

TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

For

'The Arboury' Proposed Strategic Housing Development, former ABB Site, Belgard Road, Tallaght



Prepared by Model Works Ltd for

Landmarque Belgard Development Company Limited

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Methodology	1
2.0 THE RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT	1
2.1 The Site	1
2.2 Strategic Location	2
2.3 Surrounding Townscape Character	3
2.3.1 <i>Road Network and Public Realm</i>	4
2.3.2 <i>TUD Campus</i>	5
2.3.3 <i>Town Centre West of Belgard Road</i>	6
2.3.4 <i>Historic Tallaght Village and Architectural Conservation Area</i>	7
2.4 Relevant Policy - Tallaght Local Area Plan	11
2.4.1 <i>Town Centre Vision and Objectives</i>	11
2.4.2 <i>Building Height</i>	11
2.4.3 <i>Landmark Buildings</i>	12
2.4.4 <i>Other Townscape-Related Policies</i>	12
2.5 Urban Development and Building Heights, Guidelines for Planning Authorities	13
3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	14
3.1 Built Form	15
3.1.1 <i>Adjustment to Proposed Building Height Following ABP Opinion</i>	16
3.2 Facade Treatment and Materials	18
3.2.1 <i>Activation of the Street Frontage</i>	19
3.3 Landscape/Public Realm Proposals	20
3.3.1 <i>Green Lane</i>	20
3.3.2 <i>Belgard Square North Streetscape and Pocket Parks</i>	21
4.0 POTENTIAL TOWNSCAPE EFFECTS	23
4.1 Townscape Character and Sensitivity to Change	23
4.2 Magnitude of Townscape Change	23
4.3 Significance of Townscape Effects	24
4.3.1 <i>Design Quality</i>	24
4.3.2 <i>Building Height and the LAP Height Strategy</i>	25
5.0 POTENTIAL VISUAL EFFECTS	27
5.1 Selection of Viewpoints	27
5.2 Assessment of Visual Effects	30
6.0 CONCLUSIONS	40
6.1 Townscape Effects	40
6.2 Visual Effects	42
APPENDIX A TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY	ii

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report assesses the potential townscape and visual effects of a proposed Strategic Housing Development on the former ABB site at the corner of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North in Tallaght.

1.1 Methodology

The report was prepared with reference to the Landscape Institute *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* 2013 (GLVIA) and the EPA draft *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports* 2017. The assessment methodology including explanation of the criteria and terms used is provided in Appendix A. The report was prepared by Richard Butler MILI MIPI of Model Works Ltd.

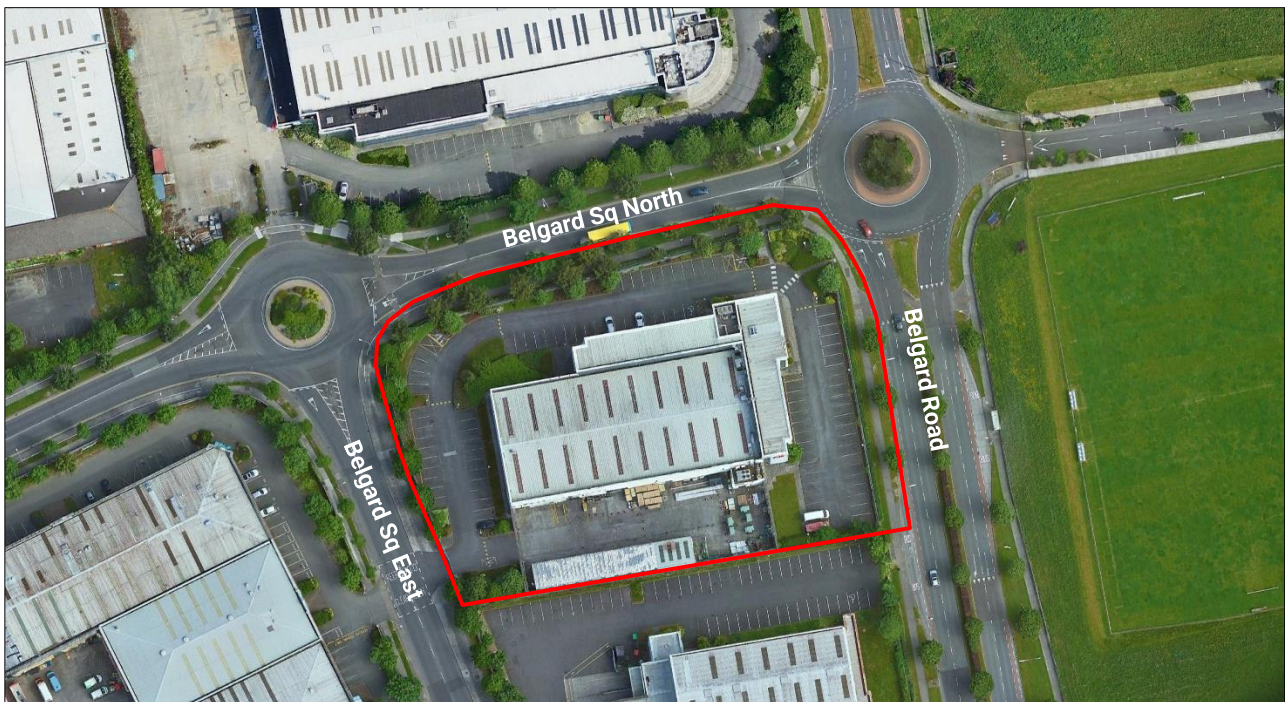
2.0 THE RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

2.1 The Site

The 0.898 ha site is the former ABB site, located on the northern half of a block formed by Belgard Road to the east, Belgard Square North to the north and Belgard Square East to the west. It is currently occupied by a three storey office block attached to a factory, with a low block wall and railing on the boundary. The main entrance to the site is from Belgard Square East, and there are also two pedestrian entrances at the corner of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North.

Belgard Road is a particularly wide road corridor. It is comprised of a four lane dual carriageway with central planted median, and footpaths on both sides in wide green verges. The street is 32m wide and features three lines of trees along the stretch passing the site. Belgard Square North and East are both two lane roads with footpaths, green verges and street trees on both sides. The two junctions to the north east and north west of the site are roundabouts with central islands with trees in beds of low planting.

Figure 1 Aerial photograph of the site context



The width of the road infrastructure is a key characteristic of the site's immediate environs and the wider urban area. It reflects the area's former use as an industrial zone, and presents both an opportunity and a challenge in the conversion of Tallaght into a mixed use town centre: (a) the wide road corridors provide the

space to deliver pedestrian and cycle facilities and include meaningful green infrastructure in the future streetscapes, but (b) the road width is a hindrance to generating urban-type street enclosure, activity and character.

Photo 1 A view south along Belgard Road showing the width of the road corridor and the position of the site at the corner of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North



Photo 2 A view across the junction of Belgard Square North and East, towards the site



2.2 Strategic Location

The site occupies a strategic position in Tallaght's urban structure:

- The site is located in Tallaght Town Centre as defined in the *South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016-2022* (the 'CDP')¹. It occupies a gateway location when entering the town centre from the north along Belgard Road (see Figure 2 overleaf).
- Belgard Road (defined as a 'Primary Route' in the *Tallaght Local Area Plan 2020-2026* – the 'LAP') is the main north-south thoroughfare through the evolving urban area.
- The site is located at the junction of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North. Belgard Square North, to which the site has over 100m frontage, is the main east-west thoroughfare serving the town

¹ The site is also zoned Town Centre in the Draft South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028.

centre. It connects Belgard Road and the university to the hospital, County Hall (and associated cultural facilities) and 'The Square'.

- The site is located at the edge between the town centre and the Technological University Dublin (TUD) campus. These are two of the central 'Urban Neighbourhoods', identified in the LAP, around which the evolving urban area will take form (Figure 3).

Figure 2 CDP Land use zoning map

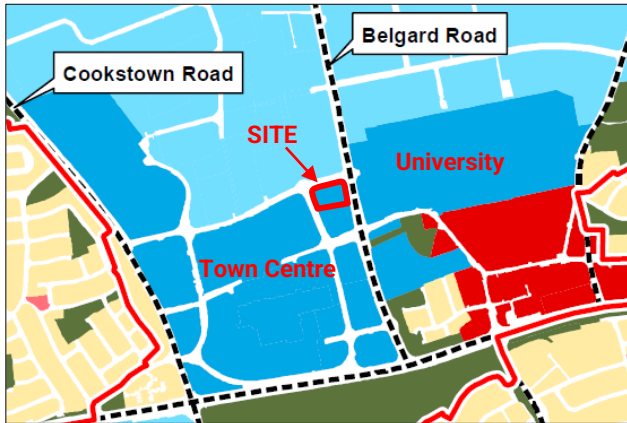
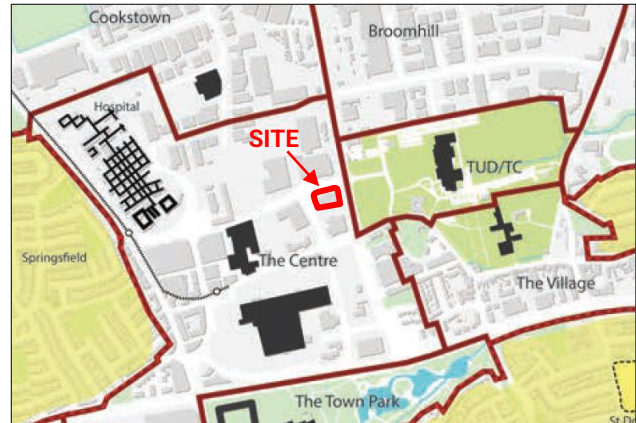


Figure 3 Tallaght LAP urban neighbourhoods map



In addition to being strategically located in townscape terms, the site has access to a range of public transport services including (a) existing and future high capacity bus routes with stops adjacent to the site, and (b) the Tallaght Luas stop less than 500m walk from the site.

The site is also walking distance from the town centre retail core, the historic village centre, the hospital, the university and large areas of open space (the university grounds leading to Bancroft Park to the east, Sean Walsh Memorial Park to the south and a future urban square a short distance to the west).

Figure 4 Tallaght LAP public transport map



The site is thus positioned at the northern gateway to the town centre, at the junction of the two main thoroughfares, with frontage to both of these roads. It is also located at the gateway between the town centre and the university, two of the key, central character areas in the evolving townscape. Finally, the site benefits from access to a complete range of urban amenities, and public transport.

2.3 Surrounding Townscape Character

The key townscape elements and character areas in the receiving environment, with regard to the proposal's potential townscape and visual impacts, are as follows:

- The road network and public realm;
- The TUD campus;
- The town centre area west of Belgard Road;
- The historic village including Tallaght Architectural Conservation Area

2.3.1 Road Network and Public Realm

The site has frontage to wide roads on three sides, and to the junctions of these roads. Together they form a large area of streetscape/ public realm in a pivotal position in Tallaght's urban structure. This is the immediate context of the site, and the character of these road corridors and junctions could be substantially altered by the site's redevelopment.

The users of these roads are also the largest group of potential visual receptors of change on the site:

- Belgard Road is a long, straight road and the proposed development would potentially be visible from some distance when approaching from the north and south, including from the junction with the N81, the main southern gateway into Tallaght.
- Visibility from the west along Belgard Square North is more restricted by the slightly sinuous road alignment.
- The proposed development is likely to be visible from some distance along Belgard Square East to the south of the site, including from its junction with Blessington Road, and from the recently redeveloped pedestrian thoroughfare linking The Square to the historic village core.

Photo 3 A view along Belgard Road from 400m to north of the site



Photo 4 The view north along Belgard Road from the N81 – the southern gateway into Tallaght town centre



2.3.2 TUD Campus

The TUD campus lies to the east of the site across Belgard Road. There is an extensive area of playing fields and belts of trees directly across the road from the site, traversed by access roads leading to the university buildings which are set back 275m from the road (see Figure 5 below). The presence of this large area of open space is a factor in the site's capacity to accommodate height.

Among the criteria for assessing sites' suitability for tall buildings in the *Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines* is the following: "The proposal enhances the urban design context for public spaces and key thoroughfares..., thereby enabling additional height in development form to be favourably considered in terms of enhancing a sense of scale and enclosure". (The LAP includes an objective (TU4) to 'protect the parkland setting and provide for greater public access and usage' of the campus grounds.)

The TUD open space would benefit from increased built enclosure to improve its definition and status in the urban structure, and to better exploit its amenity potential (for future buildings/residents overlooking the space). These objectives (improved definition and exploitation of the amenity potential) are expressed in the LAP by the identification of 'Amenity Frontages' surrounding the university (see Figure 5 below).

Another consideration in relation to the TUD open space is that, with the open space on one side of the road, the sites to the west of the road are the only opportunity to achieve a degree of built enclosure and urban character along this key stretch of Belgard Road.

As the road reaches the university (approaching from the north), it enters the Town Centre. With the university buildings set back behind the very large open space there is no opportunity to mark this important gateway along the Belgard Road corridor, except on the sites to the west of the road.

Figure 5 Tallaght LAP public transport map

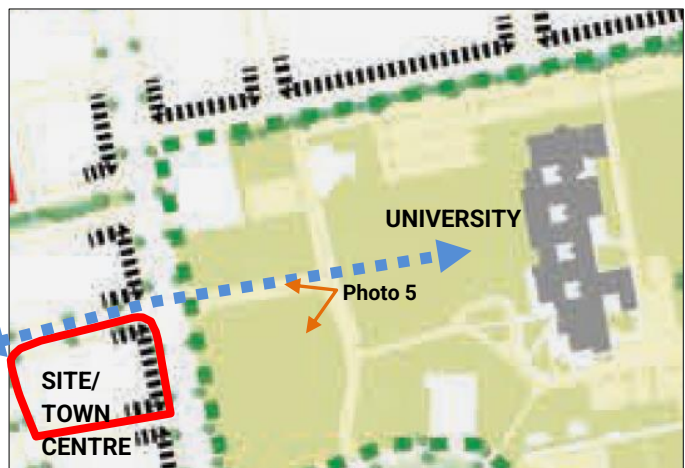


Photo 5 A view west from the TUD campus towards the site - along the alignment of Belgard Square North (the route into the town centre from the university). The view shows (a) that the open space of the campus could be enhanced by built enclosure on the far side of Belgard Road, and (b) the gateway and route between the university and town centre could be made more legible by appropriate built form



2.3.3 Town Centre West of Belgard Road

The area west of Belgard Road - including the site - is identified in the LAP as the town centre 'urban neighbourhood'. This is an extensive and diverse town centre environment incorporating Tallaght University Hospital, The Square shopping centre, County Hall, the civic theatre and library, and a growing number of streets, blocks and buildings of modern urban character.

This evolving character is generated by a mixed use land use pattern, high density development (reflected in the plot and building typologies including an emphasis on strong built frontage to streets and spaces), buildings of scale and attractive contemporary architecture. **Development along some of the streets has achieved genuine town centre character (see Photos 6, 7, 8 below), although this is juxtaposed with remnants of the historic retail and industry-dominated land use pattern in places.**

Photos 6, 7 Views of the town centre to the west of the site where a combination of high density, mixed use development and buildings of high design and material quality have created an attractive townscape



The redevelopment and re-imagining of Tallaght town centre began along the western edge of the area and around the Luas stop. It is now progressing eastwards towards the site and Belgard Road. There has as yet been no redevelopment of the lands along the west side of Belgard Road. However, planning permission has

been granted for a large site to the north of the subject site across Belgard Square North (ABP-303306-18). This site/permission is located outside of the zoned town centre area (Belgard Square North being the northern edge of the town centre – see Figure 2 above), but it combines with the subject site to form the gateway between the town centre and the university.

The permitted development is comprised of a series of buildings ranging from four to 10 storeys in height. The buildings are arranged to form perimeter blocks and and/or ‘finger blocks’ across the site. The building at the Belgard Road corner (opposite the site’s north east corner) is nine storeys, and a 10 storey building is located diagonally across the junction to the north west of the site. In both cases the height is used to mark junctions along the road corridor. There are four retail units on the ground floor of the building facing the site across the road, set back behind a wide footpath/plaza space alongside the road. A notable element of the permission is the reconfigured junction of Belgard Square North and East, changing the junction from a roundabout to a signalised crossroads.

Figures 6a-e Layout plan, elevations to Belgard Square North and photomontages of the permitted development to the north of the site across Belgard Square North



The implementation of this permission will initiate the transformation of the site’s immediate environs from its current office-industrial character to being part of a large, mixed use town centre area. The site’s redevelopment would consolidate this change, completing the eastern gateway to the town centre. There are no other significant permissions in the site environs.

2.3.4 Historic Tallaght Village and Architectural Conservation Area

The original village core of Tallaght, at the junction of Main Street and Old Bawn Road, lies some 450m to the south east of the site. A large part of the old village is designated Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). The ACA incorporates (a) the buildings fronting the original main street, (b) St Mary’s Priory, which includes one remaining tower of the 14th century Tallaght Castle, and (c) St Maelruain’s Church and graveyard, including the remaining tower of a medieval church.

Figure 7 OS 6 inch map showing Tallaght Village in the early 19th century, and **Figure 8** The boundary of Tallaght ACA



There is limited potential for the proposed development to affect the ACA. The nearest part of the ACA to the site is St Maelruain's Church and graveyard, which is 200m from the site and separated from it by Belgard Road and a portion of the university campus (see Photo 9 below). The village centre is over 450m from the site. It is located in a dip in the landform and there is generally a high degree of built enclosure along the streets, limiting distant views (Photo 10). St Mary's Priory is 500m from the site and surrounded by a broad belt of woodland which blocks views towards the site (Photo 11).

Photo 9 A view from the St Maelruain's Church graveyard (the nearest part of the ACA to the site) towards the site, which lies 200m distant beyond the university open space behind the belt of trees

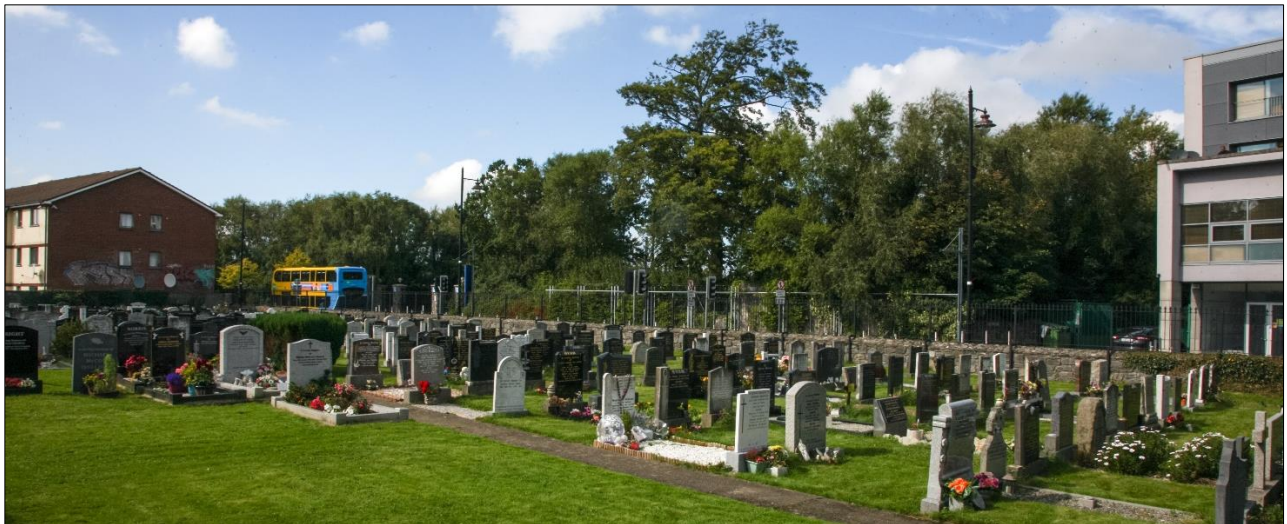


Photo 10 A view from Tallaght Village Centre (at the core of the ACA) towards the site



Photo 11 A view towards the site from Main Street outside of St Mary's Priory



The key townscape elements and character areas in the receiving environment are shown on the annotated aerial photograph, Figure 9 overleaf.

Figure 9 Key Elements, Features and Character Areas in the Context Townscape



2.4 Relevant Policy - Tallaght Local Area Plan

The planning policy pertaining to the site is addressed in detail in the Statement of Consistency submitted with the application. This section highlights the policy of most relevance to the assessment of the proposal's townscape and visual effects.

2.4.1 Town Centre Vision and Objectives

The vision statement in the LAP for 'The Centre', the urban neighbourhood in which the site is located, is as follows: *"Continued transformation towards a high quality mixed use urban centre of city scale and character, with a vibrant mixed use residential community continuing to emerge in an attractive network of streets."*

The key elements of the vision are the objectives to (a) achieve a high quality mixed use town centre of large scale and 'city character', and (b) to deliver an attractive network of urban streets.

Among the Key Objectives for the area are the following:

- **TC3:** *"Improve urban legibility throughout the area by providing new local streets including an extension to Airtown Road to Cookstown Road; and Cookstown Road to Belgard North; and a new connection from Belgard North to Tallaght Square"*.
- **TC4:** *"Improve the condition of existing streets to encourage walking and cycling"*.
- **TC7:** *"Improve interface with all existing and proposed routes and open spaces"*.
- **TC8:** *"Encourage new development on existing areas of surface car parking... subject to high quality urban design and integration with the objectives of permeability and mixed-uses in the Centre neighbourhood"*.
- **TC10:** *"Improve and enhance the public realm"*.
- **TC11:** *"Improve connectivity to all surrounding areas"*.

2.4.2 Building Height

The LAP's height strategy for individual sites/blocks is determined principally by the status of the streets to which they have frontage. The objective is for built form to reinforce the urban structure: *"In general terms, the height strategy provides for the following:*

- *Building height and scale is greatest in the Centre, in close proximity to Luas stops and along arterial and primary route frontages (up to 6-7 storeys residential, +1 recessed and up to 5-6 storeys non-residential, +1 recessed).*
- *Building height and scale on secondary routes/frontages is lesser but still within an urban scale, (4-6 storeys residential, 3-5 storeys non-residential).*

Accordingly, the LAP prescribes a height of 6-7 storeys + 1 recessed (i.e. a maximum of eight storeys) along the site's frontages to Belgard Road and Belgard Square North. Along Belgard Square East and the boundary with the site to the south, the prescribed height is 4-6 storeys. The proposed development deviates from this policy. The LAP does however allow some flexibility, as shown by the policies below.

"Building heights will also be evaluated against topography, culture context, key landmarks and key views as required by Building Height Guidelines."

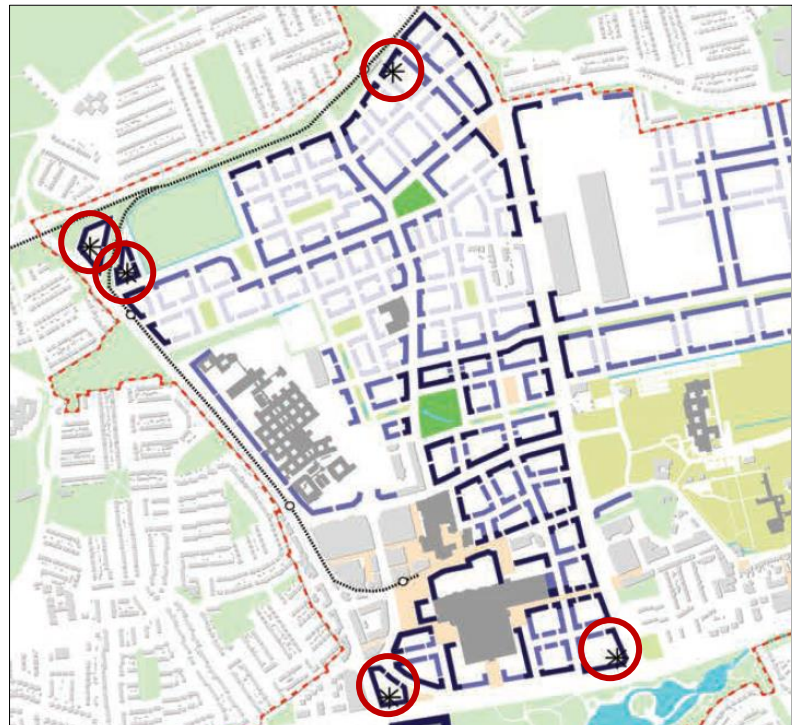
"The height standards set out above may be exceeded in the Centre neighbourhood where they reflect the height of existing buildings..."

A notable aspect of the height strategy is the provision for a uniform height of up to eight storeys along the full length of Belgard Road, apart from a landmark building at its southern end where it meets the N81. Belgard Road is 1.7km in length.

While such uniformity would generate distinct character, it is also:

- (a) limiting of the potential to mark important places in the townscape (e.g. key junctions, neighbourhood boundaries and gateways), and
- (b) limiting of the potential for employing variation in form/scale to create visual interest along the long, straight road (a road which is the main thoroughfare through an area intended to have 'city character').

Figure 10 LAP height strategy (with 'landmark buildings' circled in red)



2.4.3 Landmark Buildings

Another key element of the height strategy is the identification of four locations for landmark buildings, with an allowance for additional height on these sites. (The LAP allows for four additional storeys on these sites to set the buildings apart from their surroundings.) These sites are located at or close to the four corners of the main urban area (see Figure 10). By the identification of landmark sites in gateway locations, there is recognition in the LAP of the potential for height to enhance the legibility of the townscape.

While the LAP does seek to employ building height to create landmarks and thus strengthen the urban structure and legibility, the LAP also states: *“Building design as opposed to building height is the key determinant in producing an acceptable Landmark Building and such buildings should be of high quality design.”*

2.4.4 Other Townscape-Related Policies

Urban Grain: *“Where coarser urban grain and larger buildings are proposed, a careful approach to the design of façades will be required. Designers will be required to clearly express the ground floor, the main façade, a strong parapet and the roof form. Individual buildings within blocks should express distinctive building design.”*

Building Setback: *“Development across the Plan lands should present strong building frontages close to street edges, except where otherwise identified to provide for Green/Blue Infrastructure, parking, wide footpaths, etc. Setbacks from the street edge should therefore be minimised. Buildings should not be set back from the street or space where commercial uses are proposed at ground floor particularly along primary and secondary frontages.”*

Block Form: *“New buildings shall be laid out in perimeter blocks across the Plan lands. Such blocks shall be used to enclose private and semi-private open spaces and, depending on the context and demonstration of need, larger blocks or irregular sized blocks may contain small scale development. All perimeter blocks shall be designed according to the following principles:*

- Building massing to the perimeter of the block;
- Building frontage to all sides, including the shorter sides (secondary street frontage) of the block;
- Proper design and attention to corners, avoiding dead or windowless gables;
- A continuity of building frontage, which relates to the local or urban context, and avoidance of blank walls;
- An appropriate scale of buildings to provide the appropriate level of enclosure of the streets and spaces;
- Adequate back-to-back distances within the block;
- Appropriate building setbacks from the street in line with the use of ground floors;
- Adequate arrangements for car parking and access around, within or below the block;
- Carefully considered subdivision of the block into plots where fine urban grain or mixed use is proposed; and
- Appropriate consideration of building height within the block to facilitate adequate levels of sunlight and daylight penetration."

External Finishes and Appearance: "Proposals for all developments must ensure and guarantee that proposed development design and materials used will not appear imitative but will progress the architectural quality of the existing character of the area. The palette of materials used must be robust, durable and consist of a combination of high quality materials and colours that have good tonal differentiation and are compatible with neighbouring developments."

Interaction with the Public Realm: "Development proposals will be required to ensure successful interaction between the residential scheme, streets and public realm to foster a true sense of neighbourhood and encourage interaction between residents. Opportunities for animated ground floors, homes with own door access, private landscaped terraces and a successful integration with communal and public open space shall be encouraged."

2.5 Relevant Policy - Urban Development and Building Heights, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2018

The Building Height Guidelines state: "Implementation of the National Planning Framework requires increased density, scale and height of development in our town and city cores...

"to meet the needs of a growing population without growing our urban areas outwards requires more focus in planning policy and implementation terms on reusing previously developed 'brownfield' land, building up urban infill sites... and either reusing or redeveloping existing sites and buildings that may not be in the optimal usage or format taking into account contemporary and future requirements..."

Section 3.2, 'development management criteria' are set out to guide the evaluation of development proposals for buildings taller than the prevailing heights in an area:

"In the event of making a planning application, the applicant shall demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority/ An Bord Pleanála, that the proposed development satisfies the following criteria:

At the scale of the relevant city/town

- The site is well served by public transport with high capacity, frequent service and good links to other modes of public transport.

- *Development proposals incorporating increased building height, including proposals within architecturally sensitive areas, should successfully integrate into/ enhance the character and public realm of the area, having regard to topography, its cultural context, setting of key landmarks, protection of key views. Such development proposals shall undertake a landscape and visual assessment, by a suitably qualified practitioner such as a chartered landscape architect.*
- *On larger urban redevelopment sites, proposed developments should make a positive contribution to place-making, incorporating new streets and public spaces, using massing and height to achieve the required densities but with sufficient variety in scale and form to respond to the scale of adjoining developments and create visual interest in the streetscape.*

At the scale of district/ neighbourhood/ street:

- *The proposal responds to its overall natural and built environment and makes a positive contribution to the urban neighbourhood and streetscape.*
- *The proposal is not monolithic and avoids long, uninterrupted walls of building in the form of slab blocks with materials / building fabric well considered.*
- *The proposal enhances the urban design context for public spaces and key thoroughfares and inland waterway/ marine frontage, thereby enabling additional height in development form to be favourably considered in terms of enhancing a sense of scale and enclosure while being in line with the requirements of “The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities” (2009).*
- *The proposal makes a positive contribution to the improvement of legibility through the site or wider urban area within which the development is situated and integrates in a cohesive manner.*
- *The proposal positively contributes to the mix of uses and/ or building/ dwelling typologies available in the neighbourhood.”*

3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The site of c.0.898 ha is located at the former ABB Site, Belgard Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24, D24 KD78. The site is bound by Belgard Road (R113) to the east, Belgard Square North to the North and Belgard Square East to the west and Clarity House to the south. The proposed development will consist of:

1. Demolition of all existing structures on site (with a combined gross floor area of c. 3625 sqm).
2. The construction of a mixed-use residential development set out in 3 No. blocks including a podium over a basement, ranging in height from 2 to 13 storeys (with core access above to roof terrace), comprising:
 - 334 no. residential units of which 118 No. will be Build to Rent (BTR) residential units, with associated amenities and facilities across the development.
 - 4 No. retail/café/restaurant units and 3 no. commercial spaces associated with the 3 no. live-work units (723 sqm combined).
 - Childcare facility (144 sq.m.).
 - 670 No. bicycle parking spaces including 186 visitor spaces; 117 car parking spaces (including 6 disabled spaces) are provided at ground floor and basement level.
 - The overall development has a Gross Floor Area of 29,784 sq.m.
 - Two (2) podium residential courtyards and three (3) public accessible pocket parks, two (2) to the North & one (1) to the South.
 - Linear Park (as a provision of the Tallaght Town Centre LAP) providing safe public pedestrian and cycling access between Belgard Rd and Belgard Square East.

3. Of the total 334 residential units proposed, unit types comprise:

Block A (Build-to-Rent)

- 91 no. 1 bed units
- 1 no. 2 bed 3 person units
- 26 no. 2 bed 4 person units

Blocks B & C

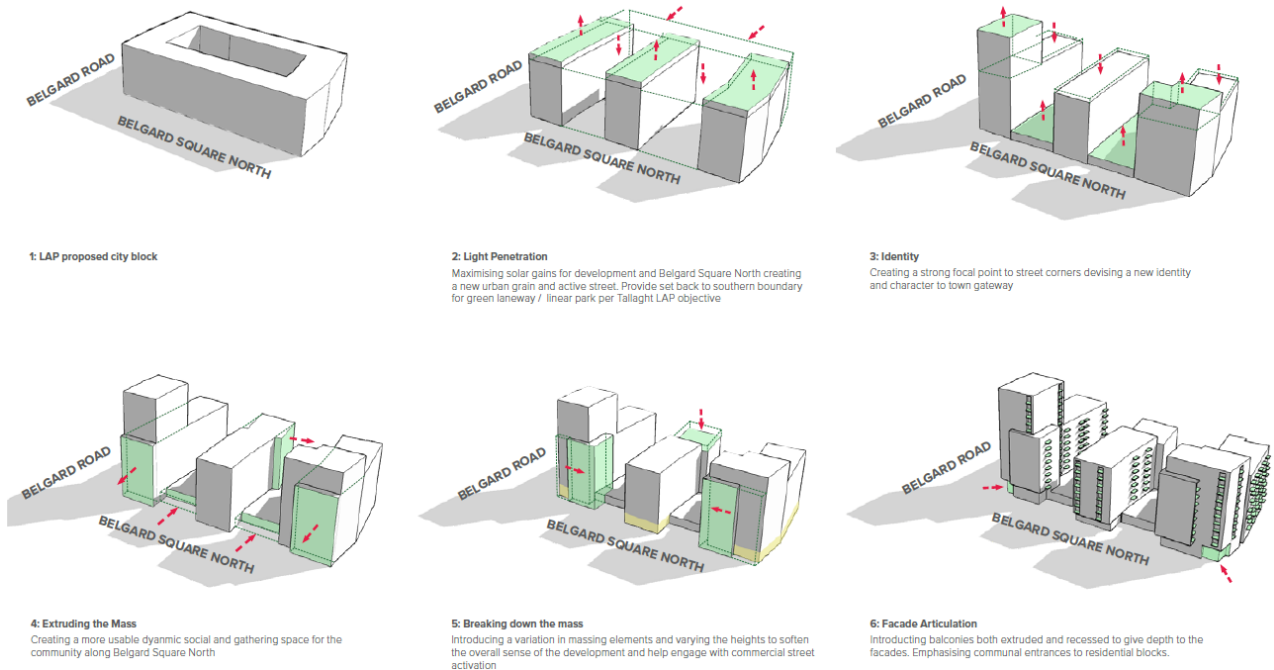
- 2 no. live-work studio units
- 102 no. 1-bed units
- 12 no. 2-bed 3 person units
- 88 no. 2-bed 4 person units including 5 no. duplex units
- 1 no. 2-bed 4 person live-work unit
- 11 no. 3-bed units

4. All associated works, plant, services, utilities, PV panels and site hoarding during construction.

3.1 Built Form

The proposed development is comprised of three linear buildings positioned side-by-side and parallel, forming two courtyards between them. The buildings are aligned north-south for maximum solar penetration into the courtyards, and to present a strong built frontage to Belgard Road. The centre of the block is raised over a single level of undercroft parking, and around the perimeter of this raised area the buildings step down to street level for active street frontage.

Figure 11 Rationale for Proposed Built Form



The buildings range in height from two to 13 storeys. The general height across the three buildings is nine storeys, with variations above and below this height depending on the adjacent conditions. The upward variations are intended to articulate the composition of form and increase the development’s visibility from the surroundings, marking the junctions and thereby improving townscape legibility:

- The most notable element is the proposed 13 storey landmark volume at the north east corner of the site, beside the junction of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North. This is a key location in the urban structure - at the entrance from Belgard Road to both the town centre and the university. This landmark volume steps down to a nine storey shoulder and to nine storeys along the remainder of the Belgard Road frontage.
- At the north west corner of the site an 11 storey volume is proposed. This is to mark the junction of Belgard Square North and East, opposite the entrance to the new street across the Marlet lands to the north. This volume also has a 10 storey shoulder along the Belgard Square North frontage, and steps down to nine storeys along the Belgard Square East frontage.

Figure 12 Proposed arrangement of height



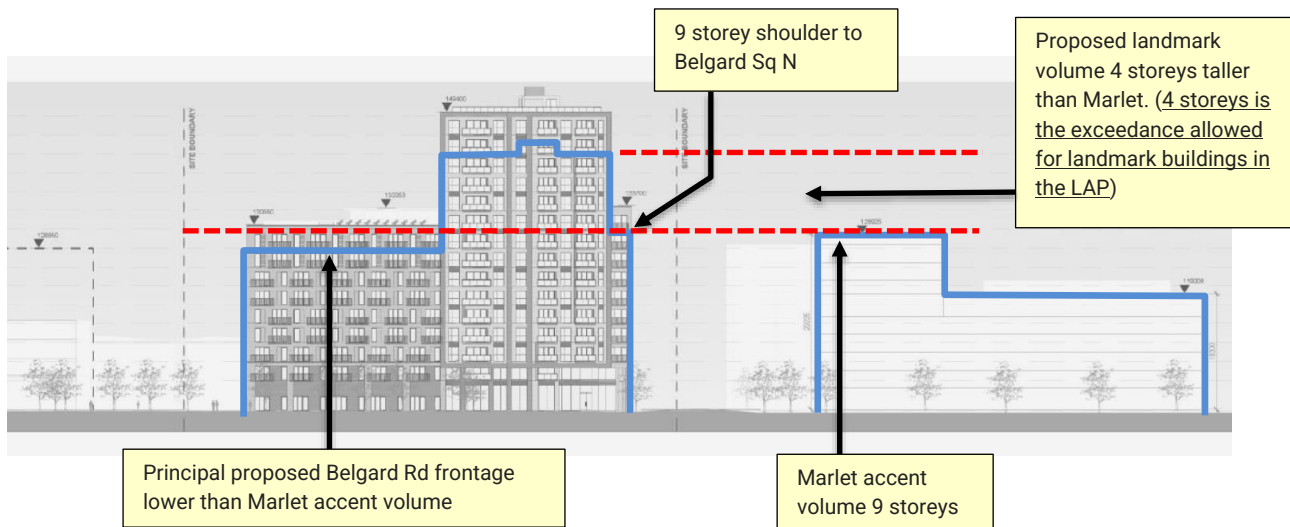
Figure 13 Proposed arrangement of height fronting Belgard Square North



3.1.1 Adjustment to Proposed Building Height Following ABP Opinion

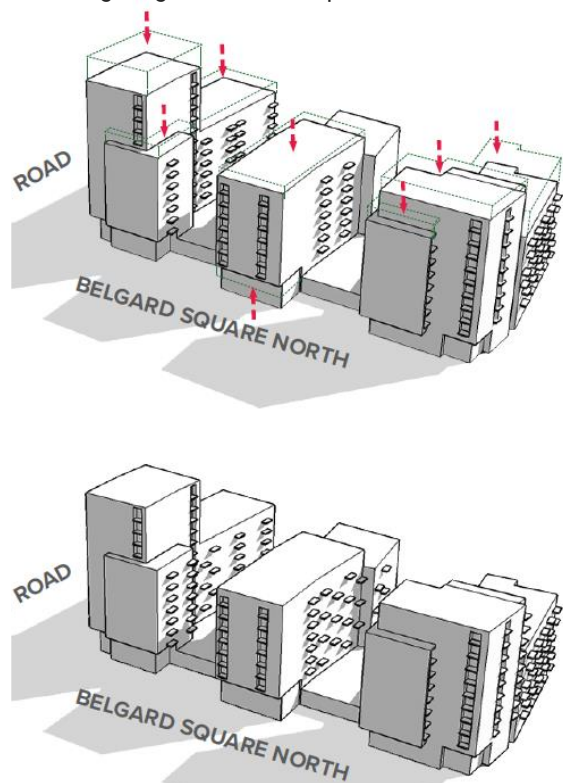
Following the tripartite meeting and ABP Opinion, a number of adjustments were made to the height of the proposed development. These adjustments were made to bring the proposed development closer in line with (a) the height strategy/policy in the LAP, and (b) the scale permitted on the neighbouring Marlet site - while still seeking to realise the site's landmark potential (and its potential for delivering meaningful density supported by a full suite of urban amenities and public transport). The key adjustments were as follows:

Figure 14a Design adjustments recommended following Stage 2 of the SHD process (Stage 2 proposal is greyscale background image), to respond to the permitted neighbouring development and LAP height policy



- The principal frontage to Belgard Road was reduced from nine to eight storeys. This part of the building, while taller than the principal frontage of the Marlet building (six storeys), would thus be lower than the accent volume at the corner of the Marlet site.
- The proposed landmark volume at the corner of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North, overlooking the gateway junction and the TUD campus, was reduced from 15 to 13 storeys. The landmark volume would thus be four storeys taller than the Marlet accent volume across the road. The four storey variance was specifically used as the LAP allows for designated landmark buildings to exceed others in the street elevation by four storeys. (It is the design intent for the proposed development to read as a landmark development in the Tallaght townscape. The greater height than the Marlet development may also be considered appropriate as the subject site is zoned Town Centre whereas the Marlet site is outside the town centre zone.)

Figure 14b Adjustments made to building height following Stage 2 of the SHD process



Figures 14a and 14b illustrate the design decisions taken in respect of building height following Stage 2 of the SHD process.

- The principal frontage to Belgard Square East was reduced from nine storeys to seven storeys. This is in recognition of the fact that Belgard Square East is classified a 'secondary route/frontage' in the LAP. It should thus read as being lower in status than Belgard Square North, which is classified a 'primary route/frontage'. The reduction in height of the principal frontage on Belgard Square East to seven storeys would achieve this, since the mean height proposed along Belgard Square North is nine storeys.

- The proposed accent volume at the corner of Belgard Square North and Belgard Square East was reduced from 12 storeys to 11 storeys. This would (a) result in a four storey step up along the Belgard Square East frontage to the accent volume at the junction, and (b) bring the accent volume closer in height to the permitted 10 storey volume diagonally across the junction on the Marlet site. (The Marlet site is outside of the Town Centre zone, therefore an increase in height from the Marlet site to the subject site may be considered appropriate.)
- The frontage to Belgard Square North was retained at nine storeys - apart from the accent volumes at either end of the block. This height reflects the status of the street, i.e. the 'primary' route connecting the town centre (and the hospital and County Hall) to the west, to the university and Belgard Road to the east.. This frontage is also permeable, being composed of the short elevations of the three blocks. This permeable frontage means that the height of the buildings would not cause excessive enclosure.

These height response to the adjacent streets is shown to good effect in the CGI below (Figure 15).

Figure 15 CGI showing the proposed arrangement of height along Belgard Square East and Belgard Square North, with the 11 storey accent volume at the corner to mark the junction as a significant new 'place' in the urban structure



3.2 Facade Treatment and Materials

The predominant material in the proposed building facades is brick. Three different colours of brick are used to distinguish between various volumes and horizontal levels. The ground floor is clearly expressed in all the facades (this is a specific requirement of the LAP – see 2.4.4 above). Patterned brickwork is also used in places for this purpose.

The facades are additionally articulated by generously sized windows and variously recessed or expressed balconies with metal railings or glass balustrades.

A notable characteristic of the design is the attention paid to the night-time appearance of the development, by the incorporation of lighting in the facades.

Figure 16a and b Proposed lighting of the facades



3.2.1 Activation of the Street Frontage

A key objective of the design is the activation of the surrounding streets by the location of active uses in the ground floors, particularly along Belgard Square North, Belgard Square East and the new 'green lane' along the site's southern boundary (see Figure 17). Following the tripartite meeting and the ABP Opinion additional attention was paid to making these uses visible in the facades. This is also reflected in the public realm design, with the streetscapes designed to achieve a distinctly 'urban street' character (see Figures 21 and 22 below).

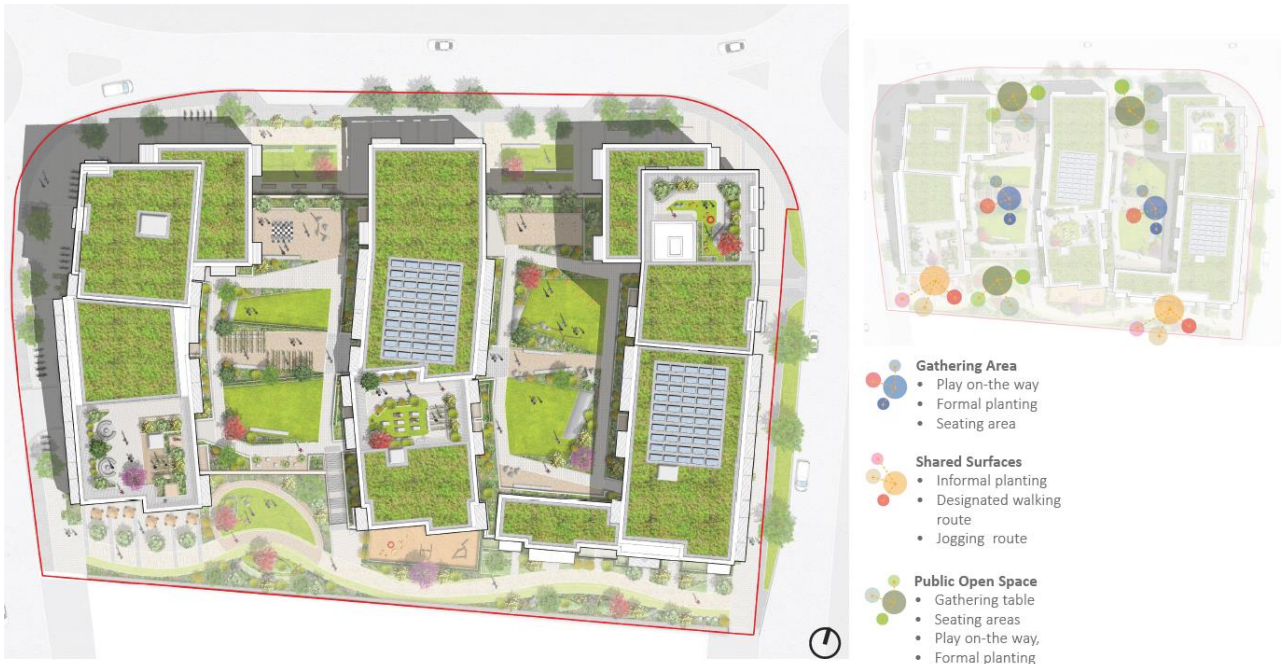
Figure 17 Proposed positioning of uses in the ground floor frontage to the adjacent streets and spaces, to activate the public realm



3.3 Landscape/Public Realm Proposals

There are existing public streets on three sides of the site, and it is proposed to provide a new ‘green lane’ on the fourth side, along the southern boundary, linking Belgard Road to Belgard Square East.

Figure 18 Proposed landscape masterplan



3.3.1 Green Lane

This linear space (see Figures 19 and 20) incorporates a strip of planting along the boundary, a wide pedestrian/ cycle path with a sinuous alignment (to set the green lane apart from an ordinary street), and a series of open spaces in front of the buildings. These ‘sub-spaces’ include (1) a plaza at the western end of the lane beside a commercial unit, (2) a green pocket park, and (3) a playground attached to the creche. Towards the eastern end of the lane where it is fronted by residential units in the ground floor, strips of privacy planting are proposed for the apartments’ private open space.

Figure 19 CGI of proposed plaza space at the western end of the green lane beside a commercial unit



Figure 20 CGI of proposed pocket park along the green lane



3.3.2 Belgard Square North Streetscape and Pocket Parks

A wide pavement is proposed in front of the commercial unit and residents' amenity spaces in the ground floor fronting Belgard Square North, allowing room for outdoor seating. A line of street trees and strips of ornamental planting are proposed to green the street. Two pocket parks are also proposed along the street (Figure 23), aligned with the courtyards between the buildings (but separated from the courtyards by the level change between the street and the podium). The pocket parks provide outdoor amenity space beside the residents' indoor amenity spaces in the ground floor of the buildings.

Figure 21 CGI of proposed Belgard Square North streetscape, showing the width of the pavement in front of the commercial unit at the corner of Belgard Square East



Figure 22 CGI of proposed Belgard Square North streetscape, showing the width of the pavement in front of the commercial unit at the corner of Belgard Square East



4.0 POTENTIAL TOWNSCAPE EFFECTS

4.1 Townscape Character and Sensitivity to Change

The site is currently commercial-industrial in character and makes no positive contribution to the townscape character or quality. It is zoned for Town Centre development, and the vision for the area is *“Continued transformation towards a high quality mixed use urban centre of city scale and character, with a vibrant mixed use residential community continuing to emerge in an attractive network of streets.”*

Additionally, there are no cultural heritage features, landmarks, key views or existing residential receptors in close proximity to the site (the nearest sensitive receptor is St Maelruain’s Church some 200m distant and buffered from the site by the Belgard Road corridor and a portion of the university parkland). Therefore, the site and receiving environment cannot be considered sensitive to development of the nature proposed.

However, due to its pivotal position in the urban structure, at the eastern gateway to the town centre from Belgard Road and at the interface between the town centre and the university, the site’s redevelopment has the potential to change the character of an important part of the townscape.

The sensitivity of the receiving environment can therefore be classified ‘medium’ (definition: *Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong, or has evidence of alteration, degradation or erosion of elements and characteristics. The landscape character is such that there is some capacity for change. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principle management objective may be to consolidate landscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change).*

4.2 Magnitude of Townscape Change

The townscape change which would result from the proposed development can be summarised as follows:

- The development would introduce a development of landmark scale and design - appropriate to the vision of ‘city character’ - at (a) the gateway junction to the town centre along Belgard Road, and (b) the interface between the town centre and university neighbourhoods;
- It would complement the permitted development on the northern side of the junction, combining with the Marlet scheme (in their complementary arrangement of built form and height) to form an appreciable gateway;
- By marking the gateway, the development would enhance the townscape legibility, particularly along Belgard Road and Belgard Square North, and as seen from the TUD campus;
- The development would provide urban-type enclosure to Belgard Road – the height commensurate with the width of the road corridor (30m+ and with no buildings on the east side of the road);
- The development would provide built enclosure to the university parkland/playing fields, improving its definition in the townscape as a key open space amenity;
- The development would provide active frontage to Belgard Road, Belgard Square North (complementing the retail units in the permitted development across the road) and Belgard Square East;
- A new ‘green street’ would be introduced to the townscape, between the site and the neighbouring site to the south, linking Belgard Road to Belgard Square East, improving pedestrian and cycle permeability;
- A number of new pocket parks and plaza spaces would be introduced to the townscape, contiguous with the adjacent public streets, alongside the entrances to the commercial/retail units;

- A total of 86 no. trees and large shrubs would be planted on the site along with lawn areas, mixed borders and low mixed planting, several green walls and extensive sedum roofs on the buildings. Despite its density the development would be green in character and would contribute to the local green infrastructure;
- The quality of the design and materials of both the buildings and landscape/public realm areas would be appreciably high, elevating the quality of the townscape locally but also enhancing the character of the wider townscape due to its pivotal position.

In summary, the magnitude of townscape change which would result from the proposed development can be classified 'medium' (definition: *Change that is moderate in extent, resulting in partial loss or alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the landscape, and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent but not necessarily substantially uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in change to the character of the landscape*).

4.3 Significance of Townscape Effects

Measuring the magnitude of change against the townscape sensitivity (refer to Table 3, Appendix A) **the significance of the effects is predicted to be 'moderate'** (definition: *An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends*) **and positive**.

Townscape change of some significance is inevitable with the development of an opportunity site in a prominent position in the urban structure. This is the desired effect of the site's redevelopment in the context of a Tallaght's ongoing transformation to a mixed use urban centre of 'city scale and character' (the LAP vision for the town centre neighbourhood).

The main considerations in assessing the appropriateness of the proposal (with respect to townscape and visual impact) are (a) the buildings' height, and (b) the design and material quality of the buildings and public realm/open space. A key question is whether the proposal would undermine the LAP's height strategy or whether it would complement or enhance the strategy.

4.3.1 Design Quality

While the LAP adopts the use of building height to create landmarks, it also states: *"Building design as opposed to building height is the key determinant in producing an acceptable Landmark Building and such buildings should be of high quality design."*

The photomontages and CGIs prepared for this assessment show that the proposed development is of exceptionally high design quality:

- The built form (three finger blocks as opposed to a perimeter block) and arrangement of height are a considered response to (a) the site's position in the townscape, (b) the permitted Marlet scheme on the neighbouring site, (c) the objective to maximise sunlight to the apartments and communal open spaces, and (d) the objective to provide a suitable degree of built enclosure to each of the adjacent streets and open spaces.
- The positioning of active uses in the ground floors responds to the requirement to activate the surrounding public realm.
- The proposed façade design is refined and the materials of high quality (refer to Figures 15-19 above).
- The communal open spaces and streetscapes around the buildings are of similarly high quality design - in their spatial arrangement, detailing and materials.

4.3.2 Building Height and the LAP Height Strategy

Considering the site's strategic location (refer to Section 2.2 and Figure 9 above), it would not appear out of place if the site were designated for a landmark building in the LAP (as illustrated in Figure 23).

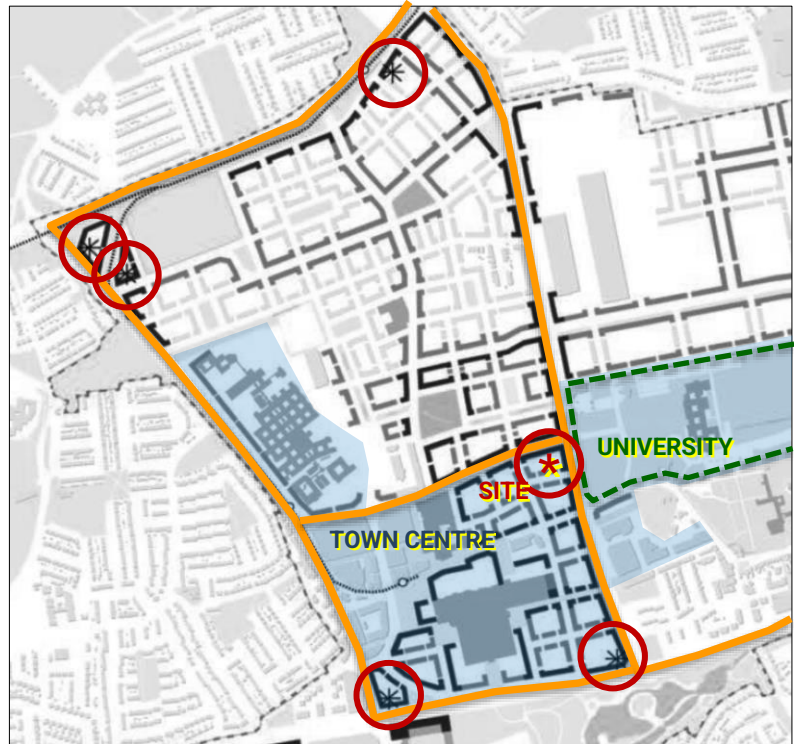
Nor would it undermine the adopted LAP height strategy (see Figure 10).

It is clear that the two main determinants of landmark sites in the LAP were (a) gateways to the urban area, and (b) frontage to wide roads/primary routes.

Both of these criteria apply to the site.

In addition, the site is located at a key internal gateway, between the town centre and the university, and between the town centre and the 'regeneration area' to the north.

Figure 23 LAP height strategy diagram annotated to illustrate the site's suitability for landmark designation (blue shading is Town Centre zoning; orange roads are primary routes)



The deviation from the prescribed height of eight storeys along Belgard Road would, in addition to marking the gateway, add visual interest to the road corridor – identifying a place of importance along the long, straight thoroughfare otherwise characterised by uniform height. **Such diversity of form and scale is not incompatible with the LAP vision of an urban centre of city scale and character. In summary, the development would complement the LAP height strategy, reinforcing the emerging urban structure, adding visual interest to the townscape, and improving legibility.**

An additional set of criteria for the assessment of proposals for taller buildings is contained in Section 3.2 of the Building Height Guidelines. The proposal is considered against these criteria below.

Table 1 Evaluation of site and proposal against Building Height Guidelines criteria

Building Height Guidelines Section 3.2	Yes / No	Comment
At the scale of the relevant city/town:		
<i>The site is well served by public transport with high capacity, frequent service and good links to other modes of public transport.</i>	Yes	The site is served by existing and future high capacity bus routes (there are three bus stops adjacent to the site), and the Tallaght Luas stop is less than 500m walk from the site.
<i>Development proposals incorporating increased building height... should <u>successfully integrate into/ enhance the character and public realm of the area...</u> having regard to topography, its <u>cultural context, setting of key</u></i>	Yes	The proposed development seeks to complement the permitted development on the site to the north in forming a legible gateway to the town centre from Belgard Road and the university. It would complement the built form, the public realm and the land use of that development, positively transforming the character of Belgard Square North and a key stretch of Belgard Road. There are no existing sensitive cultural features, landmarks or views in close proximity to the site which could be significantly, negatively

<p><u>landmarks, protection of key views...</u></p> <p>Such development proposals shall undertake a landscape and visual assessment, by a suitably qualified practitioner such as a chartered landscape architect.</p>		<p>affected by the development. (The nearest sensitive receptor is St Maelruain's Church some 200m from the site.)</p> <p>The Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment was carried out by a qualified landscape architect and member of the Irish Landscape Institute. The assessment took place in parallel with the design process, and informed the proposed design.</p>
<p><u>On larger urban redevelopment sites, proposed developments should make a positive contribution to place-making... incorporating new streets and public spaces...</u></p> <p>using massing and height to achieve the required densities but with sufficient variety in scale and form to respond to the scale of adjoining developments and <u>create visual interest in the streetscape.</u></p>	Yes	<p>The proposed development employs increased height to generate both visual interest and an 'event' in the built form along Belgard Road, with the specific intention of place-making – to mark the town centre gateway and the interface between the town centre and the university.</p> <p>The development would introduce a new greenway to the townscape, between the site and the neighbouring site to the south, linking Belgard Road to Belgard Square East. This would improve pedestrian and cycle permeability.</p>
<p>At the scale of district/neighbourhood/street:</p>		
<p><u>The proposal responds to its overall natural and built environment and makes a positive contribution to the urban neighbourhood and streetscape.</u></p>	Yes	<p>The proposal responds to its pivotal position in the urban structure and to several key characteristics of the receiving environment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The width of the roads and junctions to the east, north east, north and north west of the site. The scale of the buildings ins intended to generate urban-type enclosure of these large areas of streetscape/ public realm. - The existence of a large area of open space (the university playing fields/parkland) to the east of the site across Belgard Road. This open space would benefit from the built enclosure - improving its definition in the townscape as a key open space amenity. - The development would also derive maximum amenity value from the open space (for the site/future residents) – in line with the LAP objective for 'Amenity Frontages' around the university grounds. - The quality of the design and materials of both the buildings and landscape/public realm areas would be appreciably high, elevating the quality of the townscape locally but also enhancing the character of the wider townscape due to its pivotal position.
<p><u>The proposal is not monolithic and avoids long, uninterrupted walls of building in the form of slab blocks, with materials / building fabric well considered.</u></p>	Yes	<p>It is an objective of the development to present strong built frontage to Belgard Road and Belgard Square North and East, to generate urban-type enclosure of the streets (and the university open space to the east).</p> <p>In order to avoid long, uninterrupted walls of building, the facades are highly articulated, with steps in height, forward protrusions and recesses, and variations in material. The proposed design and material palette are of appreciably high quality.</p>
<p><u>The proposal enhances the urban design context for public spaces and key thoroughfares... thereby enabling additional height in development form to be favourably considered in terms of enhancing a sense of scale and enclosure...</u></p>	Yes	<p>The proposal would enhance the character - through (a) built enclosure/ definition, (b) active frontage and (c) passive surveillance - of Belgard Road and the university open space, and Belgard Square North and East.</p>

<i>The proposal makes a <u>positive contribution to the improvement of legibility</u> through the site or wider urban area within which the development is situated and integrates in a cohesive manner.</i>	Yes	The development would introduce a development of landmark scale and design - at (a) the gateway junction to the town centre along Belgard Road, and (b) the interface between the town centre and university neighbourhoods. By marking the gateway, the development would enhance the legibility of the urban structure, particularly along Belgard Road and Belgard Square North, and as seen from the TUD campus.
<i>The proposal positively contributes to the mix of uses and/ or building/ dwelling typologies available in the neighbourhood."</i>	Yes	The development would contribute a large number of dwellings to the Town Centre area – well located with respect to public transport, the retail and services core, the university and hospital, and a variety of open space amenities.

The assessment of the proposal against the Building Height Guidelines criteria confirms that the potential townscape effects can be classified positive.

5.0 POTENTIAL VISUAL EFFECTS

5.1 Selection of Viewpoints

Based on the townscape and policy analysis in Section 3 above, 20 no. viewpoints were selected for assessment of the proposal's visual effects, informed by Verified View Montages (VVMs). The viewpoints were selected to represent the key potential townscape and visual receptors, and to show the proposal from a range of angles and distances. The selected viewpoints are as follows (see Figure 18 below):

Table 2 Viewpoints for visual effects assessment

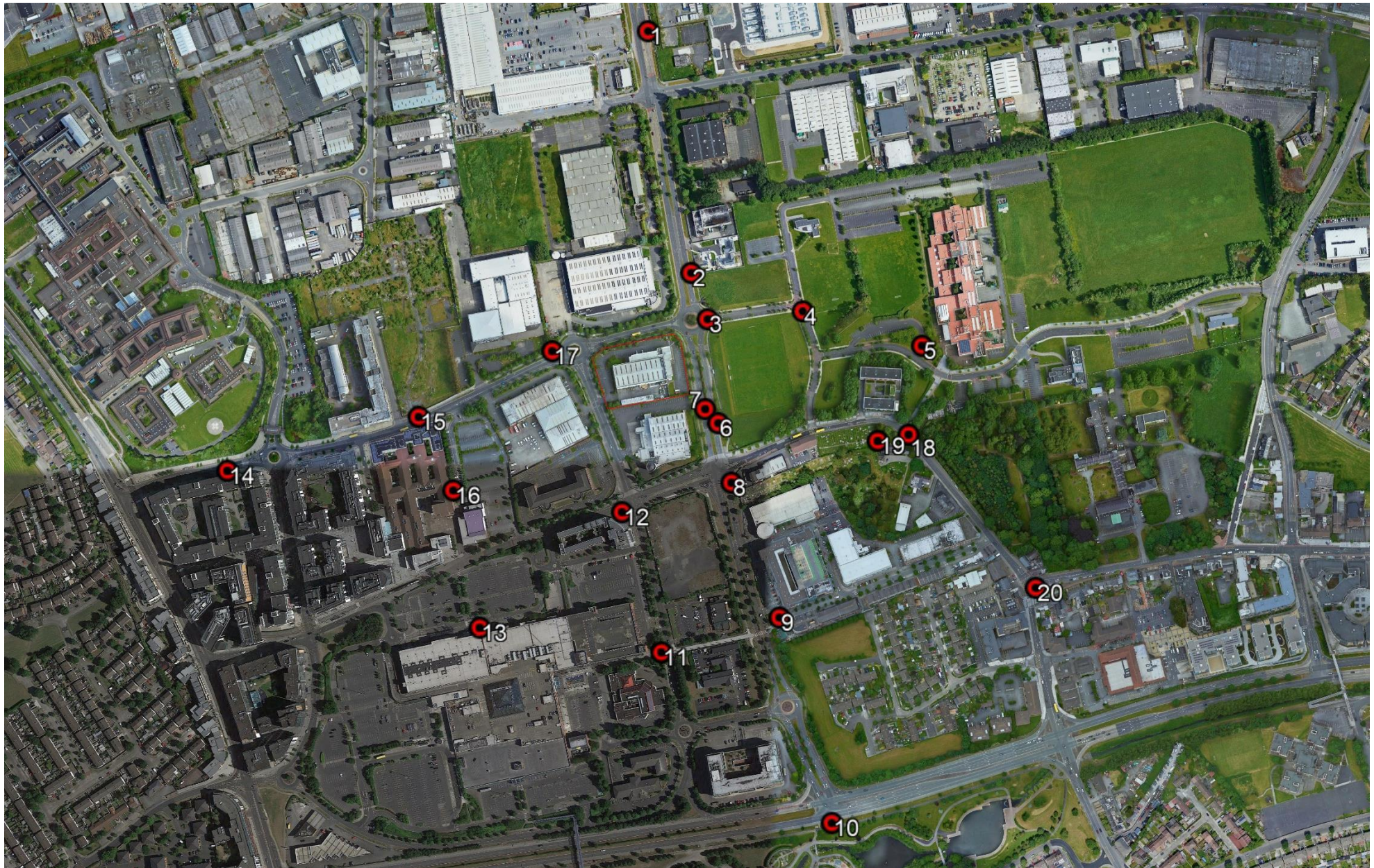
VVM No.	Location
Belgard Road North of the Site	
1	Belgard Road approaching Airton Road junction (approx. 400m from site)
2	Belgard Road approaching Belgard Square North junction, opposite Marlet site
TUD Campus	
3	Western/Belgard Road entrance to the University, opposite the site
4	Campus road/route to Belgard Road and the town centre
5	Campus road beside university building
Belgard Road South of the Site	
6	Belgard Road approaching site – West side of road
7	Belgard Road approaching site – East side of road
8	Junction of Belgard Road and Blessington Road
9	Junction of High Street and Abberley Square off Belgard Road
10	Junction of Belgard Road and N81
Belgard Square East	
11	Junction of Belgard Square East and pedestrian street
12	Junction of Belgard Square East and Blessington Road
Town Centre including Belgard Square North	
13	The Square northern entrance
14	Belgard Square North approaching hospital entrance
15	Belgard Square North beside County Hall
16	County Hall eastern entrance
17	Junction of Belgard Square North and Belgard Square East
Tallaght Village and ACA	
18	High Street beside St Maelruain's Church
19	St Maelruain's Church graveyard
20	Tallaght village centre

The viewpoints are assessed in the table below. For the methodology and the criteria and terms used in the assessment, refer to Appendix A.

The assessment should be read in conjunction with the baseline views and VVMs provided under separate cover. For each viewpoint the following are provided:

- **Existing view:** This is a photograph showing the existing environment (late summer and winter 2020);
- **Baseline view** (where relevant): This is a photomontage showing the permitted neighbouring development inserted into the existing view;
- **Proposed view:** This is a photomontage showing the proposed development inserted into the baseline view.

Figure 24 Viewpoints for visual effects assessment



5.2 Assessment of Visual Effects

Table 3 Assessment of visual effects

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
Belgard Road North of the Site						
1	Belgard Road approaching Airton Road junction (approx. 400m from site)	<p>The dominant feature of the view is Belgard Rd itself – 5 lanes wide and over 30m boundary to boundary. To the right in the foreground is Belgard Retail Park, the sprawling buildings set back from the road behind a large parking area.</p> <p>The lands on both sides of the road are zoned for urban regeneration and can be expected to be redeveloped in the coming years (apart from the retail park). The LAP prescribes a height of up to 8 storeys along the road. There is likely to be emphasis (e.g. in building height) to mark the Airton Rd junction in the foreground, which currently lacks legibility.</p> <p>The baseline view shows the permitted Marlet development on the plot neighbouring the site. This represents the first step in the transformation of the Belgard Road corridor into a main street in an urban area of ‘city character’ (as per the LAP vision).</p>	Low	<p>The development would be prominent fronting the road in the distance, combining with the Marlet scheme to enclose the road on one side, shifting its character towards that of a city street.</p> <p>The landmark volume would protrude above the roofline of the Marlet scheme, the gradation in height towards the site suggesting a place of importance in the townscape (the dual gateway to the town centre and university). The extent of the building’s protrusion above the (future) streetfront roofline is sufficient that it would be visible and recognisable from a distance. This would enhance its landmark/ legibility function.</p> <p>The two other buildings protruding above the Marlet roofline to the right also contribute to legibility by indicating the alignment of Belgard Square North.</p> <p>There would be no loss of any valued feature or characteristic of the view. The development would make a significant contribution to the vision of an urban area of ‘city scale and character’ in which Belgard Road is the central thoroughfare. Townscape legibility would be substantially improved.</p>	Medium	Moderate positive
2	Belgard Road approaching Belgard Square North junction, opposite Marlet site	<p>The width of the Belgard Road corridor makes the existing office/ industrial buildings look small, and the road width is amplified along this stretch by the TUD open space across the road.</p> <p>The distant Dublin Mountains, and to a lesser extent the trees on the roundabout, provide some legibility and visual amenity. However, the absence of buildings of note contributes to a weak townscape character and poor legibility.</p> <p>Belgard Rd (as the future main thoroughfare), the Belgard Square Nth junction (the entrance to the town centre) and the university open</p>	Medium	<p>The proposed development would cement the area’s transformation into an urban quarter of city character and architectural quality. In combination with the Marlet scheme it would form an appreciable eastern gateway to the town centre.</p> <p>The height of the corner volume would clearly indicate a place of significance in the townscape, the building serving a landmark function complementary to the LAP height strategy - marking the dual gateway from Belgard Road to the town centre and the university. <u>With no buildings on the east side of the road, there would be no sense of excessive enclosure despite the building’s height.</u></p> <p>The composite form, highly articulated facades (including a</p>	High	Significant positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
		<p>space would all benefit from improved definition by built form.</p> <p>The baseline view shows the transformative effect of the permitted Marlet development, initiating the built enclosure of the street and the definition of the junction/ gateway. It shows that the 30m wide road corridor (with no buildings on the east side) can comfortably accommodate the permitted 9 storey height at the corner.</p>		<p>recessed, double-height, glazed entrance at the corner) and variations in material reduce the perceived scale and add character and visual interest to the development and the wider townscape.</p> <p>There would be no loss of any valued feature or characteristic of the view. The development would make a significant contribution to the vision of an urban area of 'city scale and character' in which Belgard Road and Belgard Square North are two main thoroughfares. Townscape quality and legibility would be improved.</p>		
TUD Campus						
3 & 4	Western/ Belgard Road entrance to the University, and campus road/route to the town centre	<p>The Belgard Road entrance to the university is the point of interface between the university and the town centre. It is on the east-west axis (Belgard Square North) linking the hospital, County Hall and the university across the town centre.</p> <p><u>However, both views show that the route from the university into the town centre is hidden by the trees on the roundabout, in addition to not being indicated in the built form.</u></p> <p>View 3 illustrates the dominance of road infrastructure in the townscape and the related lack of urban character and legibility. The wide roads and junction make the buildings look small/ inconsequential.</p> <p><u>View 4 shows the that due to the lack of built enclosure and architectural quality along Belgard Road, the campus lacks definition, limiting its value as an urban asset.</u></p> <p>The baseline views show the permitted Marlet development initiating (a) the enclosure of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North by built form, and (b) the shift in character towards an</p>	Medium	<p>The proposed development would combine with the Marlet scheme to form an appreciable edge, bringing the town centre to the university interface, forming a gateway between the two quarters. This would cement the transformation of the area into a townscape of 'city character' and dramatically improve legibility, the development serving a landmark function complementary to the LAP height strategy.</p> <p>Both views show that the height of the building can be comfortably accommodated <u>in this particular location</u> overlooking the wide street and the campus grounds. The height of the building, while indicating a place of significance (the gateway), would have no negative effect on any other element in the composition.</p> <p><u>View 4 shows that the university campus would benefit from:</u></p> <p>(a) <u>increased enclosure/definition by buildings of architectural quality, elevating the grounds from an unremarkable green space to a place of importance in the urban structure (this is in line with the LAP vision for the university), and</u></p> <p>(b) <u>a clearly defined route into the town centre along Belgard Square North.</u></p> <p>The development would make a significant contribution to achieving the LAP vision for both the town centre and the</p>	High	Significant positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
		urban condition.		university neighbourhoods.		
5	Campus road beside university building	<p>The view is taken from a position to the side of the main university building.</p> <p>The avenue of trees in the foreground restricts the visibility of the site from the main entrance to the university building, but from this position on the road beside the building the roadside trees frame a view west towards the site (and the town centre).</p> <p>The existing building on the site can be seen in the middle distance. It is unremarkable in scale and architecture and makes no contribution to townscape character or legibility.</p>	Medium	<p>Despite the viewing distance of 200m, due to its scale and character the development would have the visual effect of bringing the town centre closer to the university.</p> <p>Similar to View 4, the campus (particularly the open space) would be given additional value by its increased enclosure/ definition in the townscape.</p> <p>The tower element of the building, which protrudes only marginally to the side of the foreground trees, has a notable effect on the view. With the lower 8 storey volume closely reflecting the LAP's prescribed building height for Belgard Road, the 13 storey tower would catch the eye. This is its intended effect - to mark the gateway and the route between the university and the town centre.</p> <p>The development would make a contribution to achieving the LAP vision for both the town centre and the university neighbourhoods.</p>	Medium	Moderate positive
Belgard Road South of the Site						
6 & 7	Belgard Road approaching site – West side of road (View 6) and east side of the road (View 7)	<p>These views are taken from the west (View 6) and east (View 7) sides of the road approaching the Belgard Square North junction. The width of Belgard Road is evident, with four traffic lanes divided by a planted central median, and wide green verges on both sides featuring lines of maturing street trees.</p> <p>The existing commercial and warehouse type buildings on the site and the neighbouring plots can be seen between the trees, set back from the road behind unsightly security fencing.</p> <p>To the right of the road is the university open space and this amplifies the width of the road.</p> <p>The generous green space and trees in the road corridor and the university grounds constitute a</p>	Medium	<p>The proposed development would cement Belgard Road's transformation into an urban street of 'city scale and character'. In combination with the Marlet scheme it would form an appreciable eastern gateway to the town centre, extending the town centre character area to the edge of Belgard Road.</p> <p>The height of the corner volume would indicate a place of significance in the townscape (the gateway to the town centre and the university), the building serving a landmark function complementary to the LAP height strategy. <u>With no buildings on the east side of the road, there would be no sense of excessive enclosure despite the building's height.</u> View 6 in particular shows that the height is commensurate with the width of the road and the university grounds.</p> <p>The composite form and the gradation in height on the site create a pleasing and logical composition of built form. The articulated facades, variations in materials and streetscape</p>	High	Significant positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
		<p>valuable green infrastructure and amenity asset, but judged as an urban street the townscape character is weak and legibility is poor.</p> <p>The baseline view shows the permitted Marlet development beyond the junction. This initiates (a) the enclosure of Belgard Road and Belgard Square North, marking the junction, and (b) the shift in character towards an urban condition.</p>		<p>improvements add character, quality and visual interest to the townscape. As the viewer passes by the site the new 'green street' along the southern boundary would be visible.</p> <p>There would be no loss of any valued feature or characteristic of the view, i.e. no negative impact. The development would make a major contribution to achieving the LAP vision for the area and would improve the townscape quality and legibility.</p>		
8	Junction of Belgard Road and Blessington Road	<p>The view is dominated by the wide junction and the complex of large-footprint factory buildings on the plot south of the site. <u>The road infrastructure (and the wider townscape in view) reflects the original purpose for which it was built, i.e. industry and distribution.</u></p> <p>To the right beyond the junction is the university open space. This amplifies the width of the road and the absence of built form and frontage. The green space and trees are valuable assets, but judged as an urban street/ townscape the character is weak and legibility is poor.</p> <p>The baseline view shows the permitted Marlet development in the distance beyond the site. This initiates the enclosure of Belgard Road and the shift in character towards an urban condition. However, on its own it will not overcome the dominance of the road or achieve urban character.</p>	Medium	<p>The proposed development would be a prominent addition to the view, combining with the Marlet scheme to transform the character of a key stretch of Belgard Road into a thoroughfare of 'city scale and character'.</p> <p>The height would indicate a place of significance in the townscape (i.e. the gateways from Belgard Road to the town centre and the university), the building serving a landmark function complementary to the LAP height strategy.</p> <p><u>With no buildings on the east side of the road, there would be no sense of excessive enclosure despite the building's height.</u> The view shows that the height is commensurate with the breadth of the road corridor and the university grounds.</p> <p>The composite form, articulated facades and variations in materials create a pleasing composition of built form, adding character, quality and visual interest to the townscape. There would be no loss of any valued feature or characteristic of the view. The development would make a major contribution to achieving the LAP vision for the area and would substantially improve the townscape quality and legibility.</p>	Medium	Moderate positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
9	Junction of High Street and Abberley Square off Belgard Road	<p>This is the first of the viewpoints located in the established town centre area. A mixed use building of 6 storeys fronts Abberley Square, which runs parallel to the reduced-width Belgard Road along this stretch. The shopfronts generate activity in the streetscape and this complements the pedestrian traffic along the link to 'The Square' (out of view to the left).</p> <p>A number of contemporary buildings of urban character are visible between the trees to the left, but <u>due to the plot and building typologies west of the road an 'urban' townscape is not fully realised. There is no suggestion of the town centre area extending north along Belgard Road.</u></p> <p>The baseline view shows the permitted Market development in the distance. This initiates the enclosure of Belgard Road and the shift in character towards an urban condition. However, on its own its urbanising effect is limited.</p>	Low	<p>The proposed development would be a prominent addition to the view, visibly extending the town centre to the edge of Belgard Road.</p> <p>The height would clearly indicate a place of significance in the townscape (the gateway between the town centre and the university) - the building serving a landmark function complementary to the LAP height strategy.</p> <p>The three finger blocks, each with volumes of varying height, create a pleasing and visually interesting composition of built form. (It is noteworthy that a perimeter block arrangement would not achieve this.) The alignment of the blocks parallel to Belgard Road reinforces the urban structure, which lacks legibility currently.</p> <p>There would be no loss of any valued feature or characteristic of the view, i.e. no negative impact. The development would make a major contribution to achieving the LAP vision for town centre area and substantially improve townscape quality and legibility.</p>	Medium	Moderate positive
10	Junction of Belgard Road and N81	<p>This view is taken from the entry point to the emerging Tallaght town centre area from the N81, a key gateway in the urban structure.</p> <p><u>There is a 6 storey, large-footprint building (the Plaza complex) on one side of the junction. This shows that even a modern 6 storey building has limited urbanising effect. This is due to the extreme width of the road infrastructure, the setback of the building from the road edge (so that an active/ animated streetscape does not result), and an absence of built enclosure across the road.</u></p> <p>The Abberley Square building (refer to Viewpoint 9) protrudes marginally above the</p>	Medium	<p>The proposed development would protrude above the distant trees and buildings, on the axis of Belgard Road.</p> <p>It is notable, in the summer view in particular, that only the tops of the 'lower' volumes protrude. They would thus be an unremarkable addition to the skyline. In contrast, the 13 storey volume rises above the skyline, catching the eye and suggesting a place of importance in the townscape. This is the design intent, that the building function as a landmark - marking the interface and gateway between the town centre and the university.</p> <p>This would add visual interest and legibility to the townscape, with no negative effects on any valued element or characteristic of the view.</p> <p><u>Were the Plaza site redeveloped to include a landmark building,</u></p>	Low	Slight positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
		<p>tree line in the middle distance, having similarly limited effect, for the same reasons.</p> <p>The plot to the left of the junction (the Plaza complex) is identified in the LAP as a landmark site, allowing for an additional 4 storeys above the prescribed 8 storey height for Belgard Road.</p>		<p><u>the proposed development would not undermine that building's status or landmark function.</u> They are sufficiently far apart that the proposed development would not compete with the Plaza for prominence. On the contrary, the development would complement the landmark in the foreground (and the wider LAP height strategy). It is a principle of landmarks/ beacons that one in a series should be intervisible with the next, so that they function collectively as a guide through an area.</p> <p>This view shows that the LAP vision for a 'high quality mixed use urban centre of city scale and character' can evolve to accommodate the proposed development. Although a departure from the LAP height policy, the development would enhance the townscape character and improve its legibility.</p>		
Belgard Square East						
11	Junction of Belgard Square East and pedestrian street	<p>The view is taken from Belgard Square East at the crossing of a pedestrian street linking the Square to the original village centre. This is a view experienced by a large number of people.</p> <p>The townscape north and east of the pedestrian crossing is of mixed quality. A contemporary 6 storey building frames the view to the left, while across the tree-lined street is a McDonald's restaurant in a large parking area, with Abberley Square rising behind it.</p> <p><u>The area's intended urban character is as yet unrealised.</u></p>	Low	<p>In summer the development would be screened from view (at this particular location) by the avenue of street trees. (It would be intermittently visible to the east along the pedestrian street as it passes the McDonald's car park, and from the car park itself.)</p> <p>In winter the buildings would be discernible in the distance, although filtered by the bare tree canopies. While only a minor change, the development would add to the quantity, diversity and quality of buildings in the townscape, improving the balance of built form to road infrastructure, strengthening the urban character.</p>	Negligible-Low	Not significant positive
12	Junction of Belgard Square East and Blessington Road	<p>The wide junction and Belgard Square East are fronted by large-footprint, low buildings of commercial-industrial character.</p> <p>The townscape in view is cluttered and somewhat unsightly, with little indication of the town centre context. (In contrast, to the west along Blessington Road the townscape is distinctly urban in character, with contemporary</p>	Low	<p>The development would be a prominent addition to the view, the three linear blocks individually discernible from this angle, forming a pleasing and interesting composition of built form.</p> <p>The facade design and material quality would be appreciable from this proximity, elevating the quality of the townscape in addition to strengthening the urban/ town centre character.</p> <p>The development would cement the area's transformation into a</p>	Medium-High	Moderate positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
		<p>buildings of quality fronting the street, and a designed pedestrian link featuring street trees and a green fence to screen an adjacent parking area.)</p> <p>In the baseline view the permitted Marlet scheme is prominent, with strong frontage indicating the alignment of Belgard Square North, and a gateway in the built form marking a new street crossing the Marlet site. This will initiate the transformation of the townscape character in this part of the town centre.</p>		townscape of 'city character' and architectural and material quality - achieving a critical mass of contemporary, quality development to prevail over the less attractive existing elements and characteristics.		
Town Centre including Belgard Square North						
13	The Square northern entrance	<p>This view is taken from a position near the northern entrance to The Square shopping centre.</p> <p>The view to the north east is dominated by the large surface parking area. A number of more recently developed buildings in the surrounding area generate a degree of urban character but they don't collectively achieve the critical mass required to overcome the detracting effect of the shopping centre and car park.</p> <p>(The view to the north west from the shopping centre entrance is very different – see Photos 6 and 7 above. In those views the combination of development density, architectural diversity and quality has created an attractive townscape.)</p>	Low	<p>The development would protrude above the roofline of the buildings surrounding the car park.</p> <p>Despite the distance, the composite built form of varying height, would attract attention, indicating a place of importance in the townscape (the gateway between the town centre and the university), thus improving legibility.</p> <p>The development would also add to the quantity, diversity and quality of buildings in view, improving the balance of built form to road infrastructure, thereby strengthening the urban character.</p> <p><u>This is another example of the proposal's height having appreciable positive effects on townscape character and legibility with no negative effects.</u></p>	Low	Slight positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
14	Belgard Square North approaching hospital entrance	<p>The view is taken from the western stretch of Belgard Square North where the urban character is well established, with mixed use buildings of up to 9 storeys enclosing the streetscape.</p> <p>The hospital entrance is to the left, with a tree belt inside the boundary adding greenery and visual amenity to the view.</p>	Medium	<p>The development would be visible in the distance, closing the vista at the eastern end of Belgard Square North.</p> <p><u>It should be noted that due to the sinuous alignment of Belgard Square North, which places the site at the centre of this view, even a lower building on the site would fill the gap that currently exists between the streetfront buildings. The retention of an open vista at the end of the street is not possible.</u></p> <p>The development would have the effect of expanding the town centre eastwards, adding to the density and diversity of architecture in the townscape. This is not inappropriate in the evolving context, and is in line with the vision to 'continue the transformation towards a high quality mixed use urban centre of city scale and character'.</p>	Low - Medium	Slight - Moderate neutral
15	Belgard Square North beside County Hall	<p>The wide street is enclosed by County Hall to the right and a high boundary wall to the left (enclosing a future development site with an LAP-prescribed height of up to 8 storeys).</p> <p><u>In the existing view the urban character ends abruptly east of County Hall, with only low buildings of commercial-industrial character discernible between the trees in the street and the County Hall car park. The trees provide some visual amenity but judged as an urban street the townscape character is weak and legibility is poor.</u></p> <p>In the baseline view the permitted Marlet Scheme is prominent ahead and to the left, enclosing the street on one side, expanding and strengthening the urban character along Belgard Square North.</p>	Low	<p>The development would be prominent in the distance, combining with the Marlet Scheme to enclose the street, further expanding and strengthening the urban character along Belgard Square North.</p> <p>The 11 storey volume at the corner of Belgard Square East would mark the junction. (This pattern of taller buildings at junctions is established in the existing town centre area to the west.)</p> <p>Along this central stretch of the road the proposed development and the Marlet scheme would frame an open vista towards the university grounds, forming a distinct gateway in the built form.</p>	Medium	Slight - Moderate positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
16	County Hall eastern entrance	<p>The view is taken from a position in front of the eastern entrance to County Hall. The view is experienced by a large number of people.</p> <p>The car park occupies the foreground and in summer (photomontage not available) the car park trees largely block the view east towards the site. In winter (the 'worst case scenario' - photomontage provided) a composition of low industrial and office buildings is visible through the bare tree canopies.</p> <p>The baseline view shows the permitted Marlet development fronting Belgard Square North, initiating a shift in character towards a higher quality mixed use townscape.</p>	Low	<p>The development would be visible in the middle distance (in winter only), combining with the Marlet scheme to form a distinct gateway in the built form.</p> <p>The composite form of varying height, facade treatments and materials would be an attractive, distinctly urban addition to the composition. It would add to the quantity, diversity and quality of buildings in view, complementing the Marlet scheme and strengthening the urban character.</p>	Low-Medium	Slight positive
17	Junction of Belgard Square North and Belgard Square East	<p>The townscape in the existing view is characterised by wide roads and unsightly buildings of industrial character set back from the boundaries behind security fences.</p> <p>The character is weak and legibility is poor (there is no indication of the town centre context or the proximity to the university).</p> <p>The baseline view shows the permitted Marlet Scheme to the left of the road, opposite the site. The development will initiate the transformation of the Belgard Square North streetscape, with a high quality, mixed use building of varying height (6-9 storeys) fronting a linear plaza space along the street.</p>	Low	<p>The proposed development would transform the view, cementing the creation of a townscape of 'city character' along this stretch of Belgard Square North. In combination with the Marlet scheme a critical mass of contemporary, quality development would be delivered, prevailing over the historic elements and characteristics.</p> <p>The view shows that the wide roads can accommodate the proposed height without excessive enclosure. The composite form of the north frontage, with gaps and setbacks, variations in height and façade treatments, reduces the perception of scale. It also complements the design of the Marlet scheme. In contrast the Belgard Square East frontage is more linear.</p> <p>Other noteworthy features – which would be visible from closer to the site - include a clearly expressed ground floor (as required by the LAP), and streetscapes of urban character animated by the active frontage to both Belgard Square North and East.</p> <p>There would be no loss or compromise of any valued feature or characteristic of the view. The development would make a significant contribution to achieving the vision of an urban area of 'city scale and character'.</p>	High	Significant positive

No	Viewpoint Location	Existing/Baseline View	Sensitivity	Proposed Change	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
Tallaght Village and ACA						
18	High Street beside St Maelruain's Church	<p>The view is taken from Main Street where it curves around the side of St Maelruain's Church and graveyard, with the road aligned to provide a view north west towards the site.</p> <p>The view is framed by the church (a protected structure) and trees inside the graveyard boundary to the left, and a modern mixed use building (the Tramway development) to the right. A small part of another small apartment building is visible beyond the graveyard in the middle distance.</p>	Medium	<p>The development would be largely screened by the foreground trees in summer and winter.</p> <p>Moving forward along the road another belt of trees (inside the TUD campus boundary to the right) would have similar screening effect.</p> <p>The magnitude of change would be negligible and there would be no negative effect on the protected structure, the ACA or their setting.</p>	Negligible	Not significant neutral
19	St Maelruain's Church graveyard	<p>The view is taken from the graveyard west of St Maelruain's Church. The graveyard is within the curtilage of the protected structure and is part of the Tallaght ACA.</p> <p>In the view north west there is a modern 3 storey building to the right across the road, and another 3 storey apartment block ahead beyond the graveyard. These buildings frame the view towards the site. In the summer view the gap is filled by a belt of trees inside the TUD campus boundary. In winter the distant buildings beyond Belgard Road can be seen but are heavily filtered by the bare tree canopies. In the winter baseline view, the permitted Marlet development would be discernible in the distance, filtered by the trees.</p>	Medium	<p>The development would be largely screened in summer.</p> <p>In the winter the landmark volume would be discernible in the distance (c. 200m), although filtered by the trees in the intervening landscape.</p> <p>It would have the subtle effect of bringing the town centre closer to the historic village core, combining with the Marlet scheme to form a built frontage to Belgard Road.</p> <p>This would constitute a slight change in the setting of the protected structure and ACA. The change is not inappropriate nor undesirable in the evolving urban context, and there would be no reduction in visual amenity. The development would however result in a slight improvement in townscape legibility.</p>	Low	Slight positive
20	Tallaght village centre	<p>The view is taken from the junction of Main Street and Old Bawn Road in the centre of the village (and the ACA).</p> <p>The village centre is in a dip in the landform, and the streets are enclosed by buildings which block views of the surrounding townscape.</p>	High	The development would not be visible.	None	None

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Townscape Effects

The site is currently commercial-industrial in character and makes no positive contribution to the townscape character or quality. It is zoned for Town Centre development, and the vision for the area is *“Continued transformation towards a high quality mixed use urban centre of city scale and character, with a vibrant mixed use residential community continuing to emerge in an attractive network of streets.”*

There are no cultural heritage features, landmarks, key views or existing residential receptors in close proximity to the site. The nearest sensitive receptor is St Maelruain’s Church some 200m distant and buffered from the site by the Belgard Road corridor and a portion of the university parkland. Therefore, the site and receiving environment cannot be considered sensitive to development of the nature proposed. However, due to its pivotal position in the urban structure, at the eastern gateway to the town centre from Belgard Road and at the interface between the town centre and the university, the site’s redevelopment has the potential to change the character of an important part of the townscape. The sensitivity of the receiving environment can therefore be classified ‘medium’.

The townscape change which would result from the proposed development can be summarised as follows:

- The development would introduce a development of landmark scale and design - appropriate to the vision of ‘city character’ - at (a) the gateway junction to the town centre along Belgard Road, and (b) the interface between the town centre and university neighbourhoods;
- It would complement the permitted development on the northern side of the junction, combining with the Marlet scheme (in their complementary arrangement of built form and height) to form an appreciable gateway;
- By marking the gateway, the development would enhance the townscape legibility, particularly along Belgard Road and Belgard Square North, and as seen from the TUD campus;
- The development would provide urban-type enclosure to Belgard Road (the height commensurate with the 30m+ road width, with no buildings on the east side) and Belgard Square North and East;
- The development would provide built enclosure to the university parkland/playing fields, improving its definition in the townscape as a key open space amenity;
- The development would provide active frontage to Belgard Road, Belgard Square North (complementing the retail units in the permitted development across the road) and Belgard Square East;
- A new ‘green street’ would be introduced along the site’s southern boundary, linking Belgard Road to Belgard Square East, improving pedestrian and cycle permeability;
- A number of new pocket parks and plaza spaces would be introduced to the townscape, contiguous with the adjacent public streets, alongside the entrances to the commercial/retail units;
- A total of 86 no. trees and large shrubs would be planted on the site along with lawn areas, mixed borders and low mixed planting, several green walls and extensive sedum roofs on the buildings. Despite its density the development would be green in character, providing a residential neighbourhood of high amenity value and contributing to the local green infrastructure;
- The quality of the design and materials of both the buildings and landscape/public realm areas would be appreciably high, elevating the quality of the townscape locally but also enhancing the character of the wider townscape due to its pivotal position.

In summary, the magnitude of townscape change which would result from the proposed development can be classified ‘medium’.

Measuring the magnitude of change against the townscape sensitivity the significance of the effects is predicted to be 'moderate' (definition: *An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends*) and positive.

Townscape change of some significance is inevitable with the development of an opportunity site in a prominent position in the urban structure. This is the desired effect of the site's redevelopment in the context of a Tallaght's 'transformation towards a high quality mixed use urban centre of city scale and character'. In addition to contributing to the realisation of the LAP vision for the town centre, the development would achieve a number of other townscape-related objectives stated in the LAP. It would:

- Improve urban legibility throughout the area (Objective TC3);
- Improve interface with all existing and proposed routes and open spaces (TC7);
- Improve and enhance the public realm (TC10);
- Present strong building frontages close to street edges (Building Setback policy);
- Provide building frontage to all sides (Block Form policy);
- Provide a continuity of building frontage, which relates to the local or urban context, and avoidance of blank walls (Block Form policy);
- Progress the architectural quality of the existing character of the area, with a combination of high quality materials and colours that have good tonal differentiation and are compatible with neighbouring developments (External Finishes and Appearance policy);
- Achieve successful interaction between the residential scheme, streets and public realm to foster a true sense of neighbourhood and encourage interaction between residents, with animated ground floors, homes with own door access, private landscaped terraces and a successful integration with communal and public open space (Interaction with Public Realm policy).

The two main LAP policies from which the proposal deviates are (1) a preference for perimeter block arrangement of built form, and (2) the height strategy.

Regarding the perimeter block preference, the proposed arrangement of three 'finger blocks' was selected in consideration of sunlight and daylight penetration (in compliance with the LAP's Block Form policy). The proposal also responds to built form of the permitted Marlet scheme opposite Belgard Square North from the site.

Regarding building height, the key question is whether the proposal would undermine the LAP's height strategy, or whether it would complement or enhance the strategy. Analysis of the receiving environment, relevant policy and the proposal indicates that there is a strong argument in favour of the development. The increased height is appropriately located to mark the town centre gateway and the interface between the town centre and the university. The photomontages show that the height would both add to townscape legibility (by identifying a place of importance) and add visual interest to views from a variety of angles and distances. Importantly, the site is sufficiently removed from any of the LAP-designated tall building sites to avoid any dilution of their intended effect.

The LAP height strategy does allow some flexibility, as indicated by the following policy:

"The height standards set out... may be exceeded in the Centre neighbourhood where they reflect the height of existing buildings..."

The site is within the 'Centre Neighbourhood', and there are several existing buildings of substantial height (up to 13 storeys) in the town centre. In all cases the height of these existing buildings contributes to their

positive impact on the townscape and views in the area. (See Photos 6 and 7 above, in which variations in building height - as well as architecture and materials - have clearly contributed to the achievement of a contemporary town centre character in Tallaght.)

“Building heights will also be evaluated against topography, culture context, key landmarks and key views as required by Building Height Guidelines.”

The site and the proposal were evaluated against the Building Height Guidelines Section 3.2 (see Table 1 in Section 4.3 of this report) and found to comply with the criteria. Furthermore, the proposed development would have no negative effect on the topography, on any cultural or architectural heritage features or other key landmarks, nor on any key views.

6.2 Visual Effects

Table 4 Summary of visual effects assessment

No	Viewpoint Location	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
1	Belgard Road approaching Airton Road junction	Low	Medium	Moderate positive
2	Belgard Road approaching Belgard Square North junction, opposite Marlet site	Medium	High	Significant positive
3 & 4	Western/ Belgard Road entrance to the University, and campus road/route to the town centre	Medium	High	Significant positive
5	Campus road beside university building	Medium	Medium	Moderate positive
6 & 7	Belgard Road approaching site – West side of road (View 6) and east side of the road (View 7)	Medium	High	Significant positive
8	Junction of Belgard Road and Blessington Road	Medium	Medium	Moderate positive
9	Junction of High Street and Abberley Square off Belgard Road	Low	Medium	Moderate positive
10	Junction of Belgard Road and N81	Medium	Low	Slight positive
11	Junction of Belgard Square East and pedestrian street	Low	Negligible-Low	Not significant positive
12	Junction of Belgard Square East and Blessington Road	Low	Medium-High	Moderate positive
13	The Square northern entrance	Low	Low	Slight positive
14	Belgard Square North approaching hospital entrance	Medium	Low-Medium	Slight - Moderate neutral
15	Belgard Square North beside County Hall	Low	Medium	Slight - Moderate positive
16	County Hall eastern entrance	Low	Low-Medium	Slight positive
17	Junction of Belgard Square North and Belgard Square East	Low	High	Significant positive
18	High Street beside St Maelruain’s Church	Medium	Negligible	Not significant neutral
19	St Maelruain’s Church graveyard	Medium	Low	Slight positive
20	Tallaght village centre	High	None	None

The viewpoint assessments found that the visual effects would be most significant on the Belgard Road corridor, Belgard Square North and East (local views) and the university campus. In all cases the visual effects are predicted to be positive. This reflects the high quality design of the proposal, which responds appreciably to the physical context (including the neighbouring permitted Marlet scheme and the site's pivotal position in the urban structure) and the relevant LAP objectives. The assessment found no negative visual effects for any of the viewpoints.

In conclusion, the proposed development can be considered an appropriate intervention in the evolving townscape of Tallaght town centre.

APPENDIX A TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The LVIA methodology is informed by the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 3rd edition 2013 (hereafter referred to as the GLVIA) and the EPA draft *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports*, 2017.

The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. This expands beyond the idea that landscape is only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity. It recognises landscape as a resource in its own right, providing a complex range of cultural, environmental and economic benefits to individuals and society.

The word ‘townscape’ is used to describe the landscape in urban areas. The GLVIA defines townscape as “the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings, the relationships between them, the different types of urban spaces, including green spaces and the relationship between buildings and open space”.

1.0 Key Principles of the GLVIA

1.1 Use of the Term ‘Effect’ vs ‘Impact’

The GLVIA requires that the terms ‘impact’ and ‘effect’ be clearly distinguished and consistently used. ‘Impact’ is defined as the action being taken, e.g. the introduction to the landscape of buildings, infrastructure or landscaping. ‘Effect’ is defined as the change resulting from those actions, e.g. change in landscape character or in the composition of views.

1.2 Assessment of Both ‘Landscape’ and ‘Visual’ Effects

The GLVIA prescribes that effects on views and visual amenity should be assessed separately from the effects on landscape/townscape, although the two topics are inherently linked.

‘Landscape/townscape’ results from the interplay between the physical, natural and cultural components of our surroundings. Different combinations and spatial distribution of these elements create variations in landscape/townscape character. ‘Landscape/townscape character assessment’ is the method used in LVIA to describe landscape/townscape and by which to understand the effects of development on the landscape/townscape as a resource.

Visual assessment is concerned with changes that arise in the composition of available views, the response of people to these changes and the overall effects on the area’s visual amenity.

2.0 Methodology for Landscape/Townscape Effects Assessment

Assessment of potential landscape/townscape effects involves (a) classifying the sensitivity of the resource, and (b) identifying and classifying the magnitude of landscape/townscape change which would result from the development. These factors are combined to arrive at a classification of significance of the landscape/townscape effects.

2.1 Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscape/townscape is a function of its land use, landscape patterns and scale, visual enclosure and the distribution of visual receptors, and the value placed on the landscape/townscape. The nature and scale of the development in question is also taken into account, as are any trends of change, and relevant policy. Five categories are used to classify sensitivity.

Table 1 Categories of Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Description
Very High	Areas where the landscape exhibits very strong, positive character with valued elements, features and characteristics that combine to give an experience of unity, richness and harmony. The landscape character is such that its capacity to accommodate change in the form of development is very low. These attributes are recognised in landscape policy or designations as being of national or international value and the principle management objective for the area is protection of the existing character from change.
High	Areas where the landscape exhibits strong, positive character with valued elements, features and characteristics. The landscape character is such that it has limited/low capacity to accommodate change in the form of development. These attributes are recognised in landscape policy or designations as being of national, regional or county value and the principle management objective for the area is the conservation of existing character.
Medium	Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong, or has evidence of alteration, degradation or erosion of elements and characteristics. The landscape character is such that there is some capacity for change. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principle management objective may be to consolidate landscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change.
Low	Areas where the landscape has few valued elements, features or characteristics and the character is weak. The character is such that it has capacity for change; where development would make no significant change or could make a positive change. Such landscapes are generally unrecognised in policy and the principle management objective may be to facilitate change through development, repair, restoration or enhancement.
Negligible	Areas where the landscape exhibits negative character, with no valued elements, features or characteristics. The landscape character is such that its capacity to accommodate change is high; where development would make no significant change or would make a positive change. Such landscapes include derelict industrial lands or extraction sites, as well as sites or areas that are designated for a particular type of development. The principle management objective for the area is to facilitate change in the landscape through development, repair or restoration.

2.2 Magnitude of Landscape/Townscape Change

Magnitude of change is a factor of the scale, extent and degree of change imposed on the landscape/townscape with reference to its key elements, features and characteristics (also known as 'landscape receptors'). Five categories are used to classify magnitude of change:

Table 2 Categories of Landscape/Townscape Change

Magnitude of Change	Description
Very High	Change that is large in extent, resulting in the loss of or major alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the landscape and/or introduction of large elements considered totally uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in fundamental change in the character of the landscape.
High	Change that is moderate to large in extent, resulting in major alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the landscape and/or introduction of large elements considered uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in change to the character of the landscape.

Medium	Change that is moderate in extent, resulting in partial loss or alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the landscape, and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent but not necessarily substantially uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in change to the character of the landscape.
Low	Change that is moderate or limited in scale, resulting in minor alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the landscape, and/or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in minor change to the character of the landscape.
Negligible	Change that is limited in scale, resulting in no alteration to key elements features or characteristics of the landscape, and/or introduction of elements that are characteristic of the context. Such development results in no change to the landscape character.

2.3 Significance of Effects

To classify the significance of effects the magnitude of change is measured against the sensitivity of the landscape/townscape using the guide in Table 3 overleaf. The matrix (Table 3) is only a guide. The assessor also uses professional judgement informed by their expertise, experience and common sense to arrive at a classification of significance that is reasonable and justifiable. There are seven classifications of significance, namely: (1) imperceptible, (2) not significant, (3) slight, (4) moderate, (5) significant, (6) very significant, (7) profound.

Table 3 Guide to Classification of Significance of Landscape/Townscape and Visual Effects

		Sensitivity of the Landscape Resource/View				
		Very High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Magnitude of Change	Very High	Profound	Profound to Very Significant	Very Significant to Significant	Moderate	Slight
	High	Profound to Very Significant	Very Significant	Significant	Moderate to Slight	Slight to Not Significant
	Medium	Very Significant to Significant	Significant	Moderate	Slight	Not Significant
	Low	Moderate	Moderate to Slight	Slight	Not significant	Imperceptible
	Negligible	Slight	Slight to Not Significant	Not significant	Imperceptible	Imperceptible

The EPA draft *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports*, 2017 describes the significance classifications as follows:

Significance Classification	Description
Imperceptible	An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences.
Not significant	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.

Slight	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities.
Moderate	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends.
Significant	An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment.
Very Significant	An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity significantly alters most of a sensitive aspect of the environment.
Profound	An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics.

3.0 Methodology for Visual Effects Assessment

Assessment of visual effects involves identifying a number of key/representative viewpoints in the site's receiving environment, and for each one of these: (a) classifying the viewpoint sensitivity, and (b) classifying the magnitude of change which would result in the view. These factors are combined to arrive at a classification of significance of the effects on each viewpoint.

3.1 Sensitivity of the Viewpoint/Visual Receptor

Viewpoint sensitivity is a function of two main considerations:

- *Susceptibility of the visual receptor to change.* This depends on the occupation or activity of the people experiencing the view, and the extent to which their attention is focussed on the views or visual amenity they experience at that location.

Visual receptors most susceptible to change include residents at home, people engaged in outdoor recreation focused on the landscape (e.g. trail users), and visitors to heritage or other attractions and places of community congregation where the setting contributes to the experience. Visual receptors less sensitive to change include travellers on road, rail and other transport routes (unless on recognised scenic routes), people engaged in outdoor recreation or sports where the surrounding landscape does not influence the experience, and people in their place of work or shopping where the setting does not influence their experience.

- *Value attached to the view.* This depends to a large extent on the subjective opinion of the visual receptor but also on factors such as policy and designations (e.g. scenic routes, protected views), or the view or setting being associated with a heritage asset, visitor attraction or having some other cultural status (e.g. by appearing in arts).

Five categories are used to classify a viewpoint's sensitivity.

Table 4 Categories of Viewpoint Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Description
Very High	Iconic viewpoints (views towards or from a landscape feature or area) that are recognised in policy or otherwise designated as being of national value. The composition, character and quality of the view are such that its capacity for change in the form of development is very low. The principle management objective for the view is its protection from change.
High	Viewpoints that are recognised in policy or otherwise designated as being of value, or viewpoints that are highly valued by people that experience them regularly (such as views from houses or outdoor recreation features focused on the landscape). The composition, character and quality of the view may be such that its capacity for accommodating change in the form of development may or may not be low. The principle management objective for the view is its protection from change that reduces visual amenity.
Medium	Views that may not have features or characteristics that are of particular value, but have no major detracting elements, and which thus provide some visual amenity. These views may have capacity for appropriate change and the principle management objective is to facilitate change to the composition that does not detract from visual amenity, or which enhances it.
Low	Views that have no valued feature or characteristic, and where the composition and character are such that there is capacity for change. This category also includes views experienced by people involved in activities with no particular focus on the landscape. For such views the principle management objective is to facilitate change that does not detract from visual amenity, or enhances it.
Negligible	Views that have no valued feature or characteristic, or in which the composition may be unsightly (e.g. in derelict landscapes). For such views the principle management objective is to facilitate change that repairs, restores or enhances visual amenity.

3.2 Magnitude of Change to the View

Classification of the magnitude of change takes into account the size or scale of the intrusion of development into the view (relative to the other elements and features in the composition, i.e. its relative visual dominance), the degree to which it contrasts or integrates with the other elements and the general character of the view, and the way in which the change will be experienced (e.g. in full view, partial or peripheral view, or in glimpses). It also takes into account the geographical extent of the change, as well as the duration and reversibility of the visual effects.

Five categories are used to classify magnitude of change to a view:

Table 5 Categories of Visual Change

Magnitude of Change	Description
Very High	Full or extensive intrusion of the development in the view, or partial intrusion that obstructs valued features or characteristics, or introduction of elements that are completely out of character in the context, to the extent that the development becomes dominant in the composition and defines the character of the view and the visual amenity.
High	Extensive intrusion of the development in the view, or partial intrusion that obstructs valued features, or introduction of elements that may be considered uncharacteristic in the context, to the extent that the development becomes co-dominant with other elements in the composition and affects the character of the view and the visual amenity.
Medium	Partial intrusion of the development in the view, or introduction of elements that may be prominent but not necessarily uncharacteristic in the context, resulting in change to the composition but not necessarily the character of the view or the visual amenity.

Low	Minor intrusion of the development into the view, or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic in the context, resulting in minor alteration to the composition and character of the view but no change to visual amenity.
Negligible	Barely discernible intrusion of the development into the view, or introduction of elements that are characteristic in the context, resulting in slight change to the composition of the view and no change in visual amenity.

3.3 Significance of Visual Effects

As for landscape effects, to classify the significance of visual effects, the magnitude of change to the view is measured against the sensitivity of the viewpoint, using the guide in Table 3 above.

4.0 Quality of Effects

In addition to predicting the significance of the effects on the landscape and views, EIA methodology requires that the quality of the effects be classified as positive/beneficial, neutral, or negative/adverse.

For landscape effects to a degree, but particularly for visual effects, this is an inherently subjective exercise. This is because landscape and views are *perceived* and therefore subject to variations in the attitude and values of the receptor. One person's attitude to a development may differ from another person's, and thus their response to the effects of a development on a landscape or view may vary.

Additionally, in certain situations there might be policy encouraging a particular development in an area, in which case the policy is effectively *prescribing* landscape change. If a development achieves the objective of the policy the resulting effect might be considered positive, even if the landscape character is profoundly changed. The classification of quality of landscape and visual effects should seek to take these variables into account and provide a reasonable and robust assessment.