

Land to the East of Stoney Hill Road, Rathcoole, Co. Dublin

Landscape & Visual Impacts Assessment

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Image: 3D Design Bureau

For Romeville Developments Limited

by



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1 Introduction

This report assesses the landscape and visual impacts likely to arise from the Phase 1 development of Land to the East of Stoney Hill Road, Rathcoole, Co. Dublin (the 'Subject Site'). This report has been prepared by Kennett Consulting Limited between May and July 2022.

This report addresses two separate but closely related aspects: the first is visual impacts focusing on the extent to which new developments can be seen, the potential loss of existing site features and the introduction of new site features; the second aspect is impacts on the character of the landscape, the changes the proposed development will bring to the landscape in general, the impacts of those changes upon views from the surrounding area, and examining responses which are felt towards the combined effects of the new development.

This latter topic is complex because it encompasses many other environmental topics such as ecology and built heritage, and because attempts to scientifically measure feelings and perceptions are not universally reliable.

2 Study Methodology

While this report does not constitute a chapter of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), it has been prepared with reference to the methodology and terminology outlined in the Draft Guidelines on Information to be Contained in an Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EPA 2017), Advice Notes on Current Practice (in preparation of Environmental Impact Statements (EPA 2003) and the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).

An initial desk study has been undertaken to establish an understanding of the Subject Site and surroundings, its planning context and to make an initial assessment of the likely visual envelope i.e. areas from which the Subject Site might be seen. Relevant maps, development plans and other published documents were used for this purpose and are referenced at the end of this report.

The Subject Site and surroundings were the subject of a visual field survey, examining the nature of the local built environment, considering the contribution that each landscape component makes to local landscape character, and exploring the potential for views of the Subject Site from the surrounding area.

The potential impact of development on the landscape has been assessed with reference to the following landscape factors:

- **Context:** This is a factual description of the Subject Site and its surroundings.
- **Character:** This identifies one or more distinct landscape units within the Subject Site and/or its surroundings and outlines the defining features of each landscape.
- **Sensitivity:** This is based on two factors:
 - **Value:** whether a landscape/view is scarce or unique (and designated for this reason); recognised for its high amenity; whether it is 'ordinary' or even 'derelict'.
 - **Susceptibility:** to what extent there is pressure for / vulnerability to the type of proposed development and the damage likely to arise as a result.

- **Significance: susceptibility** is combined with the anticipated **magnitude of change** to determine the likely effects (impacts) of the proposed development.

Potential changes in character, visibility and land use patterns have been considered first, including indirect, secondary and cumulative impacts. This has given direction to proposed mitigation measures, which have been discussed with the project design team and incorporated into the development proposal; the subsequent assessment of likely landscape and visual impacts takes account of the proposed mitigation measures.

Mitigating potential impacts on the landscape may include one or more of the following:

- Avoid, reduce or minimise development in sensitive or prominent landscapes
- Avoid, reduce or minimise visually intrusive projects
- Reduce and minimise the visibility of the project, avoid insensitive design
- Add value or character to a landscape as part of the proposed development

Terminology includes the following terms:

- 'Visual Intrusion': a proposed development may feature within in an existing view.
- 'Visual Obstruction': a proposed development may partly or completely obscure an existing view.

The degree of impact is described using the following scale:

- 'None': No material change to the landscape or view arises from the development.
- 'Imperceptible': Change is immeasurable with no bearing on a landscape or view.
- 'Low' ('Slight'): Measurable but insignificant change to the landscape or view.
- 'Moderate': Measurable change to the nature of a landscape or view.
- 'High' ('Significant'): Substantial change occurs to the landscape or view.
- 'Profound': The character or content of a view changes completely.

The nature of an impact is described in one of three ways:

- 'Neutral' impacts neither enhance nor detract from the landscape.
- 'Positive' impacts improve or enhance the existing landscape.
- 'Negative' impacts detract from the existing landscape.

The duration of an impact is described according to the following scale:

- 'Temporary': 1 year or less
- 'Short-term': 1-7 years
- 'Medium-term': 7-20 years
- 'Long-term': 20-50 years
- 'Permanent': 50+ years

The significance of impacts on the landscape depends on a broad range of objective factors, as outlined above, alongside more subjective but professional value judgements about 'good design' and how much changes will matter.

3 The Receiving Environment

The Subject Site is Located approximately 15km southwest from Dublin City Centre and 8km southwest from the M50. The N7 Naas Road runs east-west approximately 600m north of the Subject Site, with Junction 4 approximately 750 metres to the northeast.

Rathcoole village centre lies 400 metres to the north, with Stony Hill Road adjoining the residential site's western boundary, running from Rathcoole village centre southwest towards Killeel, with Co. Kildare approximately 4.5km to the southwest.

Locally, the residential area of Rathcoole Park lies north of the proposed residential site, with a small group of houses on an unnamed road at the Subject Site's eastern boundary. The new Peyton residential area lies to the west, while open countryside lies to the south.

3.1 Site Context & Context

In its wider context, the Subject Site lies at the northern edge of Landscape Character Area (LCA) 3 'Athgoe and Saggart Hills', bordering the Urban Fringe / Periurban area

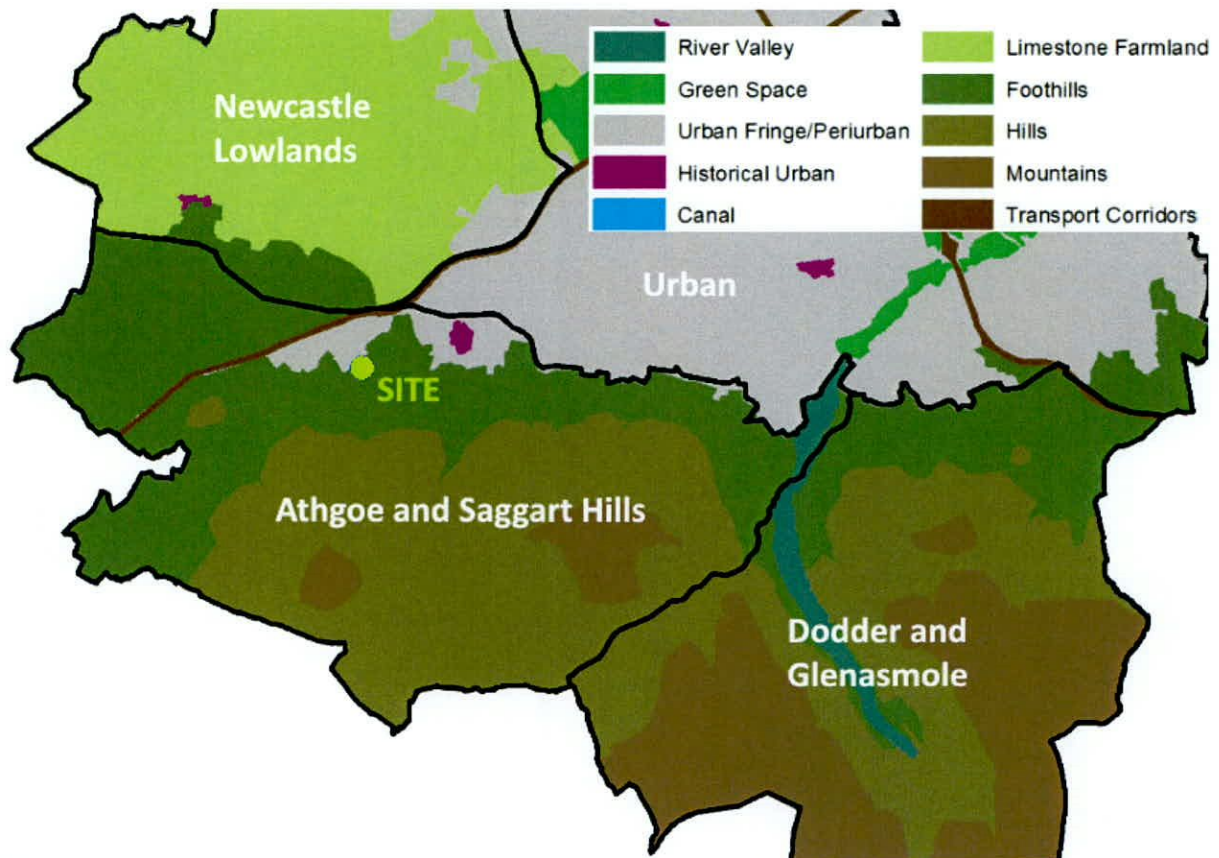


Figure 1: Landscape Character Areas, compiled from Figures 19 and 21 of the Landscape Character Assessment of South Dublin County (SDCC, 2015). Site marked in yellow.

This area has a complex local topography, a mix of igneous and sedimentary landforms comprising mainly hills and foothills, ranging from around 150m OD to almost 400m OD. The Subject Site occupies a low-lying position in the foothills towards the northern edge of this landscape character area.

Landcover is mainly pasture with coniferous woodland plantations on hilltops and upper slopes. Fields are mostly moderate to large bounded by earth banks, mature hedgerows and post-and-wire fences. Cattle and horses graze the lower slopes while sheep graze higher ground. Leisure activities within this landscape include hillwalking, horse-riding and golf.

Rathcoole and Saggart are the principal settlements and former villages, located in the north of the foothills, where extensive new housing has sometimes been unsympathetic to the local landscape. Elsewhere, settlement occurs as occasional housing clusters. The built-up areas, N7 and overhead flight paths lend a busy and somewhat noisy character to the northern part of the LCA.

This LCA as a whole has a medium-high sensitivity to development, with negligible to low capacity for development. However, it is recognised that limited scope for development may exist in carefully selected locations. The land zoning in the Development Plan suggests the Subject Site is one such location (see section 3.3. below).

The Subject Site comprises fields, mature deciduous hedgerows and disused farm buildings, with land elevation falling approximately 15 metres from south to north. The Subject Site has been recently used as a contractor's compound for new housing developments nearby. Overhead power lines run northeast-southwest through nearby fields to south. Photograph Views 1-4 and 10 at Appendix A to this report illustrate some of the Subject Site's existing character.

The Peyton estate lies on the western side of Stoney Hill Road, comprising two- and three-storey brick-and-render houses, mostly a mixture of semi-detached houses and terraces. It lies at a slightly lower elevation than, and is partly overlook by, the main Subject Site. Photograph View 8 at Appendix A illustrates the character of Peyton Avenue and the view of the Subject Site from it.



Figure 2: Aerial view showing the Subject Site in context, outlined in red (source: Google Maps).

To the north of the Subject Site lies Rathcoole Park, an established residential area comprising two-storey, mostly semi-detached houses in modest mature gardens and set around a green, illustrated in Photograph View 5-7 at Appendix A. To the east beyond the adjacent fields lies an area of woodland. Pasture and arable fields accompanied by mature hedgerows extend southwards to Coolmine.

3.2 Visibility

In the wider landscape, views extend mainly north-south between the lowlands of the greater Dublin area and the hills of the Dublin Mountains. The Subject Site is located between the two in the low-lying foothills, from where there are frequent glimpsed views to the elevated fields and wooded skyline to the south and east; Photograph View 11 at Appendix A illustrates such a view, which is from the Subject Site's southern boundary. From the roads and footpaths that weave their way through that higher ground, complex topography combines with vegetation to give rise to frequent enclosure that alternates with occasional expansive views, some of which are designated Scenic Routes, Views and Prospects. From such elevated vantage points, views extend widely across the foothills below and beyond to the limestone lowlands to the north, east and west. These points are explored in more detail below.

The Subject Site is primarily visible from close quarters - from Stoney Lane and Stoney Hill Road, from the adjoining residential areas of Peyton, and from the neighbouring dwellings at Dun Aonghusa.

More distant views down across the Subject Site occur in occasional views from local roads to the south at Bolger's Lane (1.35 km away) and Coolmine (0.65 km away), encompassing the Subject Site's southern hedgerows and glimpses of the fields within with site. These views also encompass the wider built-up area of Rathcoole and its surroundings as context to the Subject Site. A view from Coolmine is illustrated in Photograph View 12 at Appendix A.

Hills to the south and southeast are extensively wooded and it appears that there is little opportunity for public views of the Subject Site, though the Slade Valley Golf Course (private) affords distant views (~2.0 km) across the Subject Site from the lower slopes of Saggart Hill, a designated Prospect. Tallaght Hill / Lugmore lies approximately 3.5km to the southeast of the Subject Site, and may afford a view of the Subject Site but with the wider urban context of Rathcoole and its surroundings.

The N81 is a Scenic Route that runs through these hills, some 2km from the Subject Site and frequently enclosed by topography and vegetation, from where there are no significant views of the Subject Site.

To the west there is scope for distant glimpsed views towards the Subject Site from the foothills to the east at Windmill Hill, though the public road is well-enclosed by mature hedgerows with occasional glimpses to the north or south but not east towards the Subject Site itself. Green Lane (0.55 km) and Killeel Road (0.85+ km) to the west are also well-enclosed by banks and hedgerows with no significant opportunities for public views of the Subject Site. The N7 west and north of the Subject Site (0.6+ km) does not afford any significant views of the Subject Site either due to intervening buildings and vegetation.

3.3 Planning context

The Subject Site forms part of the entire residential zoned landholding for a 204 housing scheme, with associated infrastructure and facilities, that was granted planning permission through the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) on 12th November 2020 (Ref. ABP-307698-20). The proposed development of the Subject Site will be for a portion of this housing number (42 no. dwellings) on approximately a quarter of the landholding.

South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2022-2028

The current local planning context is provided by the South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2022-2028. The northern part of the main Subject Site is zoned Objective RES-N (yellow in the figure below) "To provide for new residential communities in accordance with approved area plans". It is adjoined by existing open space (Objective OS, dark green) and housing (Objective RES, yellow-brown) to the north, west and east, seeking to protect, provide and improve these. The southern part of the site comprises a small part of a much more extensive areas of open countryside, zoned Objective RU (pale green), where the protection and improvement of rural amenity and agriculture are sought.

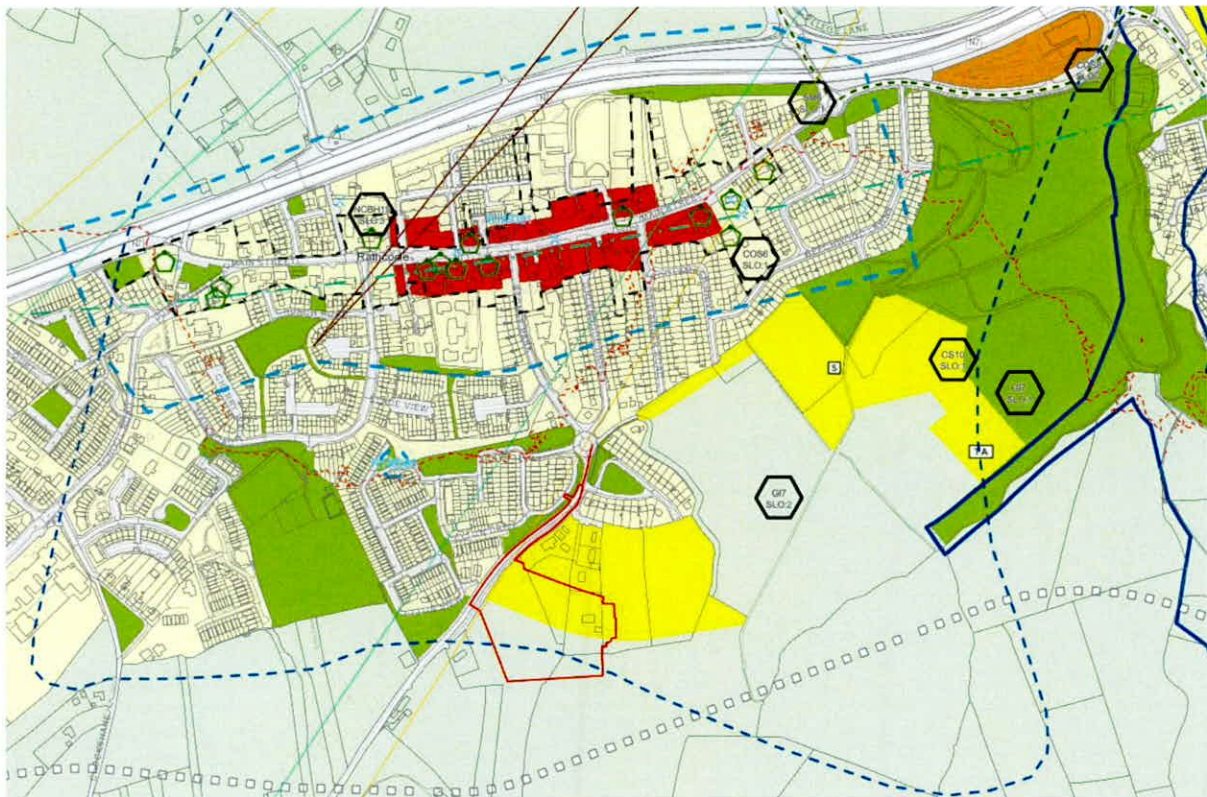


Figure 3: Map 8 (extract, annotated) from South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2022-2028.

A long-term road Objective runs east-west approximately 100m to the south (line of squares).

Higher ground, beginning 1km to the south beyond Coolmine, is subject to Objective HA(DM) seeking to "protect and enhance the outstanding natural character and amenity of the ... Dublin Mountains".

Policy: Landscape, Views and Prospects

The Development Plan's policy on landscape, views and prospects is contained in Chapter 3 of the plan 'Natural, Cultural and Built Heritage'.

Section 3.4.3 'Landscapes' identifies the 'Athgoe and Saggart Hills' as the landscape character area (LCA) within which the site is located. It summarises: "This LCA comprises foothills and hills that form a backdrop and setting for the greater Dublin area. The hills host a variety of uses including agriculture, forestry and recreation as well as important ecological services associated with their habitats. The LCA is diverse and offers access into the more strongly rural areas of the County and beyond. Long views over the lowlands and south to the Wicklow Mountains are an important characteristic. The integrity of the landscape character is derived from agriculture combined with other rural land uses including coniferous plantations. The integrity of its character, and of its value as a landscape setting have been compromised by housing developments in the area and through the use of non-vernacular styles very much in conflict with the local character." This LCA is considered to have a 'Medium to High' value.

This section then goes on to identify a series of landscape character types (LCTs) within each LCA, stating: "The capacity of each Landscape Character Type to absorb new development will largely depend on the sensitivity of the landscape. Landscape capacity means the ability of a landscape to accommodate different amounts of change for a development of a specific type without adversely affecting the intrinsic character of the landscape."

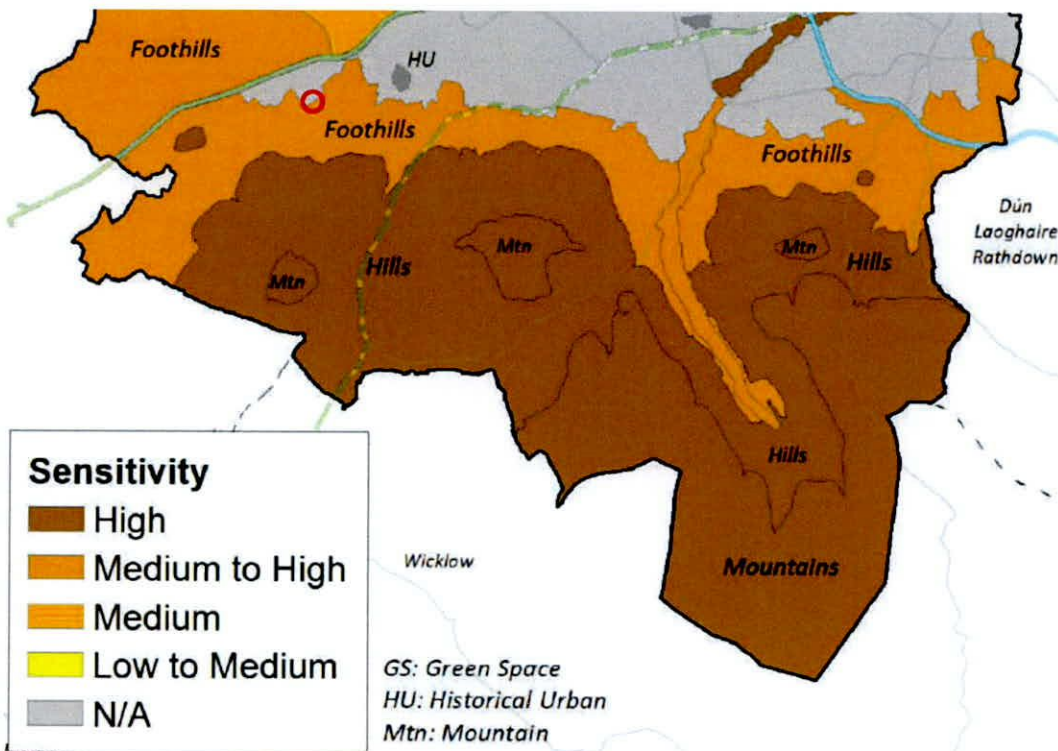


Figure 4: Landscape Character Types and Sensitivity (Figure 3.2 of the County Development Plan)

The Subject Site lies at the threshold between an area of 'Medium to High' sensitivity and the existing urban areas labelled 'N/A'. It is unclear whether the LCT map in Figure 4 above includes the land zoned RES-N in Figure 3 above, on account of the map scale.

Policy NCBH14: Landscapes sets out to "Preserve and enhance the character of the County's landscapes, particularly areas that have been deemed to have a medium to high Landscape Value or

medium to high Landscape Sensitivity and to ensure that landscape considerations are an important factor in the management of development.”

Objectives of this policy include (summarised): (1) retention, protection and enhancement of the appearance and character of the landscape; (2) assessment of development against the character, value and sensitivity of the LCA/LCT within which it sits; (3) respect and reinforce LCTs and their important characteristics; (4) use LVIA to assess landscape and visual impacts for all significant proposals and provide for mitigation of those impacts; and (5) protect ridgelines and skylines.

Section 3.4.4 sets out policy NCBH15: Views and Prospects for preserving important views and prospects and the amenity of places and features of natural beauty. Objectives include (summarised): (1) to protect, preserve and improve views and prospects and to prevent development that would interfere with these; (2) use LVIA to assess significant proposals that might affect views and prospects; (3) the provision of viewing platforms in key locations.

No designated Prospects lie in close proximity to the Subject Site. The nearest are Windmill Hill 2.15km to the west; Verschoyle's Hill 2.5km to the southeast; Saggart Hill 3.3km to the south; and Athgoe Hill 3km to the northwest. There do not appear to be any significant public views towards these prospects from the vicinity of the site.

Designated Views occur surrounding Saggart Hill to the south, where views extend towards the hill itself and to the surrounding countryside to the west and south, away from the Subject Site. Similar views occur around Verschoyle's Hill, again without the Subject Site having any bearing on these views. In both cases, intervening topography and vegetation screen views towards the Subject Site

A designated view extends west and north from part of the N81, approximately 2km southeast of the Subject Site. Intervening topography and vegetation screens the Subject Site from view.

4 The Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises of the demolition of 1 no. residential property and 1 no. ancillary outbuilding and will consist of the construction of a residential development of 42 no. dwellings on a site area of 2.60 hectares. The proposed dwellings will comprise of 2 no. typologies (Typology F and Typology L). Typology F will comprise of 21 no. dwellings and Typology L will comprise of 21 no. dwellings. The proposed 42 no. dwellings will comprise of 42 no. 3 bed units, in a mix of terraced typology. Typology L are two storey, with rear light tunnels, and typology F are two storey, plus second floor loft accommodation with front dormer windows and rear rooflights and rear roof light tunnels.

The proposed development also includes 84 no. in-curtilage surface car parking spaces, circa 3,281 sqm usable public open spaces, a parkland to the south of the site, private domestic gardens, a new vehicular entrance from Stoney Hill Road, an internal road network, including footpaths / cycleways, 3 no. refuse/bin stores, public lighting, landscaping, boundary treatments, drainage and engineering works and all other associated and ancillary development / works. The total proposed residential development gross floorspace in Phase 1 is circa: 5,662 sqm.

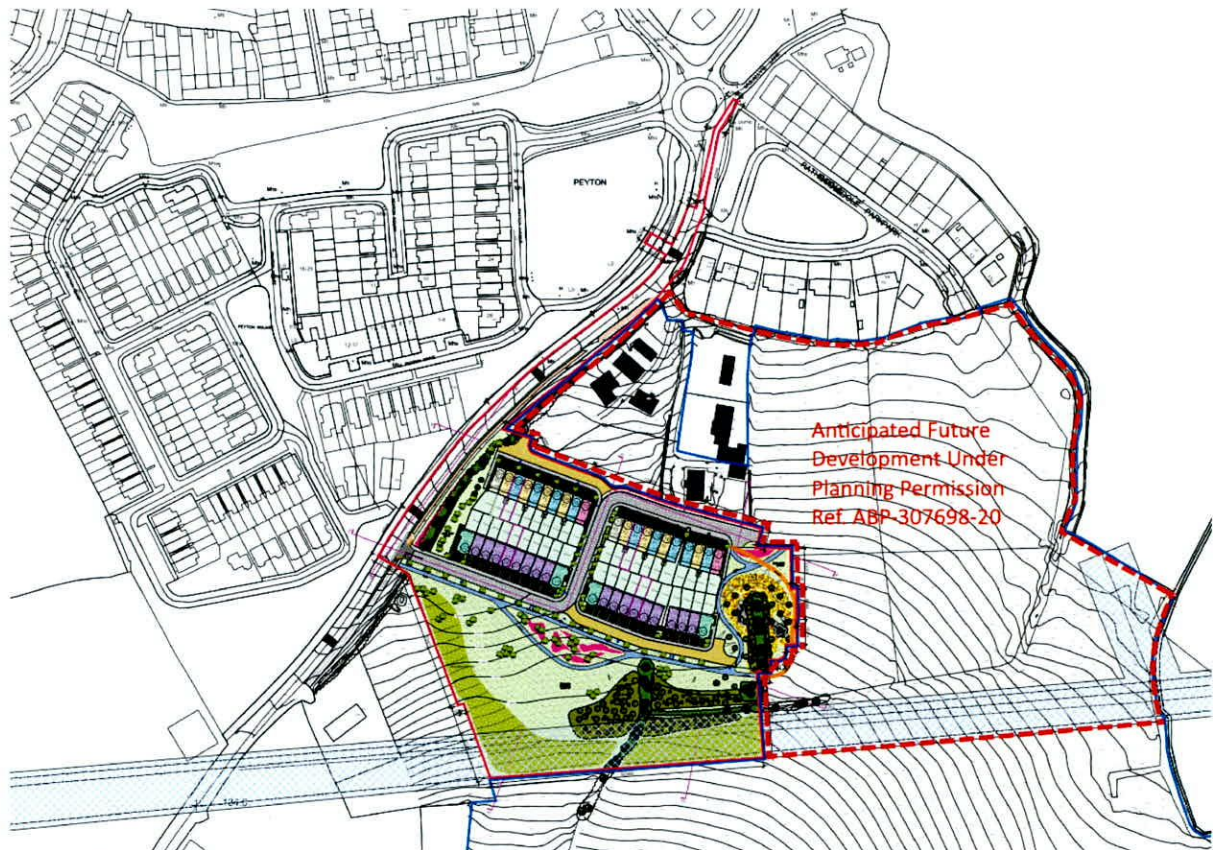


Figure 5: Proposed development in context (source: Adrian Hill Architects)

'Type F' houses are two storeys high with further accommodation in the roof space, ridge height approximately 10.4m above ground level (facing the street). All have dynamic built forms including dormer windows, bay windows and ground floor canopies to the front elevations. Street-facing elevations have rich detailing to doors and windows with high quality brickwork and other materials that add visual interest to the streetscape. Simpler detailing and rendered walls characterise the more private rear elevations. End of terrace houses have richly detailed side elevations, including windows and main entrance door, that 'turn the corner' and help activate the adjacent streetscape and green spaces. All houses have off-street parking to the front.



Figure 6: 'Type F' Houses – selected elevations (source: Adrian Hill Architects)

'Type L' houses are two storeys high without any additional accommodation in the roof space. Ridge height is approximately 8.8m above ground level facing the street, and 10.8m above ground level to the rear where kitchen/dining space steps down to a semi-garden-level. Mid-terrace houses have

relatively simple but high quality street elevations in brick with rich window and door detailing. End of terrace houses have a much more dynamic built form with projecting double-height bays, gabled front elevation and wrap-around canopy to the ground floor. Brick elevations to the front and side elevations gives way to render a the rear. All houses have off-street parking to the front.

The houses are laid out as two perimeter blocks, with roads to three sides of each block. The 'Type L' houses face south, overlooking public open space and onward into the Dublin Mountains. The 'Type F' houses face north towards adjoining future development areas and onwards to established housing areas at Stoney Park, Rathcoole Park and Peyton.



Figure 7: 'Type L' Houses – selected elevations (source: Adrian Hill Architects)

Public open spaces ('parklands') are provided to the east, west and south of the proposed houses. The eastern parkland is relatively formal, incorporating footpaths, play equipment and amenity grass. The western parkland is less formal and smaller, more of an incidental public open space, providing a landscape buffer to Stoney Hill Road.

The southern parkland is the largest and is primarily informal public open space. A shared cycle/footpath and lines of street trees define a formal northern edge to the space, while the majority of this space is amenity grass and meadow with groups of trees and blocks of woodland planting reinforcing existing retained hedgerows. It forms part of what will be a more extensive linear park along the southern edge of the consented SHD scheme and accommodates a watermain wayleave.

Hedgerows and trees will be retained at the Subject Site boundaries, incorporating them within proposed open spaces or integrating them with proposed landscaping and other green infrastructure. Breaks in hedgerows will be required for vehicular access to the Subject Site and for pedestrian circulation to/from/within the open spaces.

A full account of the proposed development is contained in the Architectural Design Statement.

5 Potential Landscape and Visual Impacts

Impact assessment addresses direct, indirect, secondary, cumulative, short, medium and long-term permanent, temporary, positive and negative effects as well as impact interactions.

5.1 Construction Phase

There will potentially be significant negative temporary or short-term landscape and visual impacts arising from the following:

- temporary hoardings, parking, deliveries and site offices
- demolition of existing site structures
- cranes, scaffolds and other temporary structures
- the presence of dynamic, partially-completed buildings
- construction activities at street level (deliveries & mobile plant)

By their very nature, construction impacts are temporary or short-term, where most impacts identified during the construction stage will reduce significantly or disappear once construction has ceased and the proposed development is complete. The proposed development will be completed in a single phase.

5.2 Operational Phase

With any new development, there is the risk that the proposed development may have been designed in largely functional terms with little regard for distinctive aesthetics and local urban/rural landscape character. At best this is a wasted opportunity and will have a neutral impact on landscape character and visual amenity; at worst this may have a detrimental impact upon landscape character and visual amenity.

The scale and style of proposed houses is consistent with those recently built at the Peyton Estate adjoining Stoney Hill Road and is complementary to traditional house types found throughout the area including Rathcoole Park.

The proposed development recognises its relationship with adjoining countryside to the south. A linear Park is proposed along the southern edge of the development, incorporating extensive tree and shrub planting and new recreational spaces/routes for the enjoyment of local residents. Existing hedgerows along with new landscaping will provide a soft edge to the proposed development as a physical and visual transition to the adjoining countryside. In the medium- to long-term, mature planting within new public open spaces will draw in the landscape as green 'fingers' running through the residential development.

Most new developments typically seek to maximise the development potential of a building plot, which in itself is a sustainable development objective, but can result in development proposals pushing building height to an excessive level and extending significantly above the prevailing building height in the locality. Such increases in height can be to the detriment of urban landscape character and visual amenity.

The proposed development exercises restraint in building height across the Subject Site, comprising houses that are consistent in height and form with the existing Peyton development on Stony Hill Road. Placing taller buildings at the Subject Site margins adjoining the open countryside to the south, where they would be more intrusive upon views from the surrounding countryside, has been avoided.

5.3 Landscape Receptors

This section considers the sensitivity of key landscape receptors to the proposed development, the anticipated magnitude of change and the resulting significance of specific potential effects that the proposed development may have. The sensitivity of each receptor is a function of its value and susceptibility to the proposed development.

Key landscape receptors defining the local landscape character include the following:

5.3.1 Athgoe & Saggart Landscape Character Area

The Athgoe and Saggart Landscape Character Area surrounds the Subject Site and rises to hills in the south and east. It has a reasonably strong and intact character, though the northern part of this area is significantly influenced by the N7 road corridor, nearby settlement and associated activity. The Subject Site's location (refer to Figure 1) lies in the urban-influenced northern part of this LCA and is considered to have a moderate sensitivity to the proposed development.

Furthermore, the Subject Site lies at the threshold of the medium-high sensitivity of the Foothills LCT and the adjacent urban area (no sensitivity attributed) as indicated in Figure 4 above.

Landscape components characterising the Subject Site comprise hedgerows and a mix of arable and pasture fields, as occur frequently throughout these foothills. The development of the Subject Site will encroach slightly into this rural landscape.

5.3.2 Rathcoole town and residential suburbs

The Subject Site lies at the suburban edge of Rathcoole, away from the Architectural Conservation Area at its heart, where the protection and/or enhancement of residential amenity is sought. The landscape character of existing residential areas is considered to have a low sensitivity to the proposed development.

5.4 Visual receptors

This section considers the sensitivity of key visual receptors to the proposed development, the anticipated magnitude of change and the resulting significance of specific potential effects that the proposed development may have. The sensitivity of each receptor is a function of its value and susceptibility to the proposed development.

5.4.1 Stoney Hill Road

Viewers of the Subject Site from this public road have low sensitivity to the proposed development on account of the existing residential context in the vicinity of the Subject Site and the intermittent screening by the embankment and hedgerow of views south from the road towards the hills. Extending southwest beyond the Subject Site, the road is enclosed by hedgerows without the benefit of significant outward views. The partial loss of hedgerows adjoining the road and their replacement with a new access road and new residential development will be the principal impact upon these views, continuing the suburban residential character along that part of the road corridor already fronted by the Peyton residential area.

Refer to Photograph Views 5 and 10 at Appendix A for examples.

5.4.2 Rathcoole Park residential area

This established residential area has a low visual sensitivity to the proposed development, in terms of public views, on account of the existing residential context and the lack of clear views to the open countryside beyond. Private views from properties at the southern side of this area are likely to be moderately or highly sensitive with more open views into parts of the Subject Site and to the hills beyond.

Refer to Photograph Views 6 and 7 at Appendix A for examples.

5.4.3 Peyton residential area

This residential area has some relatively clear views over the Subject Site from its streets, most notably from Peyton Avenue and Peyton Square (refer to Photograph View 8 for example), where these views encompass the distant hills to the south. Peyton forms part of the recent residential expansion on the south side of Rathcoole and, as such, viewers have a low sensitivity to the proposed development.

5.4.4 Athgoe & Saggart foothills

Views from the foothills across the Subject Site occur intermittently from the public road, notably in the vicinity of Coolmine (refer to Photograph View 11). Being slightly elevated, these views typically encompass arable and pasture fields in the foreground with settlement at Rathcoole and along the N7 corridor in the middle-ground. Business parks such as at Greenogue lie in the background with the countryside west of Dublin City extending beyond that into the distance.

As residential development is a well-established feature of the middle-ground, and the business parks are the dominant landscape detractors, the proposed development will benefit from this as a backdrop. These views will have a low sensitivity to the proposed development, perhaps becoming moderately sensitive in closer proximity to the proposed development.

5.4.5 Athgoe & Saggart Scenic Routes, Views & Prospects

Designated Scenic Routes, Views and Prospects lie at a significant distance from the Subject Site, largely without direct views of the Subject Site, as described in Section 3.2 above. While in principle these are highly sensitive to the proposed development, distance, intervening topography/vegetation and the very low magnitude of change give rise to a low or sensitivity to the proposed development.

6 Avoidance, Remedial and Mitigation Measures

6.1 Design Phase

Mitigation measures incorporated into the design include the following.

- Retention of existing hedgerows wherever possible. This includes minimising hedgerow removal from the road frontage on Stoney Hill Road as part of site access arrangements, and incorporating existing hedgerows within new public open spaces so that they may be substantially retained. New woodland, tree and shrub planting will reinforce retained hedgerows and compensate for those sections of hedgerow removed;
- Incorporating public open spaces that break up the built area, enrich the character and amenity of the proposed development, and make space for mature planting to weave its way into the development from the surrounding landscape;
- Facing development towards the linear park and the open countryside beyond to provide an attractive interface and appropriate transition between built development and the nearby fields and woodlands;
- Adopting a layout whose grain broadly follows the contours of the landscape and avoids the potentially adverse impacts of excessive regrading and level changes on landscape and amenity;
- Adopting a form of development that takes design cues from existing nearby residential development, including both Peyton and Rathcoole Park. Proposed built forms and a prevalence of brick finishes with tile roofs reinforce Rathcoole's 'traditional' residential character.
- House elevations 'turn corners' at street junctions and open spaces, to avoid blank gable walls and provide passive supervision;
- Garden boundaries adjoining the public realm will be brick walls rather than timber fences.

6.2 Construction Phase

The construction phase will be completed quickly through careful construction planning and management prior to commencing on site and throughout the construction phase. Even with all reasonable mitigation measures in place, construction activities will most likely have significant short-term negative effects on visual amenity for adjoining properties and public roads, therefore the sooner construction is complete the sooner negative visual impacts will be reduced or removed completely.

The implications of design changes in terms of urban landscape character and visual amenity will be considered prior to committing those changes in order to maintain the intended visual qualities of new buildings and open spaces.

Where practical, contractors' compounds, site offices and parking areas will be located where they will be least overlooked from nearby streets and dwellings.

6.3 Operational Phase

Once the construction phase has been completed, there are no specific mitigation measures that need be undertaken in order to minimise impacts on landscape character and visual amenity.

Given the location adjacent to open countryside to the south, particular care will be given to ensuring that landscaping along the linear park establishes quickly to provide a robust and effective transition from residential area to countryside. Regular maintenance of the external building fabric and surrounding public/communal spaces will be undertaken to maintain the highest standards of building presentation and streetscape quality, which will also minimise any adverse visual effects upon the surrounding area.

7 Residual landscape and visual impacts

Section 5 above considers potential impacts upon landscape and visual amenity, the sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors and the potential significance of landscape and visual effects arising from the proposed development. Section 6 above summarises key mitigation measures for landscape and visual effects incorporated into the proposed development. The residual landscape and visual effects are now addressed here with reference to key vantage points within the surrounding area.

To aid the appraisal of residual visual effects, a series of Verified Views 1-7 (Photomontages) have been prepared by 3D Design Bureau as a standalone brochure; these are referenced in the following text where appropriate.

7.1 Impacts on Landscape Character

7.1.1 Athgoe & Saggart Landscape Character Area

The Subject Site's location coincides with the northern part of this LCA, which is considered to have a medium to high sensitivity to the proposed development. However, it also lies at the junction between the Foothills LCT (medium to high sensitivity) and the existing urban area (no sensitivity attributes to it). The character of the N7 road corridor and nearby settlement have a significant influence on the Subject Site.

The hedgerows and mix of arable and pasture fields within the Subject Site form an ordinary rural landscape that extends further south and west of the Subject Site, into which the proposed development will encroach slightly. The fields will be replaced with houses, apartments, roads and landscaped open spaces, while hedgerows will be partly retained and incorporated into the Subject Site's green infrastructure.

While this constitutes a significant change to the character of the Subject Site itself, its position adjacent to the settlement of Rathcoole and a built character that complements adjacent residential areas introduce no significant adverse landscape effects into this landscape character area as a whole. Furthermore, future residential development to the east on zoned land will further consolidate this as a new residential edge to Rathcoole. The magnitude of change will be low, and as a minor urban encroachment into the edge of the rural landscape, integrating the proposed development as part of the adjacent town, there will be no more than a minor adverse impact upon landscape character.

7.1.2 Rathcoole town and residential suburbs

The Subject Site lies at the suburban edge of Rathcoole, away from the Architectural Conservation Area at its heart, where the protection and/or enhancement of residential amenity is sought. The landscape character of existing residential areas is considered to have a low sensitivity to the proposed development.

The proposed development is part of anticipated housing growth in this area. The proposed style and layout of houses will compliment both established and more recent dwellings neighbouring the Subject Site through adoption of a contemporary interpretation of traditional built forms and materials, alongside the incorporation of landscaped open spaces as a setting to the new development. The

magnitude of change will be small in terms of the established urban area and, overall, there will be a slightly positive impact upon local landscape character through delivery of a high quality residential neighbourhood, including green open spaces, and an enhanced threshold with the neighbouring countryside.

7.2 Visual receptors

This section considers the sensitivity of key visual receptors to the proposed development, the anticipated magnitude of change and the resulting significance of specific potential effects that the proposed development may have. The sensitivity of each receptor is a function of its value and susceptibility to the proposed development.

7.2.1 Stoney Hill Road

Viewers of the Subject Site from this public road have low sensitivity to the proposed development on account of the existing residential context in the vicinity of the Subject Site and the intermittent screening by the embankment and hedgerow of views south from the road towards the hills.

The partial loss of hedgerows adjoining the road and their replacement with access roads and new residential development will be the principal impacts upon these views, continuing the suburban residential character along that part of the road already established by the Peyton residential area. Retention and enhancement of hedgerows at the roadside, along with additional landscaping at the Subject Site entrances, will enhance the landscape quality of the road corridor.

Verified Views 1, 4 and 5 (existing and proposed) illustrate the approach from both directions along Stoney Hill Road.

Verified View 1 (baseline): this view approaches Rathcoole Park (in the foreground) with the Subject Site behind and to the right – there is a view to the existing cottage and vegetation that lies immediately north of the Subject Site, while the perimeter wall of the Peyton estate lies to the right. In the background is a partial view of the Dublin Mountains. This view has an ordinary suburban character that nonetheless benefits from substantial green space/landscaping in the foreground and a view to the countryside beyond. It has a low to moderate sensitivity to the proposed development.

Verified View 1 (proposed): there is a partial view to some of the proposed houses in the background, which is a moderate change to the existing view. The new houses have a complementary character to the existing dwellings visible in the foreground, but reduce views of the distant wooded hills to glimpses above and between the houses. The positive effects of an enhanced suburban character are balanced against the loss of clear views to the countryside beyond, resulting in a slightly adverse visual impact.

Verified View 4 (baseline): this view looks northeast along Stoney Hill Road towards Rathcoole Park and Peyton, and encompasses much of the Subject Site's western boundary, which is vegetated by an overgrown remnant 'hedgerow'. The suburban edge of the Peyton estate lies at the left of the road, largely out of view in this photograph, where the housing is much more visible than this view suggests. The character of this view is therefore predominantly suburban, with no special qualities and a low sensitivity to the proposed development.

Verified View 4 (proposed): the new access road into the proposed development forms a junction at this location, establishing a break in the existing roadside hedgerow and a view along the southern edge of the proposed houses. The retained hedgerow combines with new planting to create a richly landscaped entrance and setting for the new houses. This aims to retain a strong green buffer to the road corridor that provides an appropriate transition between the existing hard suburban edge of Rathcoole and the countryside to the south. The introduction of this richly landscaped residential edge to Rathcoole is considered to be slightly positive.

Verified View 5 (baseline): on the approach from the south on Stoney Hill Road, this is the first relatively open view towards the Subject Site, which is somewhat screened by roadside vegetation and topography. The adjacent bungalow and garden contrasts with the housing at the Peyton estate to the left, which appears somewhat harsh, but in combination establish a mainly suburban character to this road corridor. The view has an ordinary character and a low sensitivity to the proposed development.

Verified View 5 (proposed): new housing on the Subject Site is partially visible beyond the intervening hedgerows and trees, introducing an assembly of pitched tiled roofs as a new skyline to this view; new building elevations are largely screened by intervening vegetation. This is a low to moderate change to the existing view that complements the established suburban character of neighbouring residential areas, particularly that at the Peyton Estate. The effect of the proposed development will be a low to moderate and neutral visual impact.

7.2.2 Rathcoole Park residential area

The public realm of Rathcoole Park is visually enclosed by the houses and gardens and does not offer any significant public views to the Subject Site. Where any glimpses occur, these are likely to be of a minor magnitude of change and visual impacts are likely to be low and neutral.

7.2.3 Peyton residential area

This new residential area has some relatively clear views over the Subject Site from its streets, most notably from Peyton Avenue and Peyton Square, these views encompassing the distant hills to the south. Peyton forms part of the new residential expansion area on the south side of Rathcoole and, as such, viewers have a low sensitivity to the proposed development, which is of similar character to Peyton.

The outlook from Peyton extends principally to the boundary wall/railing on Stoney Hill Lane, with views of the Subject Site's perimeter hedgerow and glimpses to the hills beyond from some locations. The proposed development will, in effect, contribute a visual continuation and enclosure of the Peyton development, consolidating the character of this new residential suburb. The apartment building will provide a distinctive built form at the heart of it as a visual focus with new houses as a backdrop to it.

Verified View 2 (baseline): this vista southwards along Peyton Avenue extends towards the Subject Site and the open countryside beyond. Stoney Hill Road lies just beyond a small pocket of open space with the vegetated Subject Site's boundary and rising ground just beyond. In the background lies the rising slopes and wooded skyline of the Dublin Mountains in the vicinity of Saggart Hill. This vista has a moderate sensitivity to the proposed development, given the visual link to the countryside beyond what is otherwise an ordinary but contemporary suburban residential landscape.

Verified View 2 (proposed): new houses now terminate the vista, foreshortening and screening the existing view to the Dublin Mountains. The view now has a more inward-facing character that focuses on its ordinary residential streetscape. New housing complements the existing housing in the foreground, taking a similar form and using similar materials. Existing planting and new landscaping soften the interface between existing and new residential development, but the overall effect is a slightly adverse visual impact now that the long vista is gone. However, this is not considered a significant public vantage point.

Verified View 3 (baseline): parts of the southern edge of the Peyton estate are visually open to Stoney Hill Road, as illustrated in this view from Peyton Drive looking south. It is an ordinary residential landscape with no special character or value, where the view extends only as far as the boundary of the Subject Site with Stoney Hill Road. Sensitivity to the proposed development is low.

Verified View 3 (proposed): The northern edge of the proposed development now features in this view, comprising the front elevations and roofscape of new houses punctuating the skyline. This adds depth and context to the view and reinforces its suburban residential character. The magnitude of change is moderate and has a slightly positive visual impact.

Verified View 6 (baseline): this view from Peyton Square lies at the heart of this development, with glimpsed view towards the Subject Site between the houses. It is a somewhat harsh streetscape due to the lack of trees and landscaping, and the dominance of blank perimeter walls fronting the square. The position of solar panels on some roofs is also intrusive. Sensitivity to the proposed development is low.

Verified View 6 (proposed): the proposed development is outlined in red, indicating that the proposed houses are screened from view by intervening existing houses. An imperceptible change occurs where proposed tree planting features in the gap between existing houses. The magnitude of change is imperceptible and visual impacts are neutral.

7.2.4 Athgoe & Saggart foothills

Views from the foothills across the Subject Site occur intermittently from the public road, notably in the vicinity of Coolmine, as illustrated in Verified View 7.

Verified View 7 (baseline): being slightly elevated, this is a broad-ranging view that encompasses arable and pasture fields in the foreground with settlement at Rathcoole and along the N7 corridor in the middle-ground. Broadly speaking, Rathcoole Park is visible at the centre of this view, adjoining open fields, with the Peyton estate to the left of it; the Subject Site lies to the front of both. Greenogue Business Park lies in the background with the countryside west of Dublin City extending beyond that into the distance. As residential development is a well-established feature of the middle-ground, and the business park is a dominant landscape detractor, the proposed development will benefit from an established urban backdrop of low landscape value. However, this view is moderately sensitive to the proposed residential development due to its closer proximity, rising ground and the potential changes to intervening vegetation.

Verified View 7 (proposed): this illustrates the proposed development as a cohesive assembly of houses set behind a robust boundary of retained hedgerow reinforced with trees and shrubs. In the medium- to long-term, an increasingly mature landscape in the linear park will increase the screening

of the proposed development, reinforcing the existing network of mature hedgerows and tree canopies that weave their way through the suburban landscape of Rathcoole, as seen from here. The magnitude of change to the landscape is imperceptible/minor and the effect is an imperceptible neutral visual impact.

7.2.5 Athgoe & Saggart Scenic Routes, Views & Prospects

Designated Scenic Routes, Views and Prospects lie at a significant distance from the Subject Site, as described in Section 3.2 above. While these are, in principle, highly sensitive to the proposed development, intervening topography, distance and the magnitude of change is likely to afford these a low or even imperceptible sensitivity to the proposed development.

When examined in the field, it was difficult to find a view of the Subject Site from the designated Scenic Route along the N81, where viewers are unlikely to be on foot but rather in a moving car. A desk study indicates that intervening topography prevents view of the Subject Site from much of this road. Therefore it is concluded that there will be no visual impact upon the Scenic Route.

With regard to views from designated Views and Prospects, the proposed development will feature only as an imperceptible change to the edge of an established urban area. There will be no change to the views from this Scenic route as a result of the proposed development.

8 Conclusions

The proposed development will form part of planned residential expansion at the southern edge of Rathcoole in accordance with the Country Development Plan 2022-2028, under Zoning Objective RES-N. It forms part of a permitted residential zoned landholding for a 204 housing scheme, with associated infrastructure and facilities, granted planning permission through the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) on 12th November 2020 (Ref. ABP-307698-20). The proposed development of the Subject Site will be for a portion of this housing number (42 no. dwellings) on approximately a quarter of the landholding.

The proposed development takes its principle design cues from both established houses and recent residential development at Peyton, also adjoining Stoney Hill Road, adopting some of the characteristics of traditional houses, including window proportions, roofscape and materials. It seeks to improve on these and, not least, incorporates a richly landscaped setting to the houses, streets and open spaces incorporated into the proposed development. This serves to maximise residential amenity for new residents and neighbours, and provides a substantial linear park to the southern edge of the development, within land zoned RU, for public amenity and to establish an appropriate landscape buffer that helps protect the rural amenity of land to the south of the site.

The proposed development is mindful of its position within the Athgoe and Saggart Hills LCA, lying at the junction of the Foothills and existing urban area. Proposed houses of no more than two storeys overlook the richly-landscaped linear park as a permanent edge and appropriate interface with the adjoining countryside. The position, scale and detailing of buildings along with the comprehensive landscape setting satisfies Policy NCBH14 in preserving and enhancing the character of the County's landscapes.

Designated Scenic Routes, Views and Prospects have been considered as part of this assessment and established that there are no significant views of the Subject Site from designated scenic routes / views and that the proposed development will not significantly interfere with views towards designated Prospects. Local views from minor residential streets at Peyton will experience some reduction in views to the surrounding hills, but these are not considered to be significant public vantage points. The proposed development therefore satisfies policy NCBH15 in preserving important views and prospects and the amenity of places and features of natural beauty.

As a result of this appraisal, it is concluded that the proposed development will have a narrow range of landscape and visual effects, ranging from slightly adverse to slightly positive. The proposed development will have no significant adverse impacts upon the Athgoe and Saggart Hills LCA, and there will be no significant landscape or visual effects upon designated Scenic Routes or Views and Prospects.

Appendix A
Photographs – Subject Site and Context

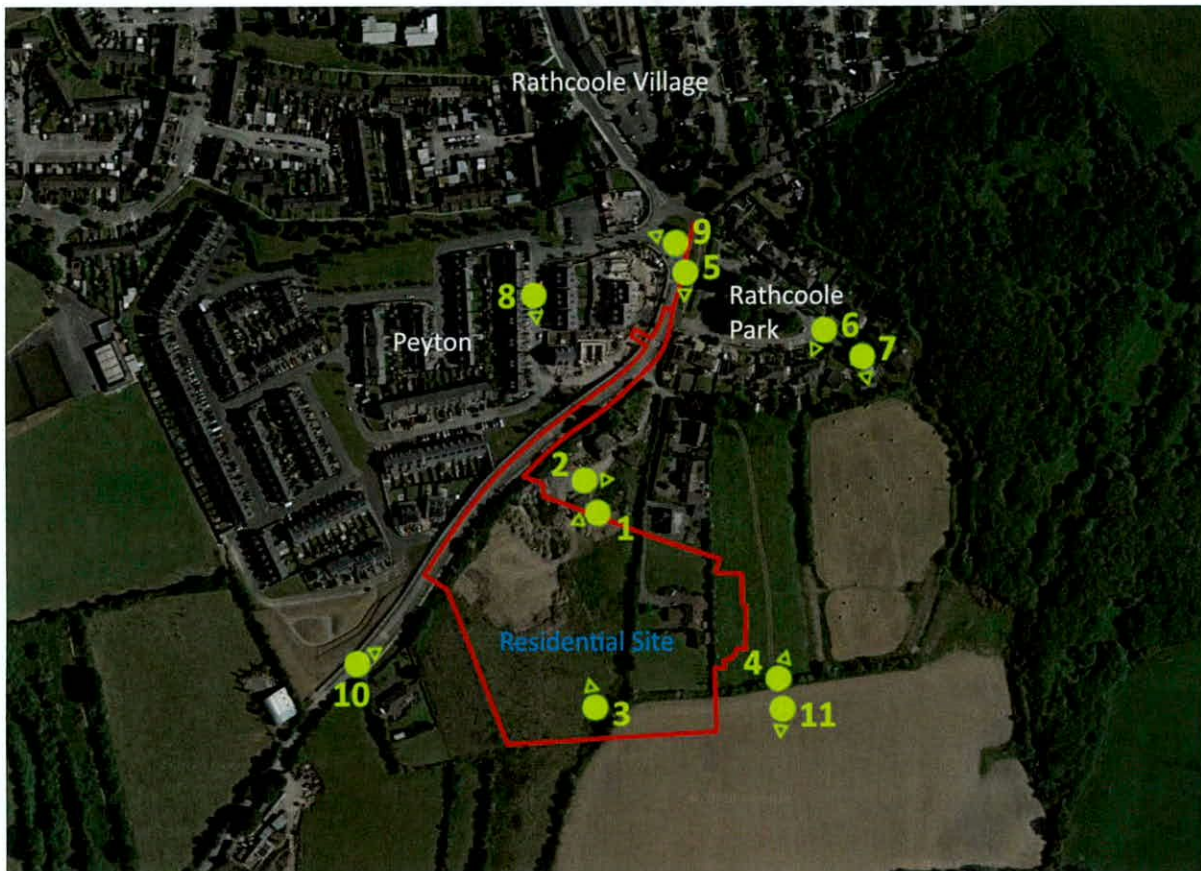


Figure 8: Photograph View Location Plan (source: Google Maps). View 12 is off plan to south – from Coolmine.



View 1: View west across site to part of Peyton (right) and to house adjoining SW corner. Very distant view to Windmill Hill (centre).



View 2: View east across northern part of site to adjacent properties (centre and right) beyond boundary hedge.



View 3: View north from centre of site, encompassing the Peyton residential area in the middle-ground, Rathcoole town beyond and the distant business park at Greenogue towards the right.



View 4: view north across site and adjoining RES-N zoned land to the edge of Rathcoole Park, which is partially screened by perimeter trees and hedgerows.



View 5: View from Stoney Hill Road approaching the Subject Site from the north (from Rathcoole town centre), with Rathcoole Park on the left.



View 6: Public views outward from Rathcoole Park towards the Subject Site are filtered and constrained by trees, hedges and houses.



View 7: Public views outward from Rathcoole Park towards the Subject Site are filtered and constrained by trees, hedges and houses.



View 8: View south along Peyton Avenue across site to the foothills and hills beyond at Lugg.



View 9: View towards Rathcoole village centre from Stoney Hill Road / Stoney Lane (image: Google Streetview)



View 10: View northeast along Stoney Hill Road with boundary wall to Peyton on the left. The house adjoining the Subject Site's southwest corner lies out of shot to the right, its boundary hedge and bank forming a barrier to views into the existing site.



View 11: View south from the southern end of the Subject Site across the adjoining foothills to Lugg (right) and Crooksling (left).



View 12: View north from Coolmine across the foothills to the Subject Site and Rathcoole town, to Greenogue Business Park beyond and the wider Newcastle Lowlands Landscape Character Area beyond that.

