 ha, in an agricultural field adjacent to an under-construction reservoir, in County Dublin approximately 0.6km southwest of the centre of the settlement of Saggart. The volume of material to be placed on the site is c. 24,008m³ (refer to planning drawings numbered PH.001 - 003 submitted as part of the planning application for full details). There is no planned removal of vegetation.

2 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Production of this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment involved;

- A desktop study to establish an appropriate study area, relevant landscape and visual designations in the South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016-2022 (South Dublin County Council 2016) as well as other sensitive visual receptors. This stage culminates in the selection of a set of potential viewpoints from which to study the effects of the proposed development;
- Fieldwork to establish the landscape character of the receiving environment and to confirm and refine the set of viewpoints to be used for the visual assessment stage;
- Assessment of the significance of the landscape impact of the proposed development as a function of landscape sensitivity weighed against the magnitude of the landscape impact; and
- Assessment of the significance of the visual impact of the proposed development as a function of visual receptor sensitivity weighed against the magnitude of the visual impact. This aspect of the assessment is supported by photomontages prepared in respect of the selected viewpoints.
- Incorporation of mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts and estimation of the residual impacts once mitigation has become established.

2.1 LANDSCAPE IMPACT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

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

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

The sensitivity of the landscape to change is the degree to which a particular landscape receptor (Landscape Character Area (LCA) or feature) can accommodate changes or new elements without

unacceptable detrimental effects to its essential characteristics. Landscape value and sensitivity are classified using the following criteria set out in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Landscape Value and Sensitivity

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

The magnitude of a predicted landscape impact is a product of the scale, extent or degree of change that is likely to be experienced as a result of the proposed development. The magnitude takes into account whether there is a direct physical impact resulting from the loss of landscape components and/or a change that extends beyond the application site boundary that may have an effect on the landscape character of the area. **Table 2** refers.

Table 2 Magnitude of Landscape Impacts

Magnitude of Impact	Description
Very High	Change that would be large in extent and scale with the loss of critically important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an overall change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality.
High	Change that would be more limited in extent and scale with the loss of important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an overall change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality.
Medium	Changes that are modest in extent and scale involving the loss of landscape characteristics or elements that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that would lead to changes in landscape character, and quality.
Low	Changes affecting small areas of landscape character and quality, together with the loss of some less characteristic landscape elements or the addition of new features or elements.
Negligible	Changes affecting small or very restricted areas of landscape character. This may include the limited loss of some elements or the addition of some new features or elements that are characteristic of the existing landscape or are hardly perceivable.

The significance of a landscape impact is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the landscape receptor and the magnitude of the impact. The significance of landscape impacts is arrived at using the following matrix set out in **Table 3**.

Table 3 Impact significance matrix

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

Note: Judgements deemed 'substantial' and above are considered to be 'significant impacts' in EIA terms.

2.2 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

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

2.2.1 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Unlike landscape sensitivity, the sensitivity of visual receptors has an anthropocentric basis. It considers factors such as the perceived quality and values associated with the view, the landscape context of the viewer, the likely activity they are engaged in and whether this heightens their awareness of the surrounding landscape. A list of the factors considered by the assessor in estimating the level of sensitivity for a particular visual receptor is outlined below and used in **Table 6** below to establish visual receptor sensitivity at each VRP:

1. **Susceptibility of Receptors** - In accordance with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment ("IEMA") Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment (3rd edition 2013) visual receptors most susceptible to changes in views and visual amenity are;
 - *"Residents at home;*
 - *People, whether residents or visitors, who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focussed on the landscape and on particular views;*
 - *Visitors to heritage assets, or to other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;*
 - *Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area; and*
 - *Travellers on road rail or other transport routes where such travel involves recognised scenic routes and awareness of views is likely to be heightened".*

Visual receptors that are less susceptible to changes in views and visual amenity include;

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

2. **Recognised scenic value of the view** (County Development Plan designations, guidebooks, touring maps, postcards etc). These represent a consensus in terms of which scenic views and routes within an area are strongly valued by the population because in the case of County Developments Plans, for example, a public consultation process is required;
3. **Views from within highly sensitive landscape areas.** Again, highly sensitive landscape designations are usually part of a county's Landscape Character Assessment, which is then incorporated within the County Development Plan and is therefore subject to the public consultation process. Viewers within such areas are likely to be highly attuned to the landscape around them;
4. **Primary views from dwellings.** A proposed development might be seen from anywhere within a particular residential property with varying degrees of sensitivity. Therefore, this category is reserved for those instances in which the design of dwellings or housing estates, has been influenced by the desire to take in a particular view. This might involve the use of a slope or the specific orientation of a house and/or its internal social rooms and exterior spaces;
5. **Intensity of use, popularity.** This relates to the number of viewers likely to experience a view on a regular basis and whether this is significant at county or regional scale;
6. **Connection with the landscape.** This considers whether or not receptors are likely to be highly attuned to views of the landscape i.e. commuters hurriedly driving on busy national route versus hill walkers directly engaged with the landscape enjoying changing sequential views over it;
7. **Provision of elevated panoramic views.** This relates to the extent of the view on offer and the tendency for receptors to become more attuned to the surrounding landscape at locations that afford broad vistas;
8. **Sense of remoteness and/or tranquillity.** Receptors taking in a remote and tranquil scene, which is likely to be fairly static, are likely to be more receptive to changes in the view than those taking in the view of a busy street scene, for example;

9. **Degree of perceived naturalness.** Where a view is valued for the sense of naturalness of the surrounding landscape it is likely to be highly sensitive to visual intrusion by distinctly manmade features;
10. **Presence of striking or noteworthy features.** A view might be strongly valued because it contains a distinctive and memorable landscape feature such as a promontory headland, lough or castle;
11. **Historical, cultural and / or spiritual significance.** Such attributes may be evident or sensed by receptors at certain viewing locations, which may attract visitors for the purposes of contemplation or reflection heightening the sense of their surroundings;
12. **Rarity or uniqueness of the view.** This might include the noteworthy representativeness of a certain landscape type and considers whether the receptor could take in similar views anywhere in the broader region or the country;
13. **Integrity of the landscape character.** This looks at the condition and intactness of the landscape in view and whether the landscape pattern is a regular one of few strongly related components or an irregular one containing a variety of disparate components;
14. **Sense of place.** This considers whether there is special sense of wholeness and harmony at the viewing location; and
15. **Sense of awe.** This considers whether the view inspires an overwhelming sense of scale or the power of nature.

Those locations which are deemed to satisfy many of the above criteria are likely to be of higher sensitivity. (No relative importance is inferred by the order of listing in the **Table 5**.) Overall sensitivity may be a result of a number of these factors or, alternatively, a strong association with one or two in particular.

2.2.2 Visual Impact Magnitude

The magnitude of visual effects is determined on the basis of two factors; the visual presence (relative visual dominance) of the proposal and its effect on visual amenity. The magnitude of visual impacts is classified in **Table 4**.

Table 4 Magnitude of Visual Impact

Criteria	Description
Very High	The proposal intrudes into a large proportion or critical part of the available vista and is without question the most noticeable element. A high degree of visual clutter or disharmony is also generated, strongly reducing the visual amenity of the scene.
High	The proposal intrudes into a significant proportion or important part of the available vista and is one of the most noticeable elements. A considerable degree of visual clutter or disharmony is also likely to be generated, appreciably reducing the visual amenity of the scene.
Medium	The proposal represents a moderate intrusion into the available vista, is a readily noticeable element and/or it may generate a degree of visual clutter or disharmony, thereby reducing the visual amenity of the scene. Alternatively, it may represent a balance of higher and lower order estimates in relation to visual presence and visual amenity.
Low	The proposal intrudes to a minor extent into the available vista and may not be noticed by a casual observer and/or the proposal would not have a marked effect on the visual amenity of the scene.
Negligible	The proposal would be barely discernible within the available vista and/or it would not detract from, and may even enhance, the visual amenity of the scene.

2.2.3 Visual Impact Significance

As stated above, the significance of visual impacts is a function of visual receptor sensitivity and visual impact magnitude. This relationship is expressed in the same significance matrix and applies the same EPA definitions of significance as used earlier in respect of landscape impacts (**Table 3** refers).

2.3 EXTENT OF STUDY AREA

From similar studies it is anticipated that the proposed development is likely to be difficult to discern beyond approximately 2km and is not likely to give rise to significant landscape or visual impacts beyond approximately 1km. In the interests of a comprehensive appraisal, a 2km radius study area was selected in this instance.

3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL POLICY CONTEXT AND DESIGNATIONS

3.1 SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2016-2022

Within the South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016-2022 (South Dublin County Council 2016) a number of general landscape policies/objectives are outlined in Section 9.2.0 Landscapes and include:

- ***'Policy 7 Landscapes:*** - *It is the policy of the Council to preserve and enhance the character of the County's landscapes particularly areas that have been deemed to have a medium to high Landscape Value or medium to high Landscape Sensitivity and to ensure that landscape considerations are an important factor in the management of development.*
- ***HCL7 Objective 1:*** *To protect and enhance the landscape character of the County by ensuring that development retains, protects and, where necessary, enhances the appearance and character of the landscape taking full cognisance of the Landscape Character Assessment of South Dublin County (2015); and*
- ***HCL7 Objective 2:*** *To ensure that development is assessed against Landscape Character, Landscape Values and Landscape Sensitivity as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment for South Dublin County (2015) in accordance with Government guidance on Landscape Character Assessment and the National Landscape Strategy.'*

3.1.1 Landscape Character Assessment

South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016-2022 (South Dublin County Council 2016) includes a Landscape Character Assessment for South County Dublin was undertaken in 2015. South County Dublin is divided into 10 geographically distinct landscape character types. The proposed development is situated in landscape character type 'River Valley' (**Figure 1** refers), and is described as:

'Transitional lands that were largely rural, transforming into suburban or urban derived landuse. Radiate from established settlements and close to transport links Landuse is built land comprising transport, retail/business parks, quarries and urban derived housing.'

South County Dublin is also divided into 5 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) with the proposed development located within 'LCA 3 – Athgoe and Saggart Hills' (**Figure 2** refers). Section 7.2 of the Landscape Character Assessment gives a detailed summary of landscape character sensitivity, capacity and mitigation measures. LCA 3 – Athgoe and Saggart Hills has been summarised as:

'The integrity of the landscape character is derived from agriculture combined with other rural land uses including coniferous plantations. It forms a strong and valuable backdrop to the

extensive and densely urbanised areas of the county. The integrity of its character, and of its value as a landscape setting have been compromised by housing developments in the area and through the use of non-vernacular styles very much in conflict with the local character.'

LCA 3 – Athgoe and Saggart Hills has been designated as having a 'high' overall landscape sensitivity, and a 'high' landscape value. LCA 3 has also been identified as having a 'negligible-low' landscape capacity.

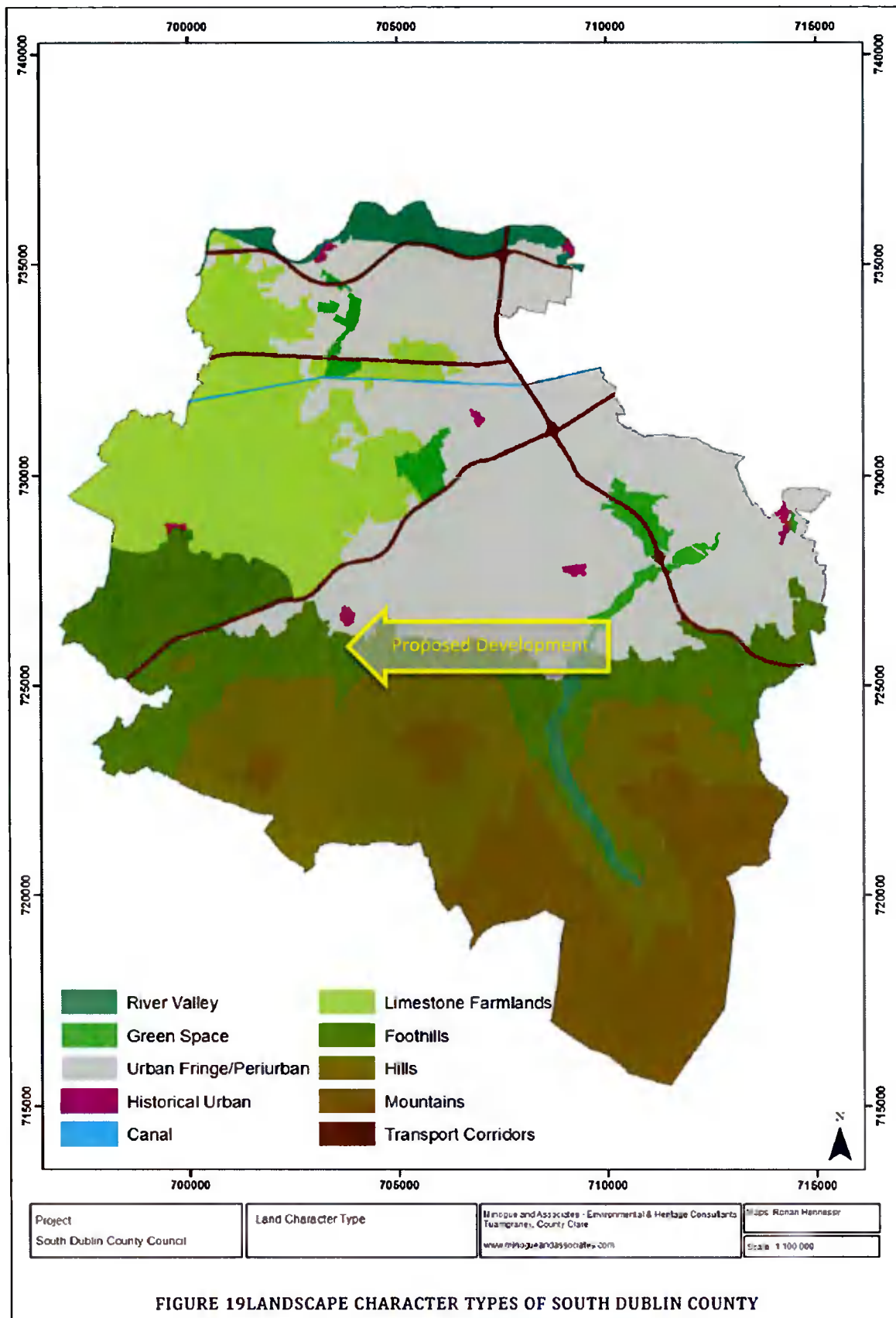


FIGURE 19 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES OF SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY

Figure 1: Excerpt from the Landscape Character Assessment of South County Dublin, showing approximate location of proposed development in relation to designated landscape character types.

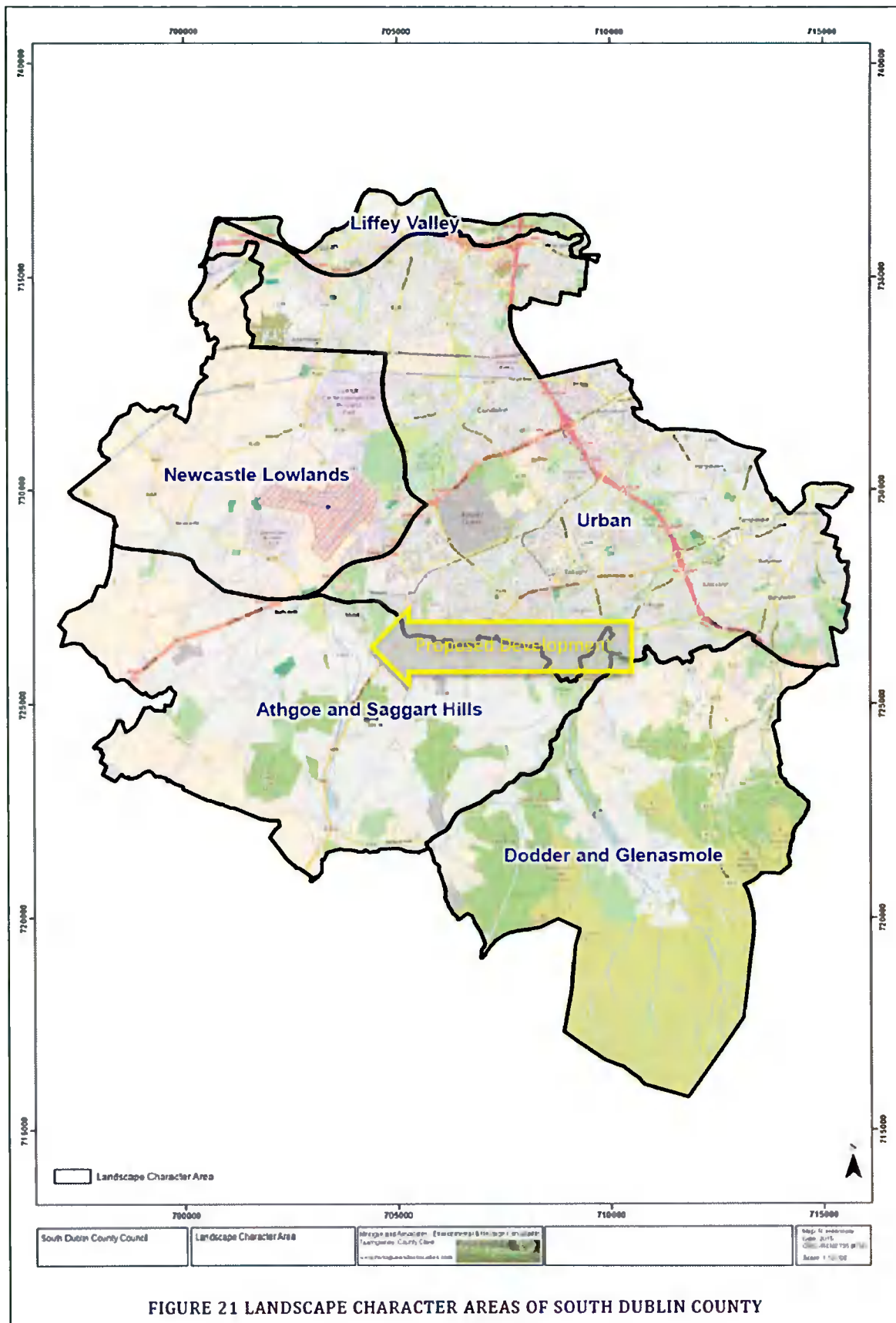


FIGURE 21 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS OF SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY

Figure 2: Excerpt from the Landscape Character Assessment of South County Dublin, showing approximate location of proposed development in relation to designated landscape character areas.

3.1.2 Land use zoning maps

The entire area of the proposed development is covered by Zoning Objective 'RU': 'To protect and improve rural amenity and to provide for the development of agriculture', in the current CDP (Figure 3 refers). The Use Classes, which are permitted in principle within this Zoning Objective include:

'Aerodrome/Airfield, Agriculture, Allotments, Cemetery, Concrete/Asphalt Plant in or adjacent to a Quarry, Home Based Economic Activities, Industry-Extractive, Open Space, Public Services, Rural Industry-Food.'

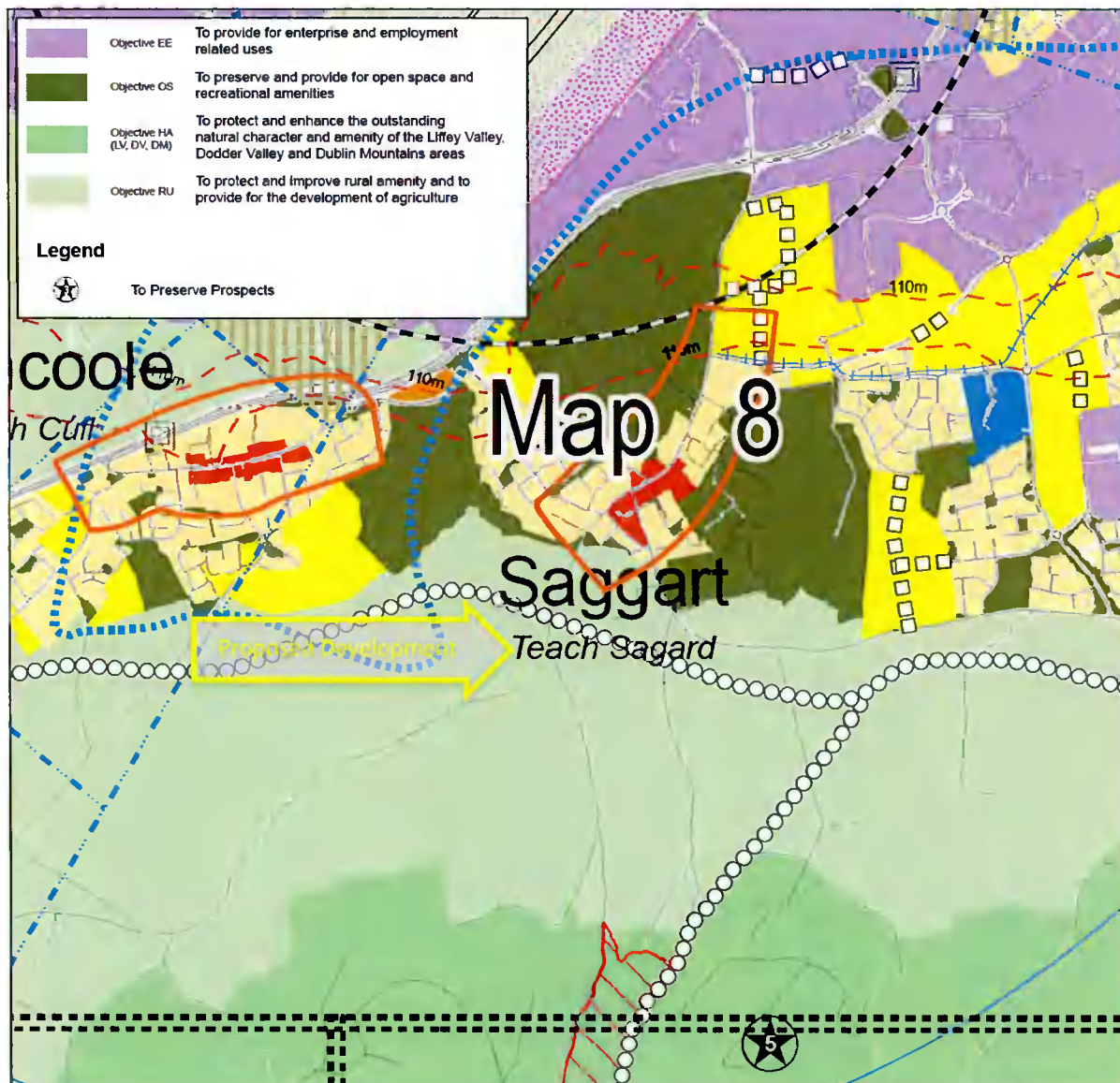


Figure 3: Excerpt from the Index Map of the Land Use Zoning Maps of South County Dublin Development Plan showing approximate location of proposed development.

3.2 VIEWS OF RECOGNISED SCENIC VALUE

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

Designated scenic Views and Prospects within South County Dublin are indicated on the Development Plan Mapping. Prospect no. 5 occurs within the study area relates to views towards the summit of Verschoyle's Hill, located approximately 1.5km southeast of the application site (**Figure 3** refers). While scenic views/routes identified for protection are only indicated on the Land Use Zoning maps of the SDCDP, with the nearest located along the N81 national secondary road which is orientated in a southwest-northeast direction and passes the application site approximately 1km to the southeast at the closest point (**Figure 4** refers). Another occurs along a local road that diverges from the N81 in an easterly direction, however the views along this route are orientated to the northeast (not in the direction of the application site).

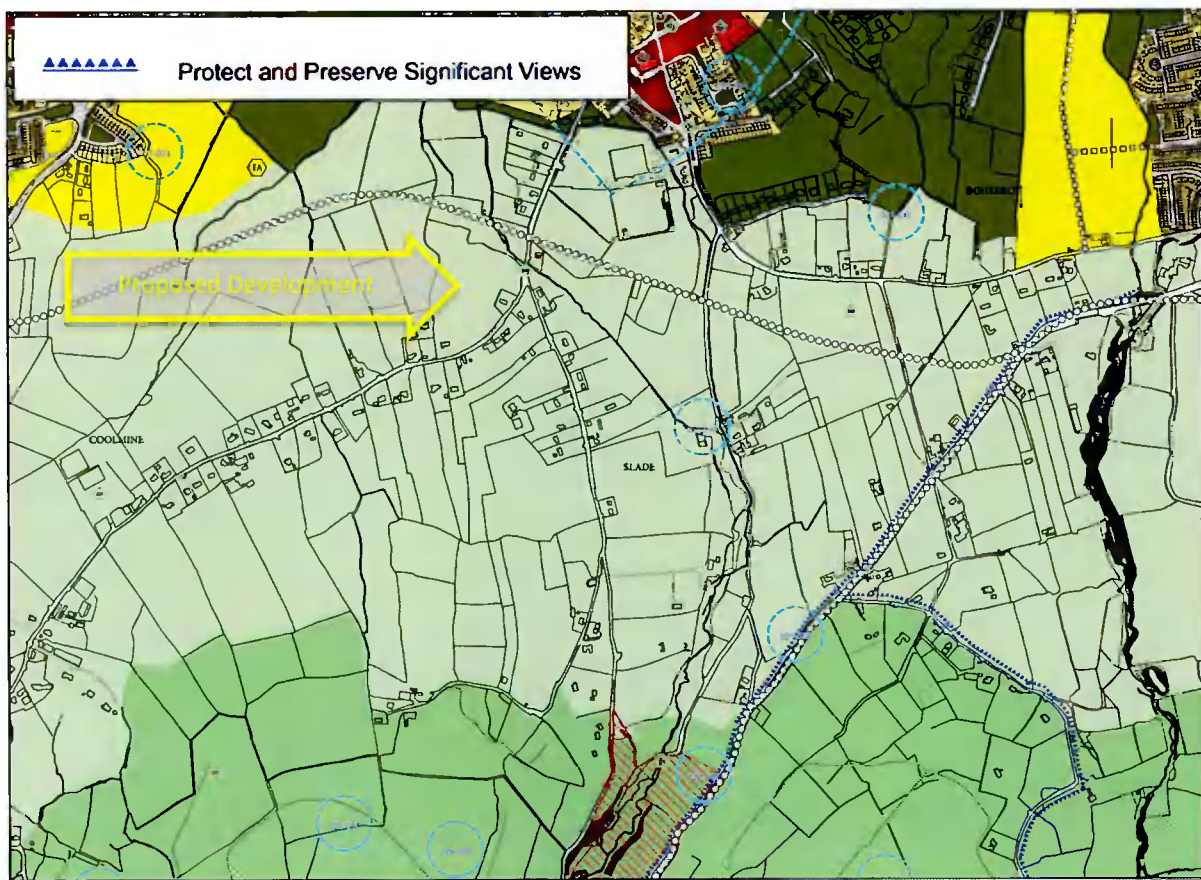


Figure 4: Excerpt from Map 8 of the Land Use Zoning Maps of South County Dublin Development Plan

4 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

4.1 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

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

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

4.1.1 Landform and Drainage

The study area is composed of terrain that slopes from c.332 OD in the south to c.97m OD in the north, with the lands within the application site ranging between c. 146.41 and 133.93m OD. The application site is located in a low-lying area adjacent to the Camac River, which is the primary watercourse that flows through the study area in a southerly direction. Other watercourses also tend to flow north from the Dublin Mountains located to the south of the study area.

4.1.2 Vegetation and Land Use

There is mature vegetation in the hedgerow network and within the golf courses located on either side of the settlement of Saggart. Rathcoole Woodland is located immediately to the south of the settlement of Rathcoole and is composed primarily of broadleaved species. The hilltops in the south of the study area have conifer plantations and the valley between them contains broadleaved woodland. In the southern portion of the study area, the predominant land use is that of farmland consisting of small-to-medium sized agricultural fields, while the northern portion is built-up. (Figure 5 refers). A reservoir is under construction to the northeast of the application site and there are industrial facilities c.300m from the eastern perimeter of the site boundary. Adjacent to the eastern perimeter of the site near Coolmine Cross is an electrical substation.



Figure 5: Aerial view of the central portion of the study area showing application site boundary of the proposed development (Google Earth Pro).

4.1.3 Centres of Population and Houses

The most notable centres of population are the settlement of Saggart and Rathcoole, located approximately 400m northeast and 900m northwest of the application site respectively. Additionally, there is a reasonably dispersed rural population within the study area, inhabiting crossroad settlements and linear clusters of dwellings along the road network. Residential dwellings adjoin the southern portion of the site, while the Millbrook Manor Nursing Home adjoins the northern perimeter.

4.1.4 Transport Routes

The N7 national primary road is the principal transport route in the study area, which passes through the study area in an east-west orientation, on the far side of the settlements of Saggart and Rathcoole, approximately 1.1km north of the proposed development at the closest point. The N81 and N82 national secondary roads occur in the southern and eastern portions of the study area, respectively. A short section of the R120 regional road passes within the northernmost extents of the study area. A network of local roads also criss-cross through the study area and converge on Saggart and Rathcoole. The proposed development is set back from the public road network. The main site will be accessed via an entrance along the eastern site boundary onto the local road. The infill material will be transported via the local road that links with the nearby reservoir construction site.

4.1.5 Public Amenities and Facilities

Rathcoole Park is situated between Saggart and Rathcoole. There are the golf courses adjacent to Saggart. The elevated area in the south of the study area hosts woodland walking trails such as the 'Slievethoul - Lugg Walk - Saggart Hill'. Otherwise, outdoor recreational opportunities are generally limited to walking and cycling on the public road network.

4.1.6 Conservation Interests

The woodland area between Lugg Hill and Verschoyle's Hill is composed of both the 'Slade of Saggart and Crooksling Glen' – Proposed Natural Heritage Area and the 'Crooksling Glen' - an Ancient or Long-Established Woodland.

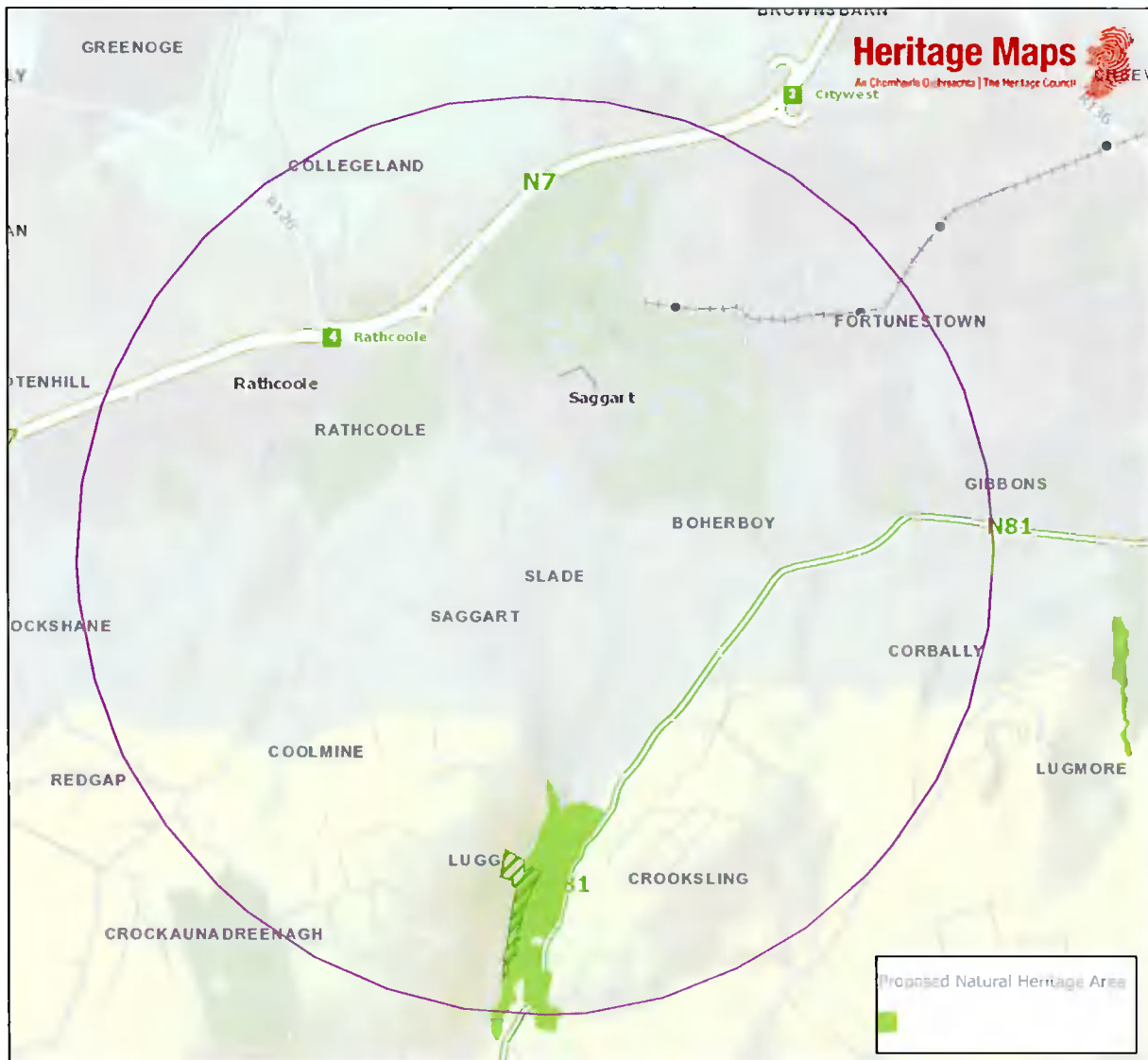


Figure 6: Conservation interests within the 2km study area (purple circle).

5 MITIGATION AND RESTORATION MEASURES

The main mitigation by avoidance measure employed in this instance is the siting of the proposed development adjoining existing infrastructure and industrial sites. The infilled area will be covered with topsoil and seeded so that it blends seamlessly with the surroundings.

6 IDENTIFICATION OF VIEWSHED REFERENCE POINTS AS A BASIS FOR ASSESSMENT

Viewshed Reference Points (VRP's) are the locations used to study the visual impacts of a proposal in detail. It is not warranted to include each and every location that provides a view of a development as this would result in an unwieldy report and make it extremely difficult to draw out the key impacts arising from the proposed development. Instead, the selected viewpoints are intended to reflect a range of different receptor types, distances and angles. The visual impact of a proposed development is assessed by Macro Works using up to six categories of receptor type as listed below:

- Key Views (from features of national or international importance);
- Designated Scenic Routes and Views;
- Local Community views;
- Centres of Population;
- Major Routes; and
- Amenity and heritage features.

VRP's might be relevant to more than one category and this makes them even more valid for inclusion in the assessment. The receptors 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 5** and **Figure 7** below.

Table 5 Outline Description of Selected Viewshed Reference Points (VRPs)

VRP No.	Location	Direction of View
VP1	Rathcoole Park, Rathcoole	SE
VP2	Drury Park, Saggart	S
VP3	L2005 local road (Slade Road), Coolmine	SW
VP4	L6018 local road (Coolmine Road), Coolmine	N
VP5	Blessington Road (N81 national secondary road), Crooksling	NW

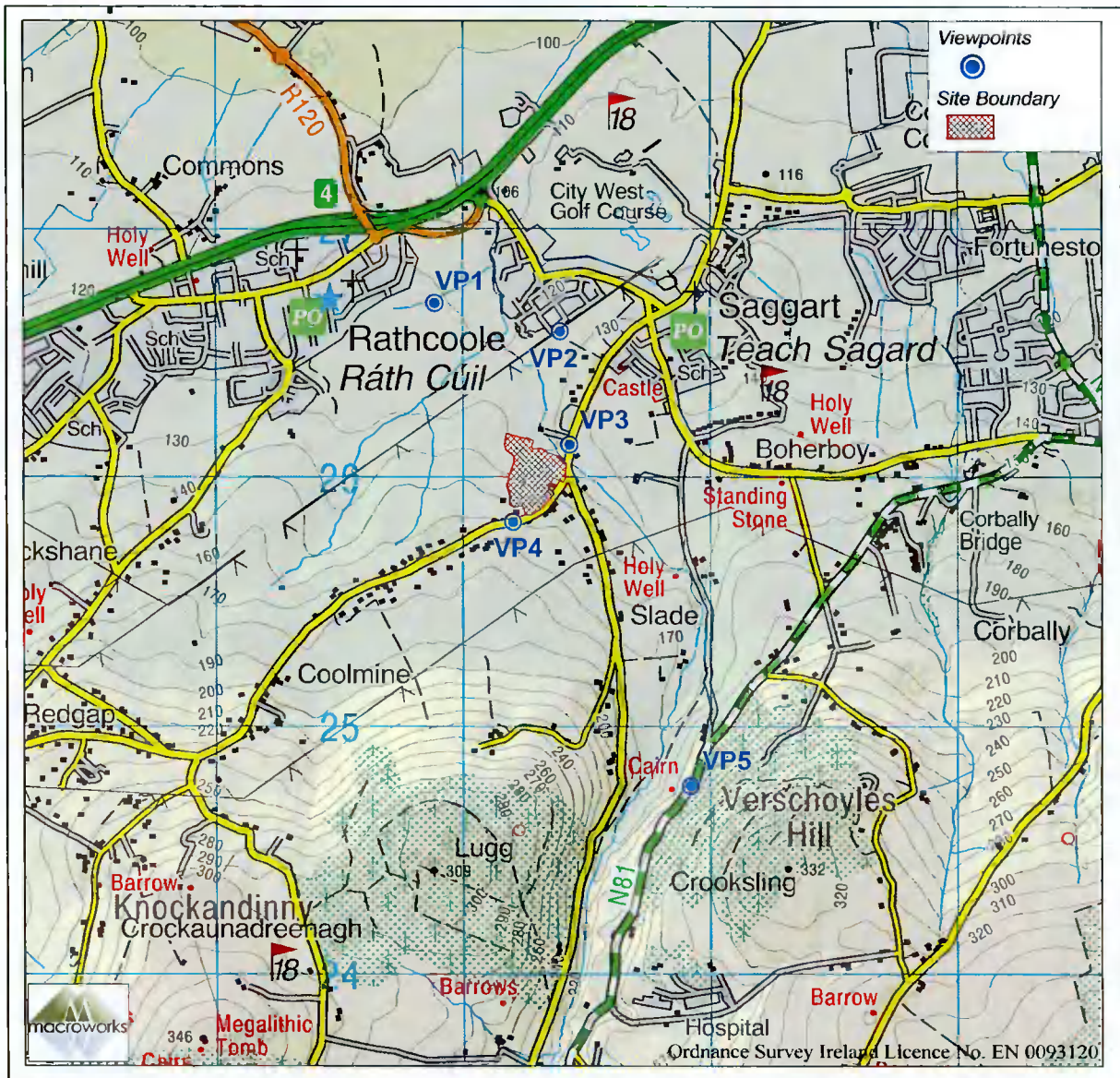


Figure 7: Viewpoint location map.

7 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 LANDSCAPE IMPACT

7.1.1 Landscape Value and Sensitivity

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

Landscape quality (condition)

The application site is currently under agricultural management. The lands adjoining the western perimeter are presently utilised for agricultural purposes. The reservoir construction site to the northeast is a major infrastructure project and there is an electrical substation to the east. In the agricultural portions of the study area, there is a range of land management practices, some relatively intensive. These agricultural areas are of relatively high integrity with few untidy, fallow, unused areas. Generally, field boundaries appear well maintained, but there are instances where fences have replaced hedgerows. The settlements of Saggart and Rathcoole are modest-sized settlements that contrast with the agricultural fields and highlight that the application site is located within the urban fringe.

Scenic quality

A pleasant countryside aesthetic prevails in the more agricultural portions of the study area. Saggart and Rathcoole have a built-up, residential character without any notable scenic qualities. The topography in the northern portion of the study area is flatter than the more elevated area to the south; thus, the hedgerows and buildings generate a strong sense of enclosure as they limit the potential for long-distance views. The scenic designations in the hills to the south of the application site indicate a higher degree of scenic value in this area, and there is a pleasant aesthetic along the upland section of the Camac River.

Rarity and Representativeness

The northern portion of the study area is not a distinctive or rare landscape, but the views of Dublin City from the hills in the southern part are distinctive to the Dublin Mountains. Apart from the 'Slade of Saggart and Crooksling Glen' and the 'Crooksling Glen' woodlands near the Camac River, there are no other particularly unique or remarkable landscape elements situated within the study area.

Conservation interests

Apart from the 'Slade of Saggart and Crooksling Glen' – Proposed Natural Heritage Area and the 'Crooksling Glen' - an Ancient or Long-Established Woodland, there were no other relevant National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) designated sites identified within the study area.

Recreation Value

The landscape in the northern portion of the study area is not synonymous with outdoor recreation and tends to be limited to walking or cycling along the public road network. However, to the south, there are recreational trails on Lugg Hill.

Perceptual aspects

The northern portion of the study area is characteristic of an urban fringe environment. Located at the periphery of Dublin city, it contains multiple industrial and infrastructural facilities immediately adjacent to more typical agricultural fields. There is a low degree of tranquillity as the road network is well-used, even the local roads. The hedgerow network creates some sense of enclosure, but otherwise, there is little sense of the naturalistic.

The more elevated areas to the south of the site afford intermittent long-distance views and opportunities for walking. Yet, the area is still heavily characterised by commercial conifer plantations and intensive agricultural practices.

Cultural Associations

Saggart dates to the 7th century as the site of a monastery founded by St. Mosacra. The sloping lands in the southern portion of the study area held significance in past times and a bronze age burial was found at Lugg Hill. There would not appear to be any other strong landscape associations to particular people, historical events or mythology within the study area. Some places will have local landscape associations with particular families or historical incidents, but these would not necessarily be associated with landscape values for the wider population.

7.1.1.1 Landscape Sensitivity Summary

'LCA 3 – Athgoe and Saggart Hills' has been designated in South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016-2022 as having a 'high' overall landscape sensitivity, and a 'high' landscape value. But the more granular assessment herein has determined, based on the factors outlined above, that this is a complex and productive landscape with typical rural land uses abutting notable industrial and urban areas. The study area is by no means a rare or distinctive landscape, instead, it is a typical hinterland setting with robust and productive values, albeit with some vulnerable scenic and naturalistic values in the southern extents of the study area. On balance, of these reasons, the landscape sensitivity to the proposed development is deemed to be **Medium**.

7.1.2 Magnitude of Landscape Effects

The impact of the duration, intensity and reversibility of activities will be assessed, but the main landscape effects to be considered relate to long term / permanent changes in landscape character and the physical impact on the landscape through the introduction of above-ground elements and any permanent removal of vegetation.

There will be a higher intensity of site activity during the infill process than when it is complete and returned to agricultural use. Such activity will include the movement of construction machinery on-site and vehicles travelling to and from the site with fill material. Infill material will transit along a very short section of the local road, and all other works will take place mainly within an area that is set back from the road network.

The application site (a c. 4.9 ha agricultural field) will receive c. 24,008m³ of infill material within a c. 2.3ha area. The alteration to the physical landscape within the application site boundary due to the infill will be notable in terms of the overall footprint; however, given the modest volume of material being brought into the site, the increase to the contour level in the site will be limited. The proposed new contour will mirror the existing contours; thus final landform will be highly naturalistic. Furthermore, the application site is in a valley; thus, the increase to the contour due to infill can be readily absorbed into the topography of the study area. These impacts are likely to be 'permanent' (effects lasting over 60 years, as defined in the EPA's EIS guidelines). When the infill process is complete, the surface will be covered with topsoil and seeded.

In relation to landscape character, the proposal seeks to modify the existing contours within the application site, which when complete will not be dissimilar to the slope that currently exists; and will not appear incongruous or unnatural. The proposed development is located within an area that falls under South County Dublin Council's Zoning Objective 'RU': *"To protect and improve rural amenity and to provide for the development of agriculture"*. By returning the land to agricultural use once filling is complete, albeit with a modified contour, the proposed development will not conflict with this rural land use policy.

The proposed development represents a small incremental change to the character in this immediate area during the construction (filling stage) where there will be a small increase in HGV movements along the road nearest to the application site. In the context of the adjacent large reservoir, this is a relatively small scale infill development that will not be an incongruous feature once complete. Whilst it represents a physical change to the landform of the site, once complete it will not be a change to the land cover of the site. Consequently, the impact on rural landscape character is very minor.

On the basis of the factors discussed above, it is considered that the magnitude of landscape impact is **Medium-Low** within and immediately around the application site during the temporary/short term infill phase. Once completed and returned to agricultural use, the permanent landscape impact is deemed to reduce to **Low-negligible** and will be very localised.

With reference to the significance matrix (**Table 3**) above, the **Medium** landscape sensitivity judgement attributed to the study area coupled with a **Medium-Low** magnitude of landscape impact within and immediately around the site during the infill phase is considered to result in a localised significance of no greater than **Moderate-slight** for a **Temporary / Short Term** duration. Once reinstated to agricultural use, the **Permanent** landscape impact significance will be **Slight-imperceptible**.

7.2 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.2.1 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Table 7 uses the criteria set out in Section 2 to determine sensitivity at each of the viewpoints selected to represent visual receptors.

Table 7 Analysis of Visual Receptor Sensitivity at Viewshed Reference Points
Scale of value for each criterion

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

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

7.2.2 Magnitude of Visual Effects

The assessment of visual impacts at each of the selected viewpoints is aided by photomontages of the proposed development. 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 above-ground elements of the proposed development overlaid on the photography; and
3. Montage view (including topsoil and grass seeding).

Viewshed Reference Point		Viewing Distance	Direction of View
VP1	Rathcoole Park, Rathcoole	0.05km	SE

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor sensitivity **Medium**

Existing view This is a broad view with a foreground composed of amenity grassland within Rathcoole Park. Transitional scrub and mature hedgerows occur in the middle ground, with Verschoyle's Hill forming a distant backcloth.

Visual impact This is an illustrative view as the proposed development will be fully screened from view by intervening terrain and vegetation; therefore, the magnitude of the visual impact will be **Negligible** by default.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in **Section 2** the significance of the residual visual impact is summarised below.

Residual	Visual Receptor Sensitivity	Visual Impact Magnitude	Significance of Visual Impact
	Medium	Negligible	Imperceptible

Viewshed Reference Point		Viewing Distance	Direction of View
VP2	Drury Park, Saggart	0.04km	S

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor sensitivity **Medium-Low**

Existing view This is a view afforded from the edge of a residential complex on the outskirts of Saggart. A channelled long-distance view south is available through and over paladin fencing, which encloses a brownfield site that occupies the foreground of the view. The topography in the falls away from this viewpoint towards the Camac River, such that the terrain screens the lower portions of the vegetation located in the middle ground. The landform slowly rises to present a farmed, settled and forested ridge in the background, with a conifer plantation at the summit of Lug Hill.

Visual impact The proposed infill area is located on the lower slopes of the ridge in the background. A large proportion of the infill area is at a low elevation; thus, most of it will be fully screened by intervening terrain and vegetation. The most elevated portion of the infill area, located to the south of the application site, will be partially screened by intervening trees but will be identifiable. However, once the infill area has received the layer of topsoil and has been seeded with grass, it will not be noticeable by a casual observer; therefore, the magnitude of the visual impact will be **Negligible** by default.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in **Section 2** the significance of the residual visual impact is summarised below.

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

Viewshed Reference Point		Viewing Distance	Direction of View
VP3	L2005 local road (Slade Road), Coolmine	0.06km	SW

Representative of: • Local community views

Receptor sensitivity **Medium-Low**

Existing view This is a view with a high degree of complexity due to the various foreground elements. The Millbrook Manor Nursing Home, with its perimeter wall, car

park, lighting columns and main building, occupy the foreground of the view. Beyond this facility, the terrain is utilised for agricultural purposes and rises gently towards the locally elevated dwellings (along Coolmine Road) in the middle ground. A conifer plantation is visible on the summit of Lugg Hill in the background.

Visual impact

The northern portion of the infill area is located in the low lying area to the rear of the Millbrook Manor Nursing Home building thus is largely screened by it. The agricultural field in the middle ground will receive infill material that will increase ground level within the field and will change the profile of the sloping terrain. The change to the view will be visible, however, once the layer of topsoil has been applied and seeded with grass, the change to the view is unlikely to be noticeable to a casual observer as the infill area will present as a typical field, and it will not appear unusual or out of place within the view. For these reasons, the magnitude of the visual impact will be **Low-Negligible** by default.

Summary

Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in **Section 2** the significance of the residual visual impact is summarised below.

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

Viewshed Reference Point		Viewing Distance	Direction of View
VP4	L6018 local road (Coolmine Road), Coolmine	0.05km	N

Representative of:

- Local community views

Receptor sensitivity **Medium-Low**

Existing view This is an enclosed view from a local road where a channelled view to the north between a residential dwelling and its boundary hedgerow is afforded towards Saggart in the low lying landscape in the background.

Visual impact The eastern portion of the infill area will be screened from view by the house in the foreground. The western portion will be visible in the low lying field beyond this house. It will be possible to see the altered contours within this field, but there will be no visual obstruction, and the field pattern will remain unchanged. There will be no meaningful change to the view once the layer of topsoil has

been applied and seeded with grass. For these reasons, the magnitude of impact is deemed to be **Low-Negligible**.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in **Section 2** the significance of the residual visual impact is summarised below.

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

Viewshed Reference Point		Viewing Distance	Direction of View
VP5	Blessington Road (N81 national secondary road), Crooksling	1.2km	NW

- Representative of:**
- Designated scenic view
 - Major road
 - Local community views

Receptor sensitivity **High-Medium**

Existing view This is a broad elevated view. The landform in the foreground falls away sharply to present a middle ground of sloping agricultural fields. The lower-lying lands in the background of the view contain the greater Dublin metropolitan area.

Visual impact This is an illustrative view as the proposed development will be fully screened from view by intervening terrain and vegetation; therefore, the magnitude of the visual impact will be **Negligible** by default.

Summary Based on the assessment criteria and matrices outlined in **Section 2** the significance of the residual visual impact is summarised below.

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

8 CONCLUSION

In terms of landscape impacts, the proposed development will involve an alteration to the landform within the application site, but it is considered that the proposed development will have only a limited physical impact on the landscape.

The study area contains a richly varied landscape that contains a range of productive land uses, including; agriculture, residential, industrial and transport corridors. There will be a limited impact on landscape character as a result of the process of infilling with the anticipated increased traffic volumes in the vicinity of the application site. Consequently, the proposed development is not considered to conflict unduly with the prevailing landscape character of its immediate environs. For these reasons, a 'Moderate-slight' level of landscape impact is predicted for the site and its immediate surroundings for a Temporary / Short Term duration, but the significance of this impact will reduce quickly with increasing distance as the proposed development becomes a proportionately smaller feature of the broader landscape fabric. The proposed use of topsoil and grass seeding of the infilled area will make the internal areas within the site boundary indistinguishable from the nearby agricultural fields and will help it to integrate the proposed development with its surroundings. Once the site is reinstated to agricultural use, the Permanent landscape impact significance will be **Slight-imperceptible**.

Visual impacts were specifically assessed at five viewpoints representing different distances, angles and viewing contexts within the study area. The proposed development will not be visible from VP1 and VP5, and will not be readily noticeable from VP2; thus, the impacts at these viewpoints are deemed to be 'Imperceptible'. The change to the view afforded from VP3 and VP4 as a result of the proposed development will be identifiable but once the infilling is complete, it will not alter the nature of these views; thus, the significance of the impact is deemed to be 'Slight-imperceptible'.

8.1 OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPACT

Based on the landscape and visual impact judgements provided throughout this LVIA, the proposed infill development in the townland of Saggart, County Dublin, is not considered to give rise to any significant landscape or visual impacts.

