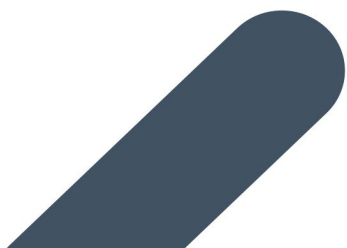


Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Proposed Residential
Development at Cairns
Road, Co. Sligo





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1. INTRODUCTION

This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) addresses the landscape and visual effects of the proposed residential development at Cairns Road in Co. Sligo. The LVIA comprises the following sections:

- **Introduction** – Includes a description of the Proposed Development, its location and essential aspects of the development that will potentially give rise to effects on the landscape and visual amenity.
- **Methodology and Assessment Criteria** – An outline of the methodology and guidance used to conduct the LVIA.
- **Landscape Baseline** – A review of the landscape policy context and landscape designations pertinent to the site; a description of the baseline landscape conditions and character of the Proposed Development site and wider landscape setting; as well as identification of landscape value and landscape sensitivities.
- **Visual Baseline** – An appraisal of likely visibility of the Proposed Development within the surrounding landscape, including visibility from designated scenic amenity designations. The visual baseline identifies key visual receptors and locations selected as photomontage viewpoints.
- **Landscape and Visual Effects** – A determination of predicted landscape and visual effects using best practice guidance outlined in the methodology. Assessment of effects is informed by a site visit and production of photomontages.

1.1 Statement of Authority

MKO has developed extensive expertise and experience over the last 15 years in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of a range of projects, including residential developments, quarries, road schemes, renewable energy developments and a range of other projects.

This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment was carried out by Maria Inês Timóteo and Saoirse Fitzsimons.

Maria is a Landscape Architect with MKO and has over six years' experience in landscape design, management and construction in Ireland and Portugal, with multiple projects across Europe. Her experience lies with several design typologies such as residential developments, open space, historical landscape, and others, for all project stages. Maria's primary role at MKO is preparing landscape packages for design implementation and producing Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Reports for renewable energy projects including wind farms, solar farms, quarry extraction and strategic housing schemes. Maria holds a Master's in Landscape Architecture and is a Council Member with the Irish Landscape Institute

Saoirse is an Environmental Scientist with MKO and holds an MSc in Coastal and Marine Environments from the National University of Ireland, Galway. Saoirse's primary role at MKO is producing the LVIA reports and chapters for EIA reports for renewable energy projects including wind farms, solar farms, quarry extraction and strategic housing schemes.

1.2

Proposed Development Description

The applicant, Novot Holdings Ltd., intend to apply for permission for development on a site which extends to 2.1ha on lands located on the Cairns Road, Sligo, Co. Sligo.

The Proposed Development will consist of:

1. *Construction of 74 no. residential units comprising:*
 - > 5 no. 1-bed apartments,
 - > 19 no. 2-bed apartments,
 - > 6 no. 3-bed terrace houses,
 - > 8 no. 3-bed semi-detached houses,
 - > 4 no. 4-bed terrace houses,
 - > 32 no. 4-bed semi-detached houses.
2. *Provision of all associated surface water and foul drainage services and connections with all associated site works and ancillary services.*
3. *Pedestrian, cycle, and vehicular access with Cairns Road, and pedestrian and cycle access with the adjoining Ard Cairn residential estate.*
4. *Provision of shared communal public amenity areas and private open space, site landscaping and public lighting, resident, and visitor parking including electric vehicle charging points, bicycle parking spaces, and all associated site development works.*
5. *Demolition of existing bungalow located to the north-east of the development site.*

A comprehensive description of the Proposed Development is included in the planning pack accompanying this LVIA. Figure 1-1 (below) shows the site layout of the Proposed Development. A comprehensive description of the existing conditions and character of the landscape at the site and wider landscape setting are included in Section 3 – *Landscape Baseline*.



Figure 1-1 Masterplan of the Proposed Development



Figure 1-2 A 3D impression of the Proposed Development from the south (model by Douglas Wallace)

Figure 1-2 (above) is an axonometric view of the proposed housing development from the south. Figure 1-3 (below) shows Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) of the Proposed Development from within the application site boundary. As shown by the image, the proposed houses within the development are similar in height throughout the site, as they are two storey dwellings, they are the most visually prominent features of the site and are the essential aspects of the proposal that are a focus of this LVIA.

There is currently pedestrian/cycle access via the existing residential developments to the north of the site, The Oaks, Hilltop Park, and Ard Cairn. From the access point to The Oaks development, the site has footpath connectivity to Sligo Town, with a designated cycle path commencing at the junction between Cairns Road and the Pearse Road (N287), adjacent to Markievicz Park. The area is predominantly residential in nature, with the Hawthorns Residential Development and the Carraroe Retail Park located adjacent to the west of the site, though not directly connected to the site itself at present.



Figure 1-5 Site Boundary (Source: Bing Maps. Edited by MKO)

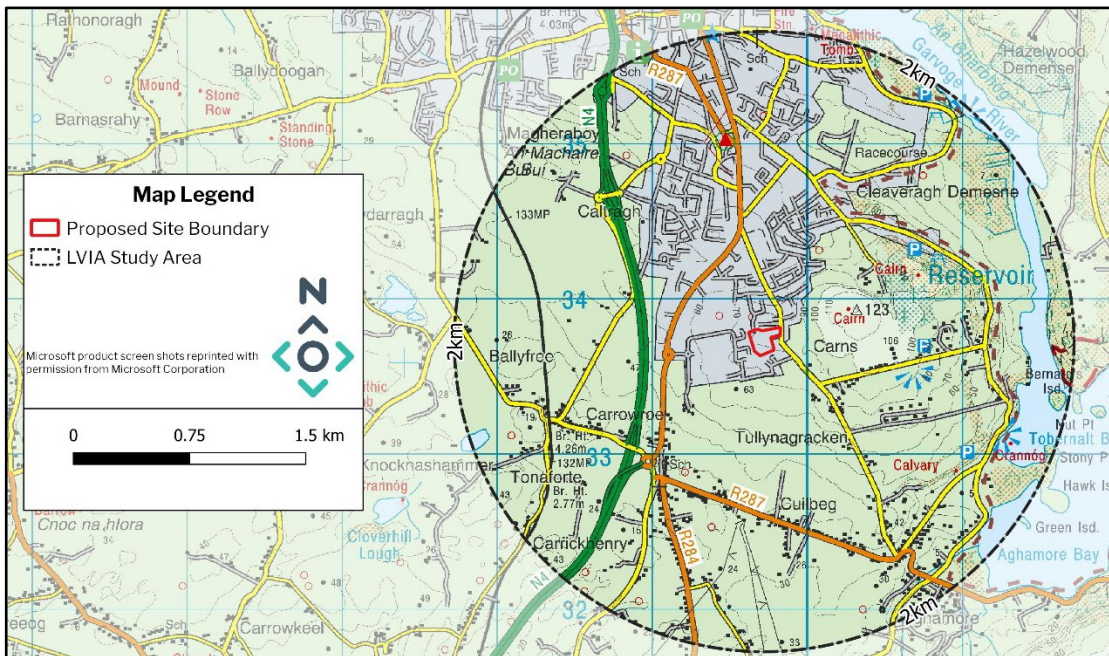


Figure 1-6 LVIA Study Area

Baseline landscape and visual investigations include all lands within 2 km of the Proposed Development – ‘The LVIA Study Area’ (see definition in Section 2.2).

2. METHODOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

This section broadly outlines the methodology used to undertake the landscape and visual assessment of the Proposed Development, and the guidance used in the preparation of each section.

2.1 Guidance Documents

In 2000, the Department of the Environment and Local Government (DoEHLG) published ‘Landscape and Landscape Assessment: Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities’, which recommended that all local authorities adopt a standardised approach to landscape assessment for incorporation into development plans and consideration as part of the planning process. This document remains in Draft.

In 2002, Ireland signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC). This introduced a pan-European concept that centres on the quality of landscape protection, management and planning. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht published a National Landscape Strategy for Ireland in 2015. The strategy aims to ensure compliance with the ELC and contains six main objectives, including undertaking a National Landscape Character Assessment and developing landscape policies.

Although the DoEHLG 2000 guidance remains in draft form, this section of the LVIA has been informed by the landscape assessment guidelines presented in the DoEHLG document as well as a range of other guidelines, which include:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd ed. (The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, UK, 2013) - also referred to as GLVIA3 (LI & IEMA, 2013).
- ‘Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Assessment’; Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/2011 (2011);

2.2 Study Area

The GLVIA3 (LI & IEMA, 2013) guidance refers to the identification of the area of landscape that is to be covered while assessing landscape and visual effects. The guidelines state:

“The study areas should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around it which the Proposed Development may influence in a significant manner.”

For the purposes of this LVIA, where the ‘Proposed Development site’ or ‘the site’ is referred to in the LVIA, this relates to the primary study area for the Proposed Development, as delineated in red on the mapping figures in this report (and Figure 1-5 in previous page).

However, the landscape and visual baseline mapping and viewpoint selection are based on a wider study area, consisting of all the area within 2 kilometres from the development site boundary. Considering the scale of the Proposed Development, it is not likely to be identifiable from locations beyond 2 km where visual or landscape effects will not be high. This area is referred to as the Landscape and Visual Impacts (LVIA) Study Area or ‘study area’ (See Figure 1-6 previously). This study area is described in terms of Landscape Policy and Landscape Character.

2.3 Assessing Landscape Effects

Qualitative methods are used to assess the effects on landscape receptors identified during baseline investigations. The methodology follows the guidance in the GLVIA3 (LI & IEMA, 2013) as well as the Landscape and Landscape Assessment (DoEHLG, 2000) Guidelines.

Landscape Effects can be described as changes which affect the landscape as a resource. This includes how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects and its landscape character. Landscape effects also relate to changes in the structure of the landscape. Under the GLVIA3 (LI & IEMA, 2013), the assessment of likely significant effects on landscape receptors includes a judgement on both the sensitivity of the receptor as well as the magnitude of change.

Landscape Sensitivity is described in the GLVIA3 (LI & IEMA, 2013) as a combination of the landscape's susceptibility to change as well as the value attached to the landscape. 'Susceptibility to change' can be described as the ability of the landscape receptor (either the overall character or quality of the landscape, or a particular landscape feature) to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline (existing) landscape situation, and/or the achievements of landscape planning policies and strategies. Table 2-1 (below) presents differing description criteria for susceptibility to change. Landscape value is the importance attributed to a specific landscape receptor or feature. Example descriptions of landscape value are listed below in Table 2-2. Landscape value is determined through baseline assessments considering a combination of criteria such as designations and local characteristics. Appraisal of the landscape value of the Proposed Development site and its surrounding landscape is summarised in Table 3-2 in Section 3.3 of this report.

Table 2-1 Assessing Landscape Sensitivity – Susceptibility to Change

Susceptibility of landscape to change	Description and example criteria
High	Landscapes where the overall landscape character or condition is highly susceptible to change and where the landscape receptor has a low ability to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the landscape character and in compliance with planning policies/strategies
Medium	Landscapes where the overall landscape character has a moderate ability to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the landscape character and in compliance with planning policies/strategies.
Low	Landscapes where the overall landscape character has a strong ability to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences to the maintenance of the landscape character and in compliance with planning policies/strategies.

Table 2-2 Assessing Landscape Sensitivity – Landscape Value

Value attached to Landscape elements	Description and example criteria
High	Landscapes deemed as high value or forming part of designations (e.g. areas of amenity, scenic routes/views) in the development plan, at a national or international level.
Medium	Landscapes where value is not formally designated but are of value as good examples of high quality, intact landscapes and are areas deemed to be of relatively high scenic quality. Landscapes that contain some rare elements, include areas which are wild or have a sense of naturalness, strong cultural associations or which have recreational value.
Low	Landscapes that are not formally designated and considered as modified. Areas which do not have particularly scenic qualities, do not include rare elements or landscape features and do not have strongly evident cultural or heritage associations.

Magnitude of the change: The magnitude of change within a landscape, as outlined in Table 2-3 below, is a combination of the size and scale of the change, the extent of the area affected (e.g. how much of a feature is lost or the extent of the feature to be added) and the degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects are altered. Consideration is given to the duration and reversibility of the change.

Table 2-3 Assessing Magnitude of Landscape Change

Magnitude of Change	Description
High	Major loss or alteration of key landscape elements with an effect on the overall landscape character, resulting in a high degree of change to the aesthetics of the landscape. Changes will be evident over a wide geographical area.
Medium	Some loss or alteration of landscape elements resulting in some change to landscape character and aesthetics. This includes landscapes where there is a moderate effect on the overall landscape character but does not affect key characteristics.
Low	Minor loss of or change to landscape elements. These changes do not affect the overall landscape character or key elements. Changes to the overall aesthetics of the landscapes are low and limited in their geographical extent.

A determination of the effects upon the landscape receptor is then arrived at by combining the magnitude and sensitivity judgements.

2.4 Assessing Visual Effects

Visual effects relate to changes in views and visual amenity of the surroundings of individuals or groups of people – termed ‘Visual Receptors’. These may result from changes in content and character of views as a result in changes to the landscape. The assessment of visual effects is based on views shown in photomontages as well as actual visibility on the ground.

2.4.1 Viewpoint Selection

A step-by-step process was followed in selecting appropriate photomontage viewpoint locations. The first step was to select a number of representative locations following a detailed desktop study of mapping. These locations were based on the following criteria:

- Potential visibility of the development site;
- Key landscape designations e.g. views and prospects, scenic routes, areas classed as sensitive;
- Proximity to receptors such as settlements, groups of residential dwellings or recreational routes and amenity areas;
- Within publicly accessible areas or on public roads, particularly more trafficked routes;
- Views that cover a wide area in terms of geographical location, elevation and varying distance from site.

Following a site visit to assess visibility on the ground, a total of 4 no. locations were identified as suitable viewpoints for photomontage production. The locations provide a representative range of local views.

2.4.2 Photomontage Production

Photomontages are photorealistic visualisations that superimpose an image of the Proposed Development upon a photograph or series of photographs. They are intended as graphical representations of how a Proposed Development will appear in the existing landscape and are used as a tool to inform the LVIA process.

Verified photomontage imagery has been produced by integrating a 3D architectural model of the Proposed Development within a GPS validated model of the landscape from a high-resolution topographical survey. Images were captured from a height of approximately 1.7 metres and a rendering has been applied to the imagery that best represents the proposed materials from which the Proposed Development will comprise in the light conditions when the photomontage was captured.

The following images are shown in the Photomontage Booklet for each viewpoint location (1-4):

- **Existing View:** Shows the baseline landscape conditions as it currently exists in a do-nothing scenario.
- **Proposed Photomontage** (labelled ‘Proposed View’ in the images): Shows a scaled verified render of the Proposed Development within the current landscape.

Photomontage images have been produced with reference to best practice and the following industry guidelines:

- Visual Representation of Development Proposals’, Landscape Institute, Technical Guidance Note 06/19, 17 September 2019; and
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3), (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).

Photomontages are displayed in the photomontage booklet accompanying this planning application. An assessment of the visual effects of the Proposed Development from each of the four photomontages is included in Section 4.3 of this chapter.

2.4.3 Assessing Visual Effects – Receptor Sensitivity and Magnitude of Change

Visual receptor sensitivity, listed in Table 2-4 below, depends on the occupation or activity of the people as well the extent to which the attention is focused on views and visual amenity, according to the GLVIA Guidelines (2013). Receptor and viewpoint sensitivity considers the value attached to certain views and to what extent it has scenic or aesthetic quality.

Table 2-4 Assessing Visual Sensitivity

Susceptibility of visual receptor	Description and example criteria
High	These include viewers at designated views or landscapes; viewers such as residents which are focussed to a large extent on the development due to location in close proximity; viewers at well-known heritage or popular tourist or recreational areas, viewers along scenic or tourist routes
Medium	Visual receptors who may have some susceptibility to changes in view, such as those from views which are not designated, but may have local significance or those travelling along routes or at views which are considered moderately scenic.
Low	Viewers engaged in activities where the focus is not on the landscape or view, such as those travelling along busy routes, viewers at work or engaged in sport not related to views or experience of the landscape.

Value attached to the view	Description and example criteria
High	Protected views or views from designated landscapes of national or international importance, views indicated on tourist/cultural publications or considered of high scenic quality, naturalness, tranquillity or views with rare elements.
Medium	Non-designated views, but including panoramic views or views judged to be of some scenic quality, demonstrating some sense of naturalness, tranquillity or have some rare element in the view.
Low	Views which are not designated and are not judged to be panoramic views or of particular scenic quality as described above. These are views which have no distinctive features.

Table 2-5 below outlines the magnitude of visual effects, consisting of size and scale of the change, the extent of the area affected and the duration or reversibility of the effect.

Table 2-5 Assessing Magnitude of Visual Change

Magnitude of Change	Description
High	Viewpoints where the Proposed Development results in a significant change of the view and its composition and creates a high degree of contrast to the existing. This includes viewpoints where the Proposed Development is fully or almost fully visible over a wide area at close proximity to the viewer. The effects are long term or permanent and have a low level of reversibility.
Medium	Viewpoints where the Proposed Development results in moderate changes to the view and a moderate degree of contrast with the existing view. This includes viewpoints where the development is visible over a significant proportion of the view and viewpoints, which are not in close proximity to the development.
Low	Viewpoints where the Proposed Development results in a low level of change in the view and its composition with a low degree of contrast. Viewpoints where the development is partially or barely visible in a small proportion of the view and includes viewpoints at a distance from the Proposed Development.

Receptor and viewpoint sensitivity is balanced with the magnitude of change to determine the visual effect - High, Medium or Low.

3. LANDSCAPE BASELINE

This section of the LVIA establishes the baseline landscape condition of the development site and wider landscape setting. This includes identification and description of relevant landscape policy designations and sensitive landscape receptors located in the LVIA Study Area (within 2 km from the development site boundary). The receiving landscape of the development site and surrounding areas are also described in terms of their landscape character, landscape value and landscape sensitivity.

3.1 Landscape Policy Context

3.1.1 Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023 (SCDP)

The Proposed Development and LVIA Study Area are located in County Sligo, therefore, the Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023 (SCDP) and the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 (SEDP) were consulted to identify relevant landscape designations and policies. Policy relevant to landscape are contained in *Chapter 7* of the SCDP, policy and designations pertinent to the Proposed Development and its wider landscape setting are reported in this section of the LVIA.

3.1.1.1 Landscape Character Areas

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a process that describes, maps and classifies landscapes objectively. Defining landscape character enables an understanding to be formed of the inherent value and importance of individual landscape elements and the processes that may alter landscape character in the future.

A landscape characterisation and appraisal study commissioned by Sligo County Council was the basis for the Landscape Characterisation Map (LC Map), shown below in Figure 3-1. The LC Map classifies County Sligo according to its visual sensitivity and capacity to absorb new developments without compromising the scenic character of certain areas. It designates the following:

- **“Normal Rural Landscapes:** areas with natural features (e.g. topography, vegetation) which generally have the capacity to absorb a wide range of new development forms – these are largely farming areas and cover most of the County. At the same time, certain areas located within normal rural landscapes may have superior visual qualities, due to their specific topography, vegetation pattern, the presence of traditional farming or residential structures. These areas may have limited capacity for development or may be able to absorb new development only if it is designed to integrate seamlessly with the existing environment.
- **Sensitive Rural Landscapes:** areas that tend to be open in character, highly visible, with intrinsic scenic qualities and a low capacity to absorb new development – e.g. Knocknarea, the Dartry Mountains, the Ox Mountains, Aughris Head, Mullaghmore Head etc.
- **Visually Vulnerable Areas:** distinctive and conspicuous natural features of significant beauty or interest, which have extremely low capacity to absorb new development – examples are the Ben Bulbin plateau, mountain and hill ridges, the areas adjoining Sligo’s coastline, most lakeshores etc.
- **Scenic Routes:** public roads passing through or close to Sensitive Rural Landscapes, or in the vicinity of Visually Vulnerable Areas, and affording unique scenic views of distinctive natural features or vast open landscapes. In addition to remote views, scenic routes have often a distinctive visual character conferred by old road boundaries, such as stone walls, established hedgerows, lines of mature trees, adjoining cottages or farmyards together with their traditional, planted enclosures etc., all of which warrant protection.”

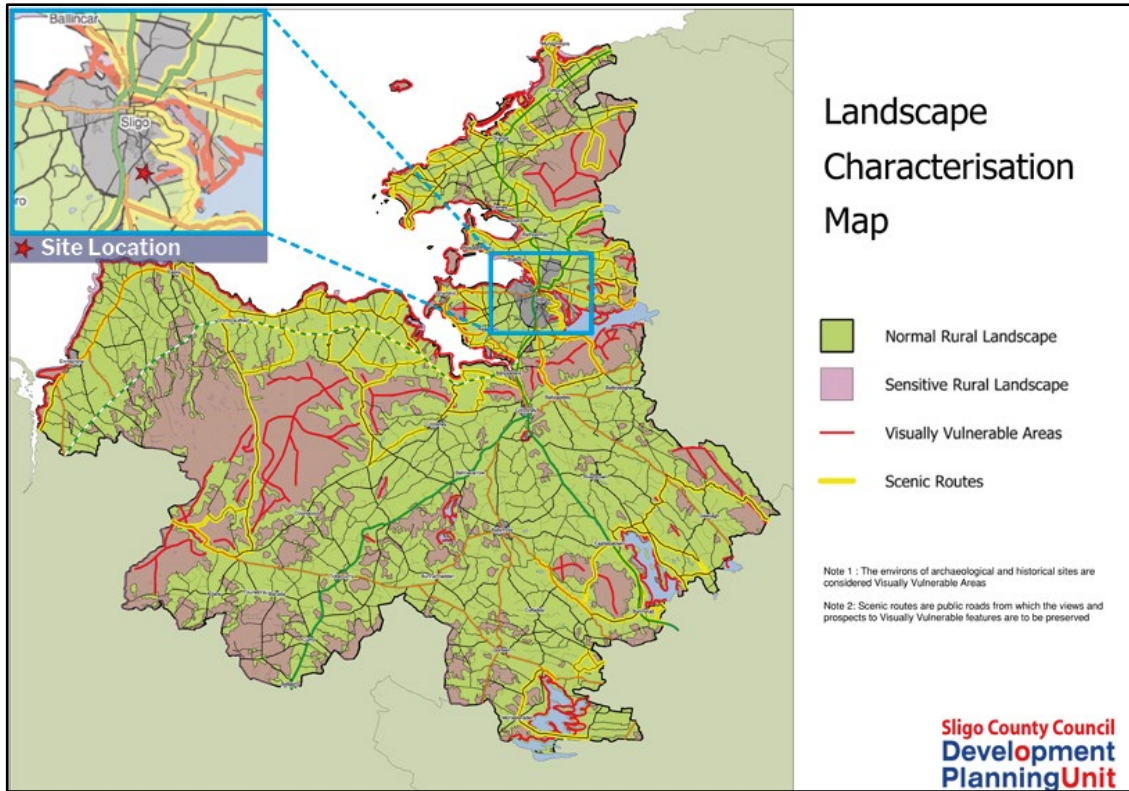


Figure 3-1 Landscape Characterisation Map in Co. Sligo - Extract from Sligo County Development Plan (Adapted by MKO)

As shown in the Landscape Characterisation Map, shown in Figure 3-1 above, the Proposed Development is not located within either ‘Normal Rural Landscape’ or ‘Sensitive Rural Landscape’, and instead is sited within an urban setting. The 2km LVIA study area includes an area zoned as ‘Normal Rural Landscape’ approximately 400m south of the Proposed Development at its nearest point. The likely effects of the Proposed Development on both areas of rural and urban landscape character will be assessed later in this report.

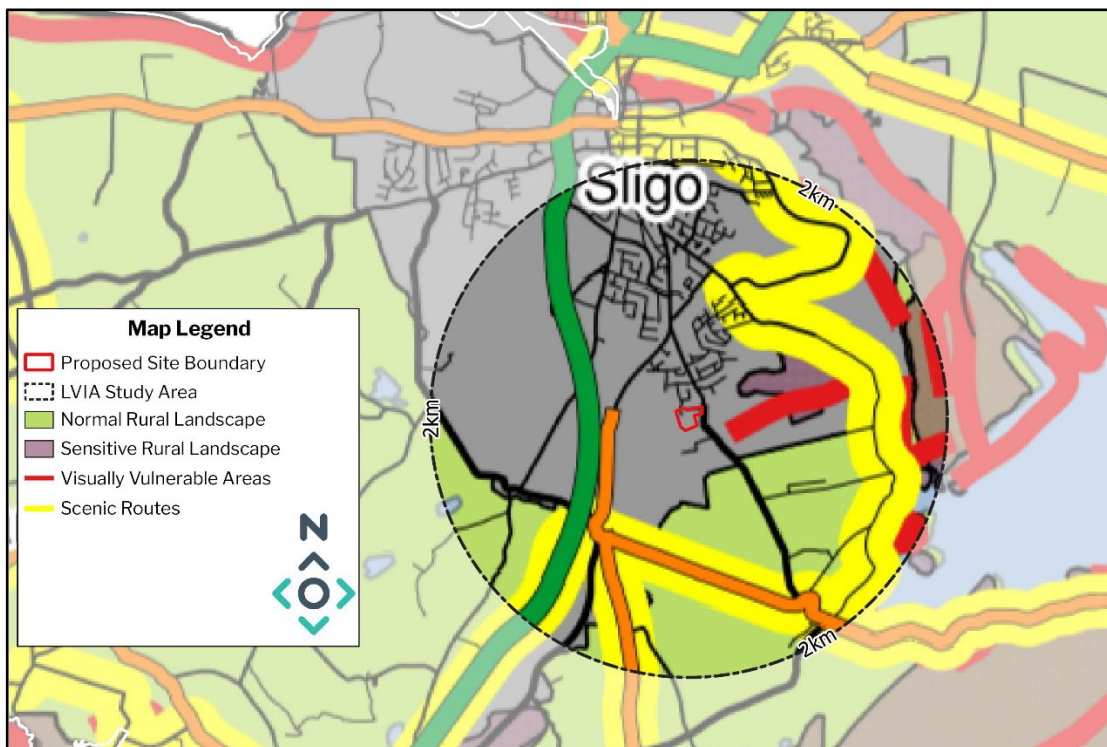


Figure 3-2 Landscape Characterisation Areas within 2km Study Area

In relation to landscape character assessment and protection policies, the purpose of established designations is to protect the rural character, setting, historic context and archaeological heritage of the landscape. It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

***PLCAP-1** - Protect the physical landscape, visual and scenic character of County Sligo and seek to preserve the County’s landscape character. Planning applications that have the potential to impact significantly and adversely upon landscape character, especially in Sensitive Rural Landscapes, Visually Vulnerable Areas and along Scenic routes, may be required to be accompanied by a visual impact assessment using agreed and appropriate viewing points and methods for the assessment.*

***PLCAP-2** - Discourage any developments that would be detrimental to the unique visual character of designated Visually Vulnerable Areas.*

***PLCAP-3** - Preserve the scenic views listed in Appendix E and the distinctive visual character of designated Scenic Routes by controlling development along such Routes and other roads, while facilitating developments that may be tied to a specific location or to the demonstrated needs of applicants to reside in a particular area.*

***PLCAP-4** - Strictly control new development in designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes, while considering exceptions that can demonstrate a clear need to locate in the area concerned. Ensure that any new development in designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes: does not impinge in any significant way on the character, integrity and distinctiveness of the area; does not detract from the scenic value of the area; meets high standards of siting and design; satisfies all other criteria with regard to, inter alia, servicing, public safety and prevention of pollution.*

***PLCAP-5** - Protect the historic and archaeological landscapes of the County.”*

This LVIA takes the above-stated policies into account and includes an assessment of the impacts of the Proposed Development on landscape character in relation to Normal Rural Landscapes, Visually Vulnerable Areas, and along Scenic routes.

3.1.1.2 Designated Scenic Routes

The SDCP defines Scenic Routes as “public roads from which the more dramatic scenic views, prospects and vistas of the County can be enjoyed. Most routes pass through or close to designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes or adjoin designated Visually Vulnerable Areas.” This designation provides a basis for protecting views and prospects of certain visually vulnerable features.

Appendix E of the SDCP lists the Scenic Routes within County Sligo and states that in order to preserve the listed scenic views, it is necessary to “control development along designated Scenic Routes, while facilitating developments that are tied to a specific location or that meet the demonstrated needs of an applicant to reside in a particular area. In all cases, the onus is on the applicant to show that there will be no obstruction or degradation of the scenic view concerned, nor significant alterations to the appearance or character of the designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes in the vicinity.”

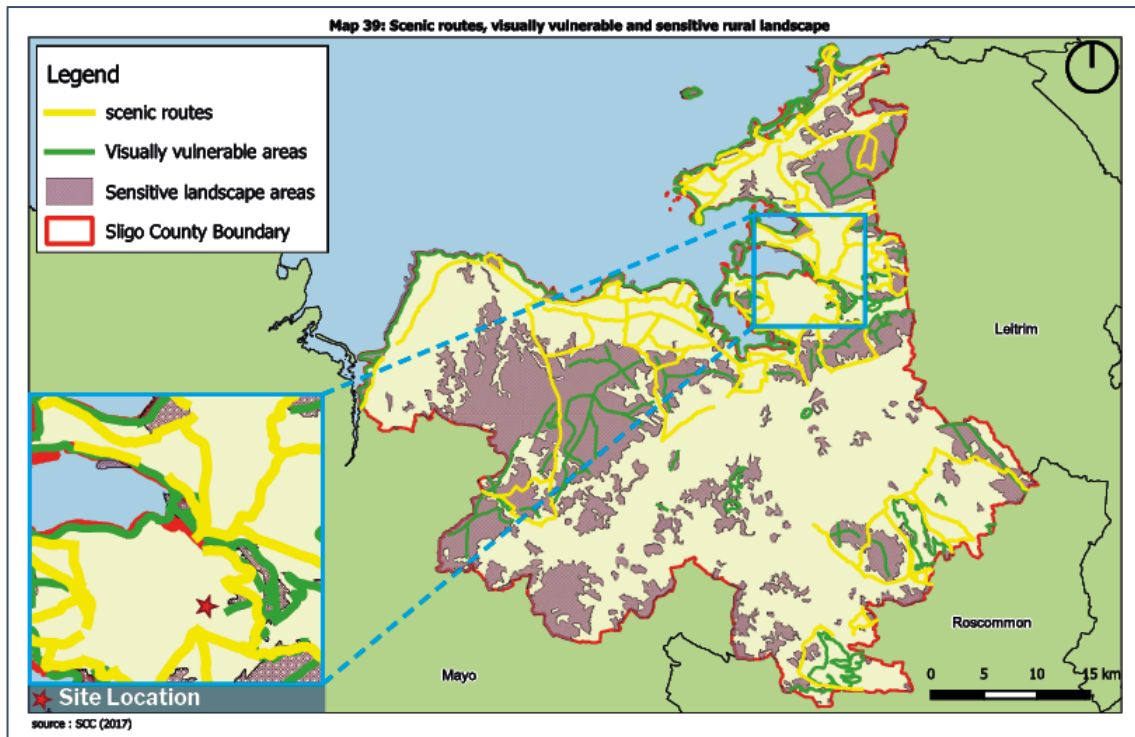


Figure 3-3 Scenic Routes, Visually Vulnerable and Sensitive landscape in Co. Sligo - Extract from Sligo County Development Plan's Map 39 (Adapted by MKO)

The Proposed Development is surrounded by multiple scenic routes (as shown in Figure 3-3 above); however, there are no scenic routes immediately adjacent to the proposed site. The closest scenic route is located approximately 800m northeast of the Proposed Development.

A total of 4 no. designated Scenic Routes have been identified in the LVIA study area, as shown in Figure 3-4 below and listed in SCDP as follows:

National Primary Roads:

- *“4. N-4 Collooney By-Pass from northern roundabout at Collooney to Carrowroe – Views of Ballysadare Bay, Knocknarea, Union Wood, Slieve Daeane, Slieve Dargan”*

Regional Roads:

- *“12. R-284 from Carrowroe to junction at road L-3605 north of Ballygawley – Views of Ballygawley Lough, Slieve Dargan and Slieve Daeane*
- *“14. R-287 from Carrowroe to junction with road L-3605 at Correagh – View of Lough Gill, Slish Wood, Slieve Dargan, Slieve Daeane and Killery Mountain”*

Local Roads:

- *“36. L-3602 along Garvoge¹ River and Lough Gill from Sligo to junction with R-287 – Views of Garvoge River and Lough Gill.”*

¹ Garvoge River is known locally as Garavogue River and thus will be referred to as such for the remainder of this document. The spelling of “Garvoge” will be used, such as in this instance, when it is a direct quote from the SCDP Scenic Route list.

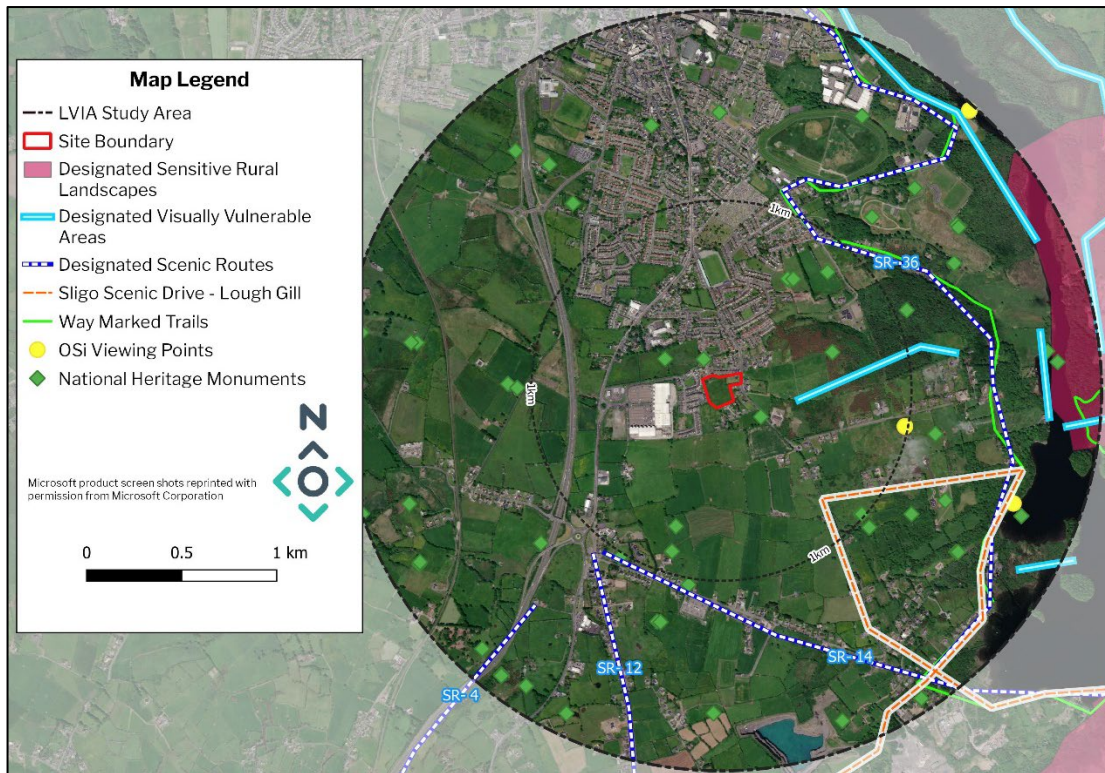


Figure 3-4 Scenic Routes, Visually Vulnerable and Sensitive landscape surrounding the Proposed Development

These routes are recognised due to their long and close ranging scenic views to the Visually Vulnerable Areas identified by County Sligo. However, following a preliminary review of each of the four scenic routes listed above, it is noted that all scenic views are directed in opposite directions of the Proposed Development, as described in Table 3-1 below.

Table 3-1 – Assessment of Scenic Routes and Recognised Views within LVIA Study Area

Scenic Route	Recognised Views (to Visually Vulnerable Areas)	Direction of Views in relation to Scenic Route (within study area only)	Direction of Proposed Development in relation to Scenic Route	Scenic Route directed towards the Proposed Development
SR4	Ballysadare Bay	Southwest	c. 1.5 km Northeast	No
	Knocknarea	West		
	Union Wood	South		
	Slieve Daeane	Southeast		
	Slieve Dargan	Southeast		
SR12	Ballygawley Lough	Southeast	c. 1km North	No
	Slieve Daeane	Southeast		
	Slieve Dargan	Southeast		

Scenic Route	Recognised Views (to Visually Vulnerable Areas)	Direction of Views in relation to Scenic Route (within study area only)	Direction of Proposed Development in relation to Scenic Route	Scenic Route directed towards the Proposed Development
SR14	Lough Gill	East	c. 1km North	No
	Slish Wood	East		
	Slieve Daeane	Southeast		
	Slieve Dargan	Southeast		
	Killery Mountain	East		
SR36	Garavoge River	East	c. 1km West	No
	Lough Gill	East		

The northern extent of Scenic Routes 4, 12 and 14 are located to the south of the LVIA study area and comprise scenic views towards Visually Vulnerable Areas located to the south of the proposed site, and thus away from the Proposed Development.

Scenic route no. 36 crosses the east of the LVIA study area in a north to south direction. This route comprises all recognised views towards Lough Gill which is located east of the proposed site and east of scenic route 36, away from the Proposed Development.

Recognised views from all of these designated scenic routes are directed away from the Proposed Development. For the avoidance of doubt, these designated scenic routes were visited during a site visit to confirm that the Proposed Development would not impact views from these routes towards Visually Vulnerable Areas. A visual appraisal of the likely visibility of the Proposed Development from these designated scenic routes is described in Section 4 - *Visual Baseline*.

3.1.1.3 Visually Vulnerable Areas

The SCDP identifies 4 no. Visually Vulnerable Areas located in the LVIA study area. Three of these Visually Vulnerable Areas are located around the western banks of Lough Gill to the east of the Proposed Development.

The elevated ridgeline of Cairns Hill to the east of the site is the Visually Vulnerable Area identified in closest proximity to the site, located circa 300m from the Proposed Development at its nearest point. This landscape feature is a ridgeline with some scenic value as it is the notable feature of Cairns Hill itself. The more recognisable features of the ridgeline are only experienced from the north and east where the existing topography is steep and visually prominent. This ridgeline is not experienced in the same way from the west (the landscape surrounding the site of the Proposed Development), where it is viewed as a gently rising hill of agricultural land of no distinctive or recognisable prominence.

As demonstrated from the visual appraisals presented in Section 4 of this report – *Visual Baseline*, the Proposed Development will not affect the character, integrity and distinctiveness of the Visually Vulnerable Areas identified within the LVIA study area. In accordance with policies *PLCAP 1* to *PLCAP 4* listed above, the Proposed Development will not detract from the scenic value of these designated landscape receptors.

From the vantage point of the site and surrounds upon the western elevations of Cairns Hill, there are long-ranging open views of other distant Visually Vulnerable Areas (e.g. Ben Bulbin) existent in the wider landscape beyond 2km. The likely effects of the Proposed Development upon views of these distant Visually Vulnerable Areas will be assessed later in this report.

3.1.1.4 General Development Standards

The SCDP sets out the general development standards to potential applicants regarding the criteria used by the Planning Authority to assess development proposals. The Proposed Development is sited within the overall Sligo city standards and does not fall under any of Sligo's Local Area Plans, as recognised in the Sligo and Environs Development Plan.

3.1.1.4.1 Development and its surroundings

The SCDP identifies several factors, listed below, that should be considered when assessing the impact of a proposed structure or development on the receiving environment and its surroundings.

- a. *“degree of overshadowing and loss of light to surrounding properties;*
- b. *degree of overlooking and consequent loss of privacy for adjoining properties;*
- c. *the extent to which the building impacts on structures or spaces of architectural or historic importance;*
- d. *the extent to which the building impacts on important landmarks;*
- e. *the extent to which the building impacts on attractive public views from significant vantage points;*
- f. *the degree of impact of the building on the skyline;*
- g. *the degree to which the building may contribute to the overall townscape; particular care will be required in the treatment of rooftops and all machine/mechanical rooms will need to be adequately screened or designed as an integral part of the building;*
- h. *the quality of the overall design;*
- i. *the scale of the building in relation to surrounding urban space, together with the effect of the building on the quality of the space;*
- j. *the effect of the building on the microclimate in the immediate vicinity;*
- k. *the area of the site, and whether it is large enough to provide a visual transition (by way of open space, or a base of lower buildings) from the scale of surrounding development.*
- l. *an increase in building height may be particularly suitable for certain strategic sites.”*

3.1.1.5 Archaeology & Cultural Heritage

The SCDP states that archaeological heritage should be protected and that alterations and interventions to protected structures should be executed to a high conservation standard that should not detract from their significance or value.

Developments that may impact on the county's archaeological heritage should be treated cautiously. The SCDP requests investigation and preservation within zones of archaeological potential (ZAP), as well as areas surrounding ZAPs that have potential for archaeological conditions.

The Proposed Development is not sited within any Zones of Archaeological Potential, as represented in *Map 5* of the SCDP, nor is it located in proximity to protected structures (RPS). However, within a 1km buffer of the proposed site, there are several ZAPs. These consist mainly of earth formations such as Rathes, which often consist of circular entrenchments which are slightly raised above the level of the adjoining land. The existing rathes closest to the Proposed Development (approximately 100m north and 165m south) are currently located in a residential setting adjoining the proposed site and are enclosed by stone walls and shrub vegetation. The proposed housing development will not detract from these

existing heritage elements in the landscape, due to its confinement around existing dwellings surrounding the site on three fronts and Cairns Road on the eastern boundary.

Section 13.1.3 in the Heritage Chapter within the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 (SEDP) details the Archaeological heritage objectives and policies for the Cuil Irra peninsula.

“Sligo Local Authorities recognise the significance of the unique and internationally-important archaeological landscape of the Cuil Irra Peninsula and are fully committed to ensuring that this special archaeological landscape is protected and preserved in situ.

Sligo local authorities will seek to develop a Management Plan for the Cuil Irra Peninsula to include Knocknarea, Carrowmore and Cairns Hill and will work with the relevant agencies to achieve that objective within the timeframe of this Plan.

In this regard, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has appointed a steering group to oversee the preparation of a Conservation Study of Archaeological Features at Knocknarea, Carrowmore and Cairns Hill, Sligo.”



Figure 3-5 Location of identified National heritage monuments on Cairns Hill in close proximity to the site

Two large cairns, situated east of Cuil Irra, are identified as a National Heritage Monument on the summit of Cairns Hill. The view from these cairns is focused on Lough Gill immediately to the southeast, the Garyvoge River to the east, and the Ox mountains approximately 15km to the southwest. The east cairn is shrouded in a thick growth of trees and not perceptible in the landscape, whereas the west cairn, located closest to the Proposed Development at approximately 500m, is surrounded by some vegetation and may be visible from selected locations, however, it is not perceptible from the proposed site. This is due to the strategic location of the Proposed Development and existing topography and vegetation in this area which ensures the preservation of the uniqueness of these special archaeological landscapes. The Proposed Development will not substantially impact on this existing National Heritage Monuments in the landscape, due to the visual containment provided by existing dwellings surrounding the site on Cairns Road, including in the direction of the Proposed

The Proposed Development is zoned as “R2- Low/Medium density residential areas”, which is represented in a light beige colour in Figure 3-6 above and described in the SEDP as follow:

“R2 - low/medium-density residential areas

Objective: *Promote the development of housing within a gross density range varying between 20 and 34 dwellings per hectare (8 to 13 dwellings per acre).*

In R2 zones, blanket construction of three- and four-bedroom houses will be discouraged. All new residential development will have to recognise and reflect the changing demographic structure in the house type and design, site layout and the additional facilities proposed. While housing is the primary use in these zones, recreational structures, crèches/playschools, educational facilities, community buildings, sheltered housing and corner shops will also be considered.”

The Proposed Development of low to medium density residential housing (74 No. housing units within 2.1 hectares equating to approximately 35 units per hectare) within the subject lands, aligns with the zoning policy of the SEDP and is fully compliant with the objective reported above. The density of 35 units to the hectare aligns with the gross density range within the R2 Objective. Based on the proximity to public transport nodes (within 500 metres as per the Guidelines), it is appropriate in this instance to apply a density of 35 units per hectare, within the higher range. Furthermore, the density proposed is in compliance with the national planning policy guidance applicable for the Peripheral and/or Less Accessible Urban Locations such as this site. The Guidelines state that a density of 35-50 dwellings per hectare is appropriate for outer suburban/ “greenfield” sites on the periphery of large towns such as Sligo.

The development prioritises the use of public transport, cycling, and walking. There are cycle and pedestrian connections throughout the development, 2 no. pedestrian and cycle access points (one via the main access to Cairns Road and the other to through the existing Ardcairn residential estate). The development is located within close distance to public transport nodes.

The SEDP also recognises this area as a *Strategic Land Reserve (SLR)*, shown in Figure 3-6 above as a red hatching, where the policy of Sligo Borough and County Council is to:

“P-SLR-1 *Designate and maintain as Strategic Land Reserve (SLR) the lands marked accordingly on the (Amended) Zoning Map pertaining to the SEDP.*

P-SLR-4 *Release lands from the Strategic Land Reserve only in exceptional circumstances, i.e. if the supply of residential land proves insufficient during the lifetime of the SEDP. Any land release shall be supported by factual evidence and shall conform with the strategic zoning policies outlined in Section 5.2.2 of the SEDP. The land release shall be done using the development plan variation procedure.”*

The requirement to release lands for residential purposes, as recognised in *P-SLR-4* above was further addressed by Sligo County Council (SCC) via a document variation (*Addressing Housing Motion 002*) recently circulated by SCC. This document informs the following:

“Sligo County Council is concerned that the lack of sufficient housing developments in recent years is inhibiting the efforts to grow Sligo as a Regional Growth Centre. As they estimate that Sligo will need an average of 468 units each year between 2020 and 2031 to meet national population targets, the forthcoming review of the CDP will provide an opportunity to examine the spatial distribution of lands zoned for residential purposes. The planning authority will consider utilising the material contravention process (pursuant to Section 34(6)(a) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000) to permit new residential development in circumstances where the site the subject of the planning application is located within lands designated as Strategic Land Reserve.”

The Proposed Development therefore will align with the material contravention process consisting with the SEDP *P-SLR-1* policy. Considering this zoning policy, it is deemed appropriate that the Proposed Development is sited on the proposed lands at Cairns Road residential area.

Furthermore, where the Proposed Development is zoned as '*R2 low/medium-density residential areas*', the surrounding area has the same zoning or '*R3 medium/high-density residential areas*.' Similarly, within the 2km study area, the zoning is described as areas to be used for residential development, open spaces, retail parks and '*public utilities*'. The general zoning for the study area can be considered as "for residential purposes" as described in SCC variation document.

3.2 Landscape Character

Landscape character refers to the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and how people perceive this. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement, and creates the particular sense of place found in different areas. The identification of landscape character as outlined in the DoEHLG Guidelines (2000) comprises the identification of primarily physical units (areas defined by landform and landcover) and, where appropriate, of visual units.

3.2.1 Site of the Proposed Development

The Proposed Development is an infill greenfield site, located within a low/medium density residential area of Sligo. Currently zoned as a strategic land reserve, the Proposed Development is located on land which has been retained for development in the current SEDP and SCC variation (motion 002).

Landcover and Land Use

Landcover is the term used to describe the combinations of vegetation and land-use that cover the land surface. It comprises the more detailed constituent parts of the landscape and encompasses both natural and man-made features.

The proposed site comprises two fields of disused semi-improved grassland. A relatively large, open forms the southern, western and north-western extent of the site. A smaller adjoining field (and derelict building) is located in the northeast corner of the site. Boundaries are vegetated with screening tree / hedgerow alignments east and south, whereas west and north of the site coincides with c. 2m high boundary walls from adjacent houses' rear gardens. The larger field within the site has a level difference of 8 meters from the northeast corner of the site to the southwest corner. The main access to the site is provided via a road within the Ardcairn estate located to the northwest of the subject lands. The site comprises views to surrounding hills, however, it's at the southwest corner of the site that more open views to Slieve Daeane occur.



Plate 3-1 View to the north-east along the northern perimeter of the Proposed Development Site.

The existing land use is mostly greenspace, although the majority is of poor quality and has a degraded appearance, which is heightened by the ruined building on site. This greenfield site is surrounded by residential properties in all directions, giving the site a semi-urban, semi-rural character.



Plate 3-2 View to the southwest of the site over an uneven, sloped field of semi-improved grassland

Plate 3-2 above shows an open view across the southwest of the site, landcover predominantly consists of rough grasses and other shrub vegetation. The south of the site is bordered by mature hedgerows and deciduous trees. The downwards-sloping topography in this south-westerly direction allows for long range views of a scenic quality of Slieve Daeáne from this field, as seen in the background of Plate 3-2 above.



Plate 3-3 View from the north of the site adjacent to the entrance to Ardcairn Estate

Plate 3-3 shows the north-eastern corner of the site (looking north) where the landcover comprises rough, uneven and overgrown land around the existing access to the Ardcairn housing estate. Both the intervening vegetation and the residential buildings seen in this image screen longer-distance views to the north from within the site.



Plate 3-4 View South towards the existing site entrance from the Ardcairn Residential Housing Estate

As seen in Plate 3-4 above, a sloped embankment of rough grassland forms the northern boundary of the site where it adjoins the Ardcairn residential housing estate.

Plate 3-5 below shows a medium distance view up a gently sloping field of semi-improved grassland towards the Cairns Road. The treeline seen in the background of the image separates this larger field from the smaller field and derelict house to the east of the proposed site along Cairns Road. Electricity poles and overhead lines are vertical man-made features of the site.



Plate 3-5 View to the east, towards Cairns Road from a location in the north-west corner of the site.

As seen in Plate 3-6 below, the west of the site is bordered by several deciduous trees interspersed along the field boundary. The Hawthorns housing estate is visible beyond this sparse line of vegetation. There are long ranging views of Knocknarea Hill in the background of the image, visible between the houses and treeline, which provide intermittent screening of long-range views in this direction.



Plate 3-6 Views west from the site towards the Knocknarea Hill



Plate 3-7 Derelict building in the northeast corner of the site

The derelict residential building shown above in Plate 3-7 is situated in the north-eastern corner of the smaller field within the proposed site. The house sits on the eastern boundary of the site that runs adjacent to Cairns Road.

To the left of the house, behind the hedge in Plate 3-8 below, the adjacent field that forms part of the proposed site is shown. The wall, partly overgrown with vegetation, provides intermittent screening of the site from visual receptors along Cairns Road. This field (the smaller of the two fields that make up the proposed site) slopes gently upwards towards its western boundary with the larger field.



Plate 3-8 Gap in vegetation along Cairns Road boundary with site

Landform - Topography and Drainage

The Proposed Development is located on the slopes of Cairns Hill, the peak of which can be seen to the right-hand side of Figure 3-7 below.

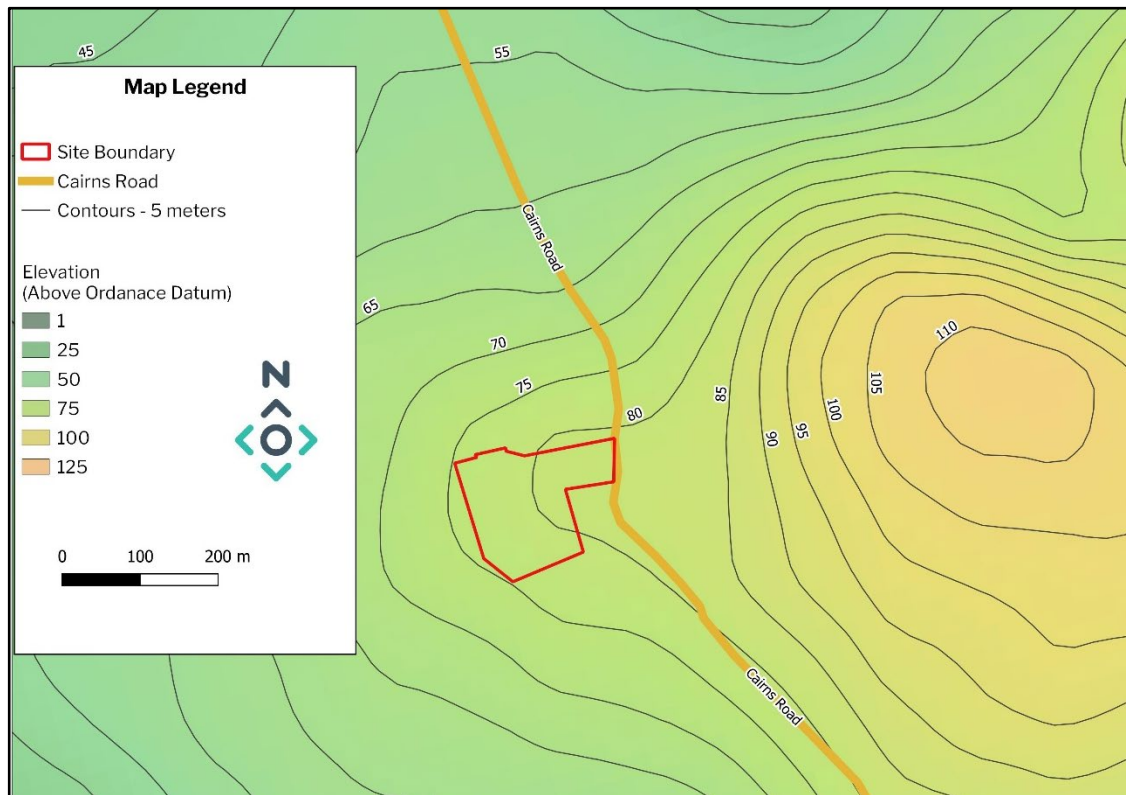


Figure 3-7 Topography of the landscape from a Digital Elevation Model

Overall, the topography of the Proposed Development site is relatively uneven, and there is a difference of approximately 8 meters in elevation levels from the north-eastern corner of the site to the south-western corner. In general, the landform of the site is gently sloping, with the main gradient oriented in a north-east to south-west orientation.

Cairns Hill to the east of the Proposed Development is sited at a higher topographical level at approximately 120m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). As a result of the site's location on the slopes of Cairns Hill, the landform immediately adjacent to the north, south, and west of the proposed site lies at a lower elevation than the site itself.

As shown in Figure 3-7 above, the Proposed Development is located on a small (relatively) sloped plateau extending from the landform of Cairns Hill (~120m AOD) to the west. Landform tapers down to the south-west from most areas within the site; suggesting that the site drains to the south-west where the Ballysadare Bay discharges into the North Atlantic Ocean at Strandhill. The Cairns Road passes by the red line boundary at the very crest of the hill, therefore there are no views looking down upon the site from the Cairns Road.

3.2.2 Wider Landscape Setting - Landscape Character



Figure 3-8 Aerial Image of the wider Landscape Setting of the LVIA Study Area (Source - Bing Maps)

Due to the location of the Proposed Development at the urban fringe of Sligo Town, the wider landscape setting is characterised by both suburban and semi-rural influences. Immediately surrounding the Proposed Development, the character is predominantly that of an urban residential landscape with a large number of residential housing developments and human settlements located to the north and west of the site. This can be seen on Figure 3-8 above, which shows the landscape of the wider study area.

The Proposed Development is located at the south-eastern extent of Sligo Town, an area predominantly characterised by residential developments and associated infrastructure, particularly to the north of the site. However, the landscape to the south of the site is characterised primarily by agricultural pasture fields, as seen in Plate 3-9, with some partial residential occurring along regional and local roads.



Plate 3-9 View of the agricultural pasture located to the south of the Proposed Development

To the west of the site the N4 national road is oriented in a north-south direction, passing within 1 km of the proposed site at its closest point. Further west, the landcover becomes predominantly agricultural, with pasture fields separated by mature hedgerows and mature deciduous treelines which dissect the landscape and define the field pattern. The peak of Cairns Hill is seen to the east of the site, approximately 1 km from the site boundary. Further east, the Garavogue River enters the LVIA study area from the south-east where it leaves Lough Gill, which is shown in Plate 3-10 below and leads to the north-east of the LVIA study area, beyond which it flows through Sligo Town and into the bay.



Plate 3-10 View of Lough Gill, located to the south-east of the Proposed Development

Landform of the Wider Landscape Setting

The topography of the wider landscape area can be seen below in Figure 3-9. The Proposed Development is located on the western slopes of Cairns Hill and is located at a relatively higher elevation than the surrounding area to the north, west and south. The elevation in these directions generally slopes downwards away from the Proposed Development, as seen in Plate 3-9 above which looks north towards the Proposed Development from the south. The peak of Cairns Hill, seen in Figure 3-9 below, to the east of the site, is located between the Proposed Development and a number of sensitive landscape receptors in the east of the LVIA study area, including the Garavogue River and Lough Gill. The intervening topography will provide substantial levels of screening of the Proposed

Development from these sensitive receptors in the eastern portion of the LVIA study area. The focus of views from locations between these sensitive landscape receptors and the Proposed Development will also generally be oriented towards areas of higher scenic quality than views to the west.

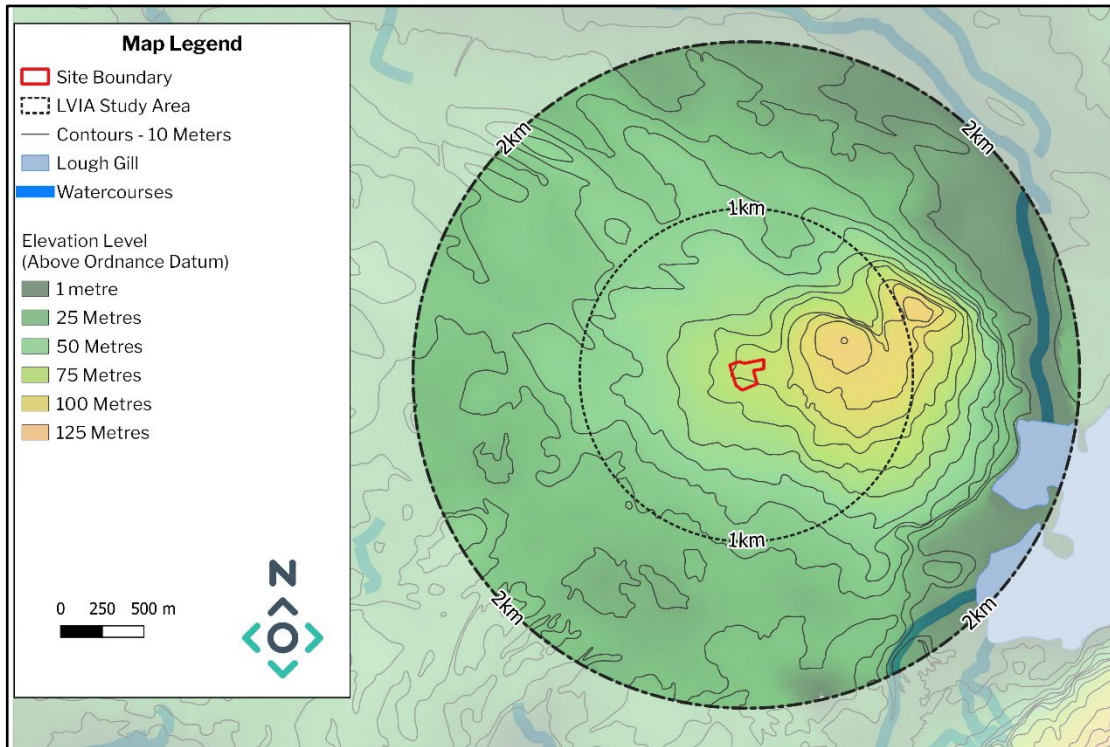


Figure 3-9 Landscape Features and Topography of the wider landscape

Further afield than the area shown in Figure 3-9 above are a number of notable topographical features. These are indicated in Figure 3-10 below.

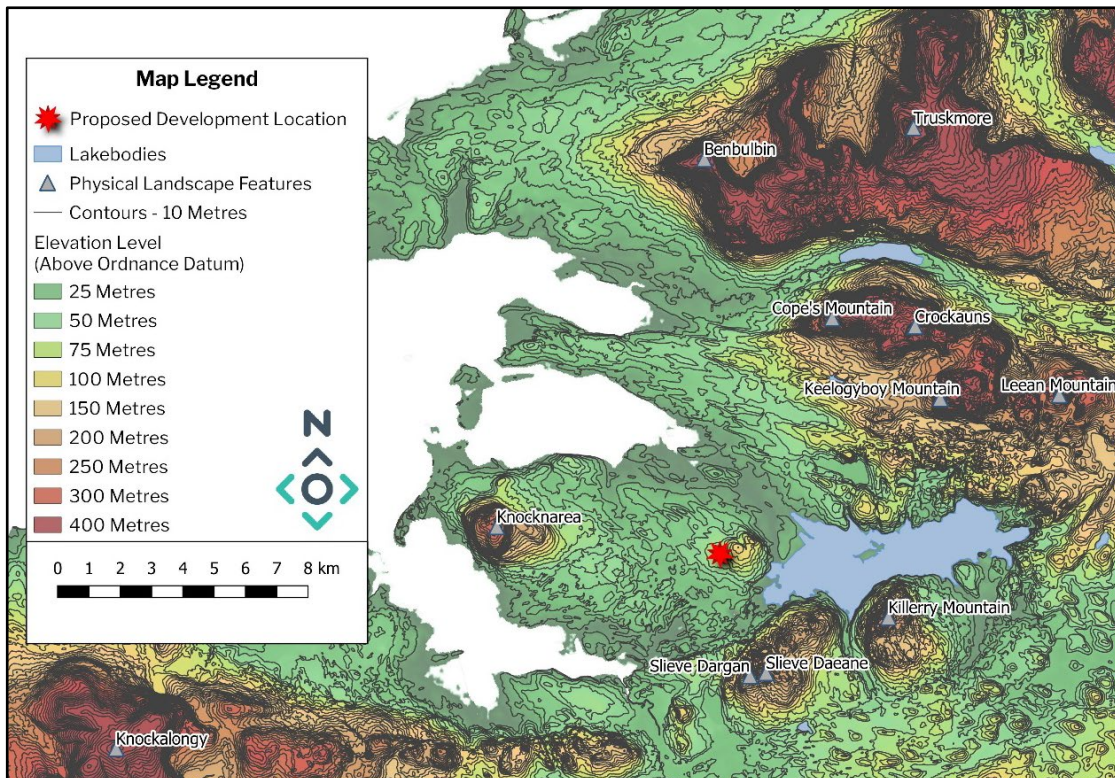


Figure 3-10 Notable topographical features in the wider landscape

Given the elevated height of the area within which the Proposed Development is located on the slopes of Cairns Hill, there is likely visibility of a number of the peaks seen above on Figure 3-10. These peaks are sensitive scenic landscape features designated in the SCDP as ‘Visually Vulnerable Areas’ (Benbulbin) and ‘Sensitive Rural Landscapes’ (Knocknarea, the Ox Mountains). These designations are visible within views from vantage points immediately surrounding the Proposed Development and from within the site itself (which is discussed further below).

Approximately 12 km to the north of the Proposed Development is the peak of Benbulbin, which is a notable topographical feature within the wider surrounding landscape. It is a wide flat-topped rock formation that is an important part of the cultural heritage of the area having been featured in several Irish Legends including ‘*The pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne*’. In addition to Benbulbin, Knocknarea Hill is located approximately 7km to the west of the Proposed Development, with views of this peak likely available from the landscape area surrounding the Proposed Development, particularly from Cairns Road, which is located adjacent to eastern site boundary. Finally, of particular note in the context of the Proposed Development are the hills Slieve Daeáne, as well as Killerry Mountain, all of which are located adjacent to the shores of Lough Gill, south and south-east of the Proposed Development. These are noted in particular, due to the likely visibility of these peaks from locations in the wider landscape area surrounding the Proposed Development. Plate 3-11 below shows these peaks from the western shores of Lough Gill to the south-east of the Proposed Development.



Plate 3-11 View of Slieve Daeáne and Killerry Mountain, image taken close to the western shores of Lough Gill

Views from within the site

Given the location of the proposed site on the elevated slopes of Cairns Hill, there are long-ranging views of a scenic quality to the south-east, south, west, and north from within the site itself. Plate 3-2 (seen previously) and Plate 3-12 below show various views in a southerly direction towards Slieve Daeáne, visible in the background of these images. These two images, taken from both the northern and southern sections of the site show that there is widespread visibility of the peaks from the majority of the proposed site.



Plate 3-12 View from the north-western corner of the site looking towards Slieve Daeáne

From the northern section of the site the rising topography screens view to the east, as seen in Plate 3-13 below. This topography, combined with the mature deciduous treeline seen in the background of the image, therefore, screens any views of Lough Gill or the Garavogue River from this part of the site.



Plate 3-13 View east from the north of the site, with long-range views restricted by the rising topography

Views to the west are similarly screened from this section of the site, as seen in Plate 3-14 below. In this case the built infrastructure from the residential dwellings and the low trees, hedgerows and scrub vegetation bordering the proposed site restrict views predominantly to short-range views from this location. The houses seen in the background of the image above form part of the Hawthorns housing estate. There is a partial view of Knocknarea Hill from this location, as seen in the centre-background of Plate 3-14 below. However, this view is heavily screened by the intervening residential dwellings. At the north-western entrance of the site, from the top of Ardcairn road, there are open views of Benbulbin to the North, as seen in Plate 3-15 below. Visibility of Benbulbin quickly reduces from within the site itself and there are very limited views in this direction. This is due to the screening provided by the residential dwellings seen on either side of the road in Plate 3-15 below and aided by the topography sloping downwards from the north-east of the site to the south-west, which provides screening in northerly directions from locations further south within the site.



Plate 3-14 View west from the north of the site, with long-range views restricted by the intervening screening elements



Plate 3-15 View north towards Benbulbin, from the north-west site entrance

The north-eastern corner of the Proposed Development site consists of a derelict residential dwelling (seen previously in Plate 3-7). This building is bordered by a number of deciduous trees and other vegetation forming a hedgerow around the property. This existing boundary vegetation provides additional screening from within the site, further restricting views to the east.



Plate 3-16 View from Cairns Road of the derelict dwelling located in the north-eastern section of the site

Overall, the majority of the long-range views from within the site are of Slieve Daeáine to the south, where the topography slopes downwards allowing for open-expansive views of that mountain range. In addition there is variable visibility of Knocknarea to the west. Visibility of this topographical feature varies throughout the site as a result of screening provided by the intervening residential dwellings from the Hawthorn housing estate. Long range-views to the north are quickly screened by the intervening residential dwellings and sloping topography that restrict views of Benbulbin and the Dartry Mountain range in this direction from the majority of the proposed site.

3.3 Landscape Value and Sensitivity

Landscape Values were assessed in order to determine the landscape sensitivity of the Proposed Development site and its wider landscape setting. Determination of landscape value considers scenic amenity designations, sensitivity and value designations found in local landscape policy, as well as other indications of landscape value attached to undesignated landscapes. Table 3-2 (below) describes various features and attributes of the landscape that indicate landscape value. These then contribute to the assessment of landscape sensitivity.

Table 3-2 Indications of Landscape Value

Features & Attributes of Landscape Value	Description
Landscape Designations	<p>In terms of land-use zoning, the Proposed Development is sited within a County Sligo ‘R2 low/medium density residential area’. There are no protected views within the site or specifically directed towards the site, nor are there any other landscape designation pertaining to the Proposed Development itself.</p> <p>Within the LVIA study area the Sligo Scenic Route and Way Marked Trails pass east of the site on the other side of the peak of Cairns Hill and so the views from these locations are screened by the intervening topography. Therefore, views of a scenic quality from locations along these designations are directed away from the Proposed Development.</p> <p>Views of the County Sligo Visually Vulnerable Area that runs along the peak of Cairns Hill, that will be partially visible from these designations within the eastern portion of the study area (see Figure 4-1 below) will not include views of the Proposed Development, given that the intervening topography will screen it.</p>
Landscape Elements Quality/Condition	<p>This refers to the physical state of the landscape and the condition of individual elements. The site of the Proposed Development is currently an unmanaged greenfield site, with landcover generally comprising of rough grass. The footprint of the Proposed Development also incorporates a derelict residential dwelling and associated sheds / units in the north-east corner of the site.</p>
Aesthetic Qualities	<p>The site has some aesthetic qualities considering the long-ranging views to the south over the rural mountainous landscape of the Ox Mountains and rural mountainous views to the west towards Knocknarea Hill. The grasslands of the site itself have no particularly defining or distinctive aesthetic qualities. The derelict nature of the residential dwelling located on the north-eastern corner of the site, which reinforces the current “urban void” use of this location.</p>
Wildness/naturalness	<p>The site is currently a dis-used, modified landscape. The views of the Ox Mountain range (Slieve Daeáine) incite a sense of wildness and naturalness. The immediate landscape setting of the site is semi-rural and semi-urban in nature due to the combination of both residential land-use and its proximity to agricultural lands. Overall, the landscape setting is a well settled, modified landscape with a limited sense of wildness of naturalness.</p>
Rarity/Conservation Interests	<p>There are no ecological rarity/conservation interests on the Proposed Development site itself.</p>
Cultural Meaning/Associations	<p>There are no sensitive cultural heritage sensitivities associated with the Proposed Development itself. However, as noted above in section 3.1.1.5, there are a number of Rathes and Cairns proximate to the site. It is unlikely that there will be substantial visibility of the Proposed Development from these sensitive cultural heritage locations, primarily due to screening from the existing residential buildings surrounding these designations at present, caused by existing vegetation, and the intervening topography. The closest National Heritage Monument, a Rath Ringfort (ID: SL01814) is situated</p>

Features & Attributes of Landscape Value	Description
	100m north of the site, although it has become overgrown, there is no existing public access to the monument.
Recreation Value	The site itself is privately owned and not currently used for public recreation.

In consideration of the indicators detailed in Table 3-2 above, the landscape value of the site is deemed to be **Low to Medium**. Features of the site with the highest landscape value are the long-ranging views available to the south. However, the site itself has no public recreational or cultural heritage value and the greenfield site is in a disused state. The site is disconnected from the sensitive landscape receptors to the east in the wider landscape setting, such as the Garavogue River and Lough Gill which will be well screened by the intervening topography of Cairns Hill itself.

Considering the zoning of the subject lands for residential development in the SEDP and the urgent requirement for housing in the area (as noted in the SEDP and document variation '*Addressing Housing Motion 002*', in Section 3.1.2.1), the susceptibility the landscape of the site to change is deemed to be **Low**. On balance, the general sensitivity of the site as a landscape receptor is deemed to be **Low**.

4.1.1

Visibility from Scenic Designations, Scenic Routes and Other Prominent Visual Receptors

Baseline investigations identified a number of sensitive visual receptors within the LVIA study area. The most prominent and sensitive visual receptors are located to the eastern and southern portions of the LVIA Study Area. The closest designated scenic route is Scenic Route 36 - L-3602 along Garavogue River and Lough Gill from Sligo to junction with R-287. This scenic route is located approximately 800m north-east the Proposed Development site boundary at its closest point. In addition, Scenic Route 14 - R-287 from Carrowroe to junction with road L-3605 at Correagh is located approximately 1km south of the Proposed Development at its closest point. Likely visibility was assessed from several locations along these scenic routes.

Scenic Route 36 Southbound – Visibility Appraisal

Scenic Route 36 runs in a north-south orientation in the eastern portion of the LVIA study area. It is noted that the stated focus of views from this designated scenic route is “*views of Garavogue River and Lough Gill*” (see Section 3.1.1.2 above), which is in the opposite direction to the Proposed Development. There will be no visibility of the Proposed Development from a majority of this route.

Visibility of the Proposed Development is only likely to occur from the northern section of the route within the LVIA study area. In this location, views in the direction of the Proposed Development are focus upon a heavily developed residential area existent on the north-eastern slopes of Cairns Hill, seen in Plate 4-1 below. There is likely to be very limited visibility of the Proposed Development from this location given the level of screening provided by the existing residential settlement seen in the image as well as the intervening distance (approx. 1km) from the Proposed Development.



Plate 4-1 View to the south-west, towards the Proposed Development site from Scenic Route 36 as it turns onto Tonaphubble Road

Further south along the Scenic Route, the topography of Cairns Hill begins to intervene in views towards the Proposed Development. The focus of views from locations along the scenic route is away from the Proposed Development to the north and east, as seen in Plate 4-3 below. Cairns Hill appears as a significant topographical feature from the majority of the locations along this scenic route within the LVIA study area, given the proximity of the Scenic Route to the hill. This factor means that views from the scenic route towards the Proposed Development will be entirely screened by the intervening topography from large sections of this route, particularly the stretch of the Scenic Route is located in close proximity to the proposed site, as seen in Plate 4-2 below.



Plate 4-2 View south-west, towards the Proposed Development from Scenic Route 36 along Holywell Road



Plate 4-3 Views north-east of an open and expansive view towards the Darty Mountains, from Holywell Road on Scenic Route 36

It is further noted that the waymarked walking trail noted on Figure 4-1 above follows the same route as Scenic Route 36 within the LVIA study area and the above visibility appraisal is also applicable to that walking trail.

Scenic Route 14 – Visibility Appraisal

Scenic Route 14 runs in a north-east to south-west orientation, to the south of the Proposed Development. It is noted that the stated focus of views from this designated scenic route is “view of Lough Gill, Slish Wood, Slieve Dargan, Slieve Daeane and Killery Mountain” (see Section 3.1.1.2 above), all of which are in the opposite direction to the Proposed Development.

The majority of the Scenic Route is located outside the LVIA study area to the south-east. Plate 4-4 below shows a view along the R287 regional road at the north-western start of the scenic route, towards the Ox Mountains (Slieve Daeáne) which the remainder of the scenic route extent. Plate 4-5 below shows a view from the same location along the R287 towards the Proposed Development, which is

located behind the residential buildings seen along the ridgeline. It is likely that there will be limited visibility of the Proposed Development from this location given the intervening distance (approx. 1km), the screening provided by the intervening treeline seen in front of the residential buildings along the ridgeline, the screening provided by the residential dwellings located under the arrow indicating the approximate location of the Proposed Development, and the undulating topography itself, which can be seen to form a ridgeline that partially screens the existing buildings.



Plate 4-4 View east from Scenic Route 14, with views of the Ox Mountains in the background



Plate 4-5 View north from Scenic Route 14, towards the Proposed Development Site

Overall, in relation to Scenic Route 14, it is likely that there will be limited visibility of the Proposed Development from only a relatively short section of the Scenic Route, where the scenic focus of the views from this section is on the mountain range in the background of a view directed away from the Proposed Development. A photomontage (Viewpoint 4) was captured from a location in close proximity to the capture location of the image above. This location was chosen it is one of the only locations where the Proposed Development will be seen from a County Sligo designated Scenic Route.

Other Designated Scenic Routes – Visibility Appraisal

Scenic Route 4 - N4 Collooney By-Pass from northern roundabout at Collooney to Carrawrow, and **Scenic Route 12** - R-284 from Carrowroe to junction at road L-3605 north of Ballygawley are both located in the south-western portion of the LVIA study area. The sections of these scenic routes within the LVIA study area are located at a similar orientation as Scenic Route 14 above, albeit they are located further from the Proposed Development than Scenic Route 14. As a result of this increased distance, there are increased levels of screening provided by intervening elements within the landscape such as hedgerows, treelines, buildings (residential and otherwise), and topography, particularly given that these relatively small sections of these scenic routes are both located at lower elevations than the section of Scenic Route 14 that is discussed above. Plate 4-6 below shows a view from the roundabout at the intersection of the N4 national road and the R287 regional road, which is located close to the start of both Scenic Route 4 and Scenic Route 12.

There is heavy screening provided by the treelines seen in the background of this view, with only partial views of Cairns Hill behind them. This image indicates that there will be extremely limited visibility of the Proposed Development from both of these scenic routes. In addition, as noted above in Section 3.1.1.2, the stated focus of both of these scenic routes is on landscape features that means that views will be directed away from the Proposed Development from locations along these scenic routes.



Plate 4-6 View north-east, towards the Proposed Development from the roundabout at the intersection of the N4 national road and the R287 regional road

OSi Viewpoint – Visibility Appraisal

As seen on Figure 4-1 above there is an OSi viewpoint located approximately 900m south-east of the Proposed Development site. This viewpoint is directed to the west, south and east, as indicated on the map, scenic views from this viewpoint will therefore be directed away from the Proposed Development. There will likely be no visibility of the Proposed Development from this location given the intervening topography and vegetation that can be seen in Plate 4-7 below.

4.1.1.2 Cairns Road – Visibility Appraisal

Views were assessed from the elevated vantage point on Cairns Road immediately east of the subject site where there are open views towards Benbulbin in the north and the range around Slieve Daeáine to the south. As shown previously in Figure 3-7, the Cairns Road passes the proposed entrance to the site at the crest of a localised plateau that extends west from the peak of Cairns Hill. As demonstrated by

the images and text below, the geographical and topographical characteristics of the Cairns Road route in relation to the Proposed Development serve to reduce the overall visibility of the Proposed Development from the Cairns Road. The positioning of the site to the west of the road and upon the very crest of this hill ensures that any proposed development on the subject lands will not screen existing views of Visual Vulnerable Areas to the north and south.



Plate 4-7 Views north-west along Cairns Road towards the Proposed Development Site

Plate 4-7 shows a short-range view across Cairns Road on the northbound approach to the site as it nears the crest of the hill adjacent to the site. Plate 4-7 was captured approximately 87 m from the red line boundary at its closest point. The road is bordered on either side by several residential dwellings which, along with the gently rising topography and the hedgerows and stone walls and wooden fences that define the borders of each property, screens long-distance views to the north, west and east from this location. A photomontage (Viewpoint 1) was captured from a location adjacent to the white house seen to the right of the image above. This location was chosen as visual effects are likely to be greatest from the crest of the hill in a location proximate to the Proposed Development.

A receptor travelling southbound from the proposed site entrance would encounter scenic views of the mountains to the south such as those presented Plate 4-8. Plate 4-8 shows views in the opposite direction of the photomontage captured from Viewpoint 1 (See Photomontage Booklet).



Plate 4-8 Views south, away from the Proposed Development Site, along Cairns Road, approximately 40m south-east of the proposed site entrance from Photomontage Viewpoint 1

A section of the ‘Sligo Scenic Drive – Lough Gill’ is located on the Cairns Road, however it is unlikely that there will be any visibility of the Proposed Development from this scenic drive. The image above shows where Plate 4-9 (below) was captured, immediately after the capture location there is a sharp

bend and steep slope before the Cairns Road becomes Sligo Scenic Drive – Lough Gill. There is unlikely to be any visibility of the Proposed Development beyond the bend in the road shown in the background of Plate 4-8 above.



Plate 4-9 Views north-west along Cairns Road towards the Proposed Development Site

Plate 4-9 above shows a similar view to that presented in Photomontage 1, albeit 100 metres further away where visual effects will be limited.



Plate 4-10 Views south along Cairns Road towards the Proposed Development site

Plate 4-10 shows a view towards the Proposed Development as a receptor reaches the crest of the hill on the Cairns Road when travelling in a southbound direction. Plate 4-10 was captured approximately 26 metres north of the Proposed Development Site at its closest point. A photomontage (Viewpoint 2) was captured from a location adjacent to the yellow and black road sign seen to the left of the image above. This location was chosen as visual effects are likely to be greatest from the crest of the hill in a location proximate to the Proposed Development.

4.1.1.3 Visibility from Visually Vulnerable Areas

The elevated ridgeline of Cairns Hill to the east of the site is the Visually Vulnerable Area identified in closest proximity to the site with recognised scenic value, located circa 300m from the Proposed Development at its nearest point. As mentioned above in Section 3.1.1.3, the more recognisable features of the ridgeline are only experienced from the north and west where the existing topography is steep and visually prominent. This ridgeline is not experienced in the same way from the west, where the Proposed Development is located, where it is viewed as a gently rising hill of agricultural and pastureland with no distinctive prominence, as shown in Plate 4-11 below.



Plate 4-11 Cairns Hill as a gently rising hill viewed from the West (Cairns Road)



Plate 4-12 Prominent Cairns Hill slope as viewed from Hollywell Road to the West

As seen in Plate 4-12, Cairns Hill has a more distinctive prominence in the landscape from the north and west due to steep slopes and a more recognisable ridgeline, even when screened by deciduous mature vegetation. These features are perceived on the opposite side of the hill from the Proposed Development.

No evidence was apparent during the site visit in February 2022 that the National Heritage Monuments within the study area and the Visually Vulnerable Area that is Cairn Hill are seen as visitor attractions by the general public.

Therefore, the Proposed Development will not pose a prominent visual presence in the surrounding landscape and will unlikely be perceived from visually vulnerable areas and receptors.

4.1.1.4 Visibility from Other Residential Receptors

Visibility Appraisals determined that there would be very limited visibility of the Proposed Development from the public roads within Residential Housing Developments surrounding the site such as Hilltop Park to the north, The Hawthorns to the west, as well as the private road servicing independent properties to the south of the site. Open visibility of the Proposed Development was found from the Ardcairn residential estate where the existing site access is located. A photomontage (Viewpoint 3) was selected here to represent residential receptors from a north-westerly geographical perspective.

4.2 Photomontage Viewpoints

4 no. viewpoint locations were selected for production of photomontages and assessment of visual effects. The location specific details of the viewpoints and the receptors they represent are described in Table 4-1 and their locations are illustrated in Figure 4-2 below. Assessment of the views and visual effects of the Proposed Development from these locations are described in the following section of this report – *Photomontage Assessment*.

It is not possible to present every view and every location by means of viewpoints. The choice of viewpoint locations is influenced by both the views available and the type of viewer. Care was taken to provide a range of views from various geographic perspectives (distance, orientation and elevation). It is to be noted that the photomontages are tools to assist the visual assessment and are not representative of visibility of the Proposed Development in the entirety of the LVIA study area.

The choice of viewpoint locations should cover locations where the development will be completely visible as well as partially visible.



Figure 4-2 Photomontage Viewpoint Location Map

Table 4-1 Photomontage Viewpoint Locations

Table of Viewpoints.		
VP No.	Description	Grid Ref. (ITM)
1	View to the north-west along Cairns Road in the townland of Carns (Duke). This viewpoint is located 40 metres south-east of the closest point of the Proposed Development site boundary.	E 569,803 N833,729
2	View to the south-west from the intersection of Cairns Road and Hill Top Park in the townland of Carns (Duke). This viewpoint is located 25 metres south-west of the Proposed Development site boundary.	E 569,794 N 833,846
3	View to the south along Ardcairn Road in the townland of Tullynagracken North. This viewpoint is located 50 metres north of the Proposed Development site boundary.	E 569,606 N 833,853
4	View to the north along the R287 in the townland of Tullynagracken South. This viewpoint is located on County Sligo Scenic Route 14. This viewpoint is located 1km south of the Proposed Development site boundary.	E 569,588 N 832,636

The photomontages can be seen in more detail in the high-resolution photomontage booklet accompanying this planning application. It is recommended that the following section should be read in conjunction with the photomontage booklet. In order to aid descriptions, smaller images of photomontages are also included within this document followed by a description of the ‘existing view’ (existing baseline conditions at each viewpoint) and its sensitivity in consideration of local receptors. The proposed photomontage is then described with a focus on determining the magnitude of change that will occur at each viewpoint. Factors that mitigate the visual impact are also noted and considered into the assessment process to give a residual visual effect.

4.3 Photomontage Assessment

4.3.1 Viewpoint 1

VP1 - Existing View



Figure 4-3 Viewpoint 1 – Existing View

Viewpoint 1 shows a short-range view across Cairns Road which slopes gently upwards from this viewpoint location towards the Proposed Development site. The road is bordered by a footpath on the near side and a wall of a private residential property runs along the far side of the road. Hedgerows in the midground of the image demark the Proposed Development site boundary. The derelict residential building that forms part of the north-eastern section of the site can be seen in the background, behind a mature hedgerow that borders the road on the left-hand side. Electricity lines can be seen running through the right midground of the view, across the road.

Viewpoint 1 was captured across Cairns Road outside an existing residential dwelling. From this viewpoint location there are views of a high scenic quality toward the Ox Mountains to the south. However, these views are directed away from the Proposed Development. The character of views from this location are semi-urban and semi-rural in nature due to the location of this viewpoint at the southern margins of suburban Sligo.

Receptors in this location are likely to include those who live in the existing residential dwellings, and they are deemed to be of relatively high sensitivity in consideration of their proximity to the development. This viewpoint is on a relatively low trafficked local road, other receptors may be motorised traffic or pedestrians. Considering the residential receptors in proximity and the relatively unremarkable nature of the existing view in this direction, the sensitivity of this viewpoint is **Medium**.

VP1 – Proposed View



Figure 4-4 Viewpoint 1 – Proposed View

The Proposed Development is visible in the centre of the photomontage. It is very prominent along the road as the road levels out before sloping downwards on the other side of the crest of the hill. Several of the proposed houses within the Proposed Development are screened by existing hedgerows to the left-hand side of the photomontage. The houses within the Proposed Development are of similar character to the existing residential dwellings and the Proposed Development is not a novel structure within this type of landscape. The top of roof level is also of similar height to the adjacent existing dwellings and will accompany the overall height of existing settlements along Cairns Road. The magnitude of change is deemed to be High due to the proximity of receptors from this viewpoint, however only the duplex units located on the site boundary will be visible from this location. The Proposed Development does not obscure any valuable views as there are no scenic views or views of a high scenic quality from this location in the direction of the Proposed Development. Overall, visual effects are deemed to be **Medium to High**.

4.3.2 Viewpoint 2

VP2 – Existing View



Figure 4-5 Viewpoint 2 – Existing View

Viewpoint 2 shows a short-range view towards the Proposed Development across Cairns Road from a location 25m northeast of the site. The foreground of the existing view is comprised of Cairns Road that slopes gently upwards towards the site. The derelict residential dwelling that forms part of the north-eastern section of the site can be seen in the midground of the image, behind a slightly vegetated stone wall that borders the road on the right-hand side. Additional residential dwellings can be seen on either side of this derelict building, obstructing longer-range views. Lamp posts and electricity lines are other man-made features seen throughout the view.

Visual receptors include several residential dwellings located behind this viewpoint, down a heavily inclined road, these receptors are deemed to be of relatively high sensitivity in consideration of their proximity to the development. This viewpoint is on a relatively low trafficked local road and there are no other visual receptors located north of this location with open views of the Proposed Development. On balance, sensitivity is deemed to be **Medium to High**.

VP2 – Proposed View



Figure 4-6 Viewpoint 2 – Proposed View

The Proposed Development is visible in the centre of the image. It appears quite prominent within the urban landscape as it is located on the slightly elevated crest of the hill. However, considering that the Proposed Development is replacing the existing derelict dwelling and providing residential amenity to an already semi-residential zone, the Proposed Development does not fundamentally change the character of the landscape or the view. The duplex units located in proximity to the site boundary are the only units visible from this location, and no other dwellings are perceived from the proposed residential development. The top of roof level is also of similar height to the adjacent existing dwellings and will accompany the overall height of existing settlements along Cairns Road. The Proposed Development does not obscure any valuable views as there are no scenic views or views of a high scenic quality from this location in the direction of the Proposed Development. The magnitude of change is deemed to be Medium and overall visual effects are deemed to be **Medium**.

4.3.3 Viewpoint 3

VP3 – Existing View



Figure 4-7 Viewpoint 3 – Existing View

Viewpoint 3 is representative of views looking south from the Ardcairn housing estate. The road slopes upwards very gently towards the site and is bordered on both sides by footpaths. The road is bordered on either side by several residential dwellings. An electricity line runs from the end of the footpath to the left-hand side of the image behind a house, and there is a lamp post seen within the same part of the view. A line of sparse deciduous trees run along the midground of the image where the road ends to meet the entrance of the Proposed Development site. There is a sharp change in the topography of the land as the soil bank in the midground of the image slopes upwards to the larger of the two fields that make up the proposed site. There are some extremely limited views of the Ox Mountains available from this location, that are heavily screened by the tree line and soil mound seen in the midground.

Visual receptors include several residential dwellings located within the view and behind this viewpoint, down an inclining road, these receptors are deemed to be of relatively high sensitivity in consideration of their proximity to the development. This viewpoint is on a relatively low trafficked local road and there are no other visual receptors located north of this location with open views of the Proposed Development. Considering the residential receptors in proximity and the relatively unremarkable nature of the existing view in this direction, the sensitivity of this viewpoint is **Medium**.

VP3 – Proposed View



Figure 4-8 Viewpoint 3 – Proposed View

The Proposed Development visible throughout the midground of the image, comprising a relatively substantial horizontal and vertical extent of the view. It appears quite prominent within the suburban landscape as it is located at a similar elevation and in close proximity to the viewpoint. However, considering that the Proposed Development is of similar aesthetic style and finishes as other residential dwellings within the view, the Proposed Development does not fundamentally change the character of the landscape or the view but instead extends the residential nature and use in this location. Existing dwellings have an east-west orientation with no units facing directly towards the proposed site. Furthermore, the Proposed Development does not obscure any valuable views as there are no scenic views or views of a high scenic quality from this location in the direction of the Proposed Development. There are no longer limited views of the Ox Mountain range as the Proposed Development screens these. However, these views were extremely limited in comparison with other views available in the immediate area, in particular those from Cairns Road, which the Proposed Development does not obstruct. The magnitude of change is deemed to be High and overall visual effects are deemed to be **Medium**.

4.3.4 Viewpoint 4

VP4 - Existing View



Figure 4-9 Viewpoint 4 – Existing View.

Viewpoint 04 is representative of views looking north towards the Proposed Development site from the regional road R287, and Sligo Scenic Route 14. This viewpoint shows open long-ranging views towards the Proposed Development. The viewpoint is located circa 1.05km from the southern site boundary. A gentle sloped field takes up the majority of the midground of the image, with a line of vegetation bordering the road seen in the foreground. An electricity line can be seen running through the midground of the view, across the field. In the middle distance, the north boundary of the field is bordered by sparse deciduous trees. The Hawthorns residential estate can be seen in the background to the left-hand side of the image behind the electricity pole. There are also several existing two-storey residential properties seen in the background behind the deciduous tree line, beyond the field.

The views towards the site from other locations along this road are screened by residential dwellings and vegetation. Viewpoint 4 was captured from a footpath along the road where there was a break in the roadside screening. Receptors in this location are likely to include residential receptors, pedestrians and motorised traffic, some receptors may be on Sligo Scenic Route 14 in a recreational capacity. However, as the scenic views along this drive are directed towards the east and there are limited views north due to roadside screening, receptor sensitivity is deemed to be of **Medium** sensitivity.

VP 4 – Proposed View



Figure 4-10 Viewpoint 4 – Proposed View

The upper storeys of six proposed houses are visible in the centre background of the photomontage. The ground floor and second floor sections are screened from view by the rising topography and tree line of the intervening landscape. The Proposed Development is of a similar scale and generally similar in aesthetic as the existing residential dwellings seen in the background left-hand side of the photomontage. Furthermore, it assimilates well within the landscape and does not fundamentally alter the character of this view. The magnitude of change is deemed to be Low. The Proposed Development does not obscure or intrude upon any valuable scenic views from this location as scenic views are in the opposite direction along the road which runs perpendicular to this location. Visual effects are significantly mitigated by distance. Overall, visual effects are deemed to be **Low**.

5. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

5.1 Predicted Landscape Effects

As well as describing the landscape character of the Proposed Development and wider landscape setting, the Landscape Baseline exercise (Section 3) identified current landscape designations in the Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023 (SCDP), as well as determining landscape value and landscape sensitivities relating to the site.

The greatest landscape effects will occur within the site boundary itself. The subject lands are a greenfield infill site zoned for residential housing in the current Sligo Environs Development Plan, and the proposed development of residential housing at the site is deemed to be acceptable and compliant with this local policy. No specific landscape designations apply directly to the site. Furthermore, no rare or unique landscape features or receptors were identified on the site or in its immediate surrounds. The site itself does not provide any outstanding recreational value or cultural heritage value. Long ranging views of the wider landscape have some aesthetic scenic quality, although these qualities do not pertain to the subject lands itself. On the grounds of these points, the landscape value of the proposed development site is considered Low to Medium. Considering that the subject lands are zoned for residential development, the susceptibility of the landscape of the site to this type of change is deemed to be Low. And overall sensitivity is Low.

There will be a High magnitude of change at the site throughout the construction stage and then upon completion of the Proposed Development. Earthworks, loss of natural ground cover, construction activities and then implementation of the proposed infrastructure will change the physical fabric of the site and its landscape character will be altered to that of a more suburban nature. Overall landscape effects within the site will be High. These landscape effects are highly localised to within the site boundary and these effects are in line with the zoning of lands in this area.

Several sensitive landscape receptors were identified to the east of the LVIA Study Area. The Proposed Development site is located on an elevated vantage point on the gentle western slopes of Cairns Hill. The northern ridgeline of Cairns Hill is designated as a Visually Vulnerable Area. Site visits determined that the Proposed Development will have no visual connectivity with the protected ridgeline of Cairns Hill or the other designated landscape receptors to the east of the study Area around Lough Gill (Visually Vulnerable Areas and an area of Sensitive Rural Landscape). The Proposed Development will not impact the integrity, character or distinctiveness of any designated landscape receptors within the LVIA Study Area.

As shown by the photomontage booklet, and visual baseline exercise, the Proposed Development is not likely to intrude upon other designated landscape receptors (Benbulbin or the Ox Mountains) seen within landscape views from the surrounding landscape. The Proposed Development is also of a scale and aesthetic similar to that of the existing diverse settlements and development in the area, therefore it is not likely to fundamentally effect the visually aesthetic attributes and existing character of the surrounding landscape.

Overall, the predicted landscape impact is deemed to be Medium, the site itself will undergo a change in character due to the creation of a residential development where there is currently a greenfield site. However, siting of the Proposed Development in this location causes little impact on the character of the wider landscape setting, particularly sensitive landscape receptors to the east.

5.2

Predicted Visual Effects

A desktop study, a site visit, the Proposed Development layout and photomontages all informed the assessment of visual effects. Likely visibility of the Proposed Development was appraised from many locations surrounding the site, this is comprehensively reported with the aid of photographs in Section 4 previously – *Visual Baseline*. The site visit established that the zone of visual influence is limited to areas in close proximity (approx. 1km) from the Proposed Development. Also, as shown in photomontages (Viewpoint 4), when seen from a distance of approximately 1 km, the Proposed Development is a small and unsubstantial addition to the landscape and will not likely cause any visual impact of consequence. In general, the magnitude of visual change is substantially reduced with distance from the development site.

Four photomontages were prepared from viewpoints located within the LVIA study area. The viewpoints represent prominent visual receptors surrounding the site and show views from multiple geographic perspectives and landscape contexts. The photomontage viewpoint locations are illustrated previously in Figure 4-2.

Visual receptor sensitivity was considered highest at locations in very close proximity (100m) to the Proposed Development, where nearby residential receptors would experience the greatest magnitude of change in their views (Viewpoints 01, 02, and 03). In addition, the nearby Scenic Route 14 (Viewpoint 04), located approximately 1 km south of the Proposed Development, was considered the highest sensitivity designated visual receptor within the LVIA study area.

From these viewpoints, the Proposed Development is only visible within views directed away from the views of scenic value, and due to its siting upon an elevated crest of a rise in topography, it is always viewed above the horizon and does not obscure any valuable long-ranging landscape views. The Proposed Development visually assimilates with the existing settlement pattern within the landscape and

does not cause a large alteration to the character of the existing views. Considering this, visual effects from these sensitive receptors (nearby residential receptors) were deemed to be Medium (Viewpoints 01, 02, and 03). Visual effects arising from Viewpoint 04 (SR 14) were considered Low considering the relatively low impact on the view which is not of any particular scenic quality.

The other scenic routes (designated) and undesignated scenic drives and recreation routes identified within the LVIA study area were found to have views in the direction of the Proposed Development substantially screened, primarily by the intervening topography of Cairns Hill itself (in the case of receptors located in the eastern portion of the LVIA study area), as well as other screening elements within the landscape such as other residential development and vegetation (e.g. roadside hedgerows, treelines). There is likely to be no visibility of the Proposed Development from the majority of locations along these receptors, and extremely limited views where visibility does occur. In any case, the focus views of high scenic quality from the sensitive visual receptors located in the eastern portion of the LVIA study area are directed to the north and east, away from the Proposed Development.

Due to the location of the Proposed Development on the crest of a local rise in topography, visibility of the Proposed Development from Cairns Road, the local road positioned directly east of the proposed site, is limited to locations in close proximity where the Proposed Development will be viewed from locations further down the hill. As a result, the valuable views of a high scenic quality that are available from this road will not be experienced with the Proposed Development within these views. From the north of the Proposed Development, travelling in southerly direction, there are valuable long-range views available of the Ox Mountains. However, these views begin from the point on the hill when the crest of the local rise in topography is surpassed. i.e. the north side of the crest, travelling south. As a result of its location, visual receptors travelling south along this road will have passed the Proposed Development by the time these long-range views become available. This is similarly the case for visual receptors travelling north along Cairns Road, where after passing the crest of the rise in topography, long-range views towards Benbulbin and the Dartry Mountain range become available. Again, the Proposed Development is located in such a position that visual receptors travelling north along this road will have passed the Proposed Development by the time these views become available. Therefore, the Proposed Development is so located as to prevent it obscuring or obstructing the long-range scenic views available to the north and south along Cairns Road.

Overall, the Proposed Development has a Medium visual effect as it will be seen and alter the view from sensitive visual receptors. However, it will not impact the key scenic sensitivities of the landscape and the wider landscape character.

5.3 Cumulative Effects

There are no known planned land-use changes or other developments proposed within the vicinity of the site or LVIA Study Area. Adverse cumulative effects arising from existing land uses in this area of south of Sligo Town are not anticipated.

6. CONCLUSION

The Proposed Development is located at the southern margin of Sligo Town, where the landscape transitions from suburban townscape to that of a more rural nature. The subject site is located immediately south of the Ardcairn housing estate and west of Cairns Road (L3602).

An assessment of Sligo County Development Plan's Landscape Characterisation Map informed that the Proposed Development is not located within sensitive categorizations such as 'Normal Rural Landscape' or 'Sensitive Rural Landscape', and instead is sited within an urban setting. The site is however, surrounded by Scenic Routes, Visually Vulnerable Areas and Archaeological elements in the landscape. A visual appraisal of the likely visibility of the Proposed Development from the designated scenic routes within the LVIA study area indicated that the subject site will comprise very limited or no visibility from these routes due to the screening provided by existing residential settlements, vegetation and intervening distance and topography.

The elevated ridgeline of Cairns Hill to the east of the site is the Visually Vulnerable Area identified in closest proximity to the site and located within the study area. This landscape feature is a ridgeline with some scenic value as it is the notable feature of Cairns Hill itself, however the more recognisable features of the ridgeline are only experienced from the north and east where the existing topography is steep and visually prominent. This ridgeline is not experienced in the same way from the west, where the Proposed Development is sited, where it is viewed as a gently rising hill of agricultural land of no distinctive or recognisable prominence. The Proposed Development will therefore not comprise any visual presence from the northern and eastern directions of Cairns Hill, where the ridgeline is more prominent.

The Sligo Environs Development Plan informs of the National Heritage Monuments existent in Sligo County and sites two Rath/Ringforts in close proximity to the site boundary (distanced under 200m) as well as two Cairns located along the ridgeline of Cairns Hill. It was assessed that the Proposed Development will not substantially impact on this existing National Heritage Monuments in the landscape, due to the visual containment provided by existing dwellings surrounding the site on Cairns Road, including in the direction of the Proposed Development, existing vegetation and intervening topography and distance.

Generally, the Proposed Development is only perceived in close proximity to the site due to its strategic siting at the western gently slopes of Cairns Hill and located on a high point along Cairns Road. The Proposed Development consists of construction of residential housing which is compliant with the local policy in this location. No specific landscape designations or relevant unique landscape features were identified on site or its immediate surroundings. The site itself does not provide any outstanding recreational value or cultural heritage value. Long ranging views of the wider landscape have some aesthetic scenic quality; however, these qualities do not relate to the subject lands itself. Therefore, the landscape value of the proposed development site was considered Low to Medium. Seeing that the subject lands are zoned for residential development, the susceptibility of the landscape of the site to this type of change was deemed to be Low. And overall sensitivity has been deemed Low.

The Proposed Development is also of a scale and aesthetic similar to that of the diverse existing settlements and development in the area, therefore it was considered not likely to fundamentally effect the visually aesthetic attributes and existing character of the surrounding landscape.

Baseline investigations identified a number of sensitive visual receptors within the LVIA study area. The most prominent and sensitive visual receptors are located to the eastern and southern portions of the LVIA Study Area and refer to the residential receptors in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development (c. 100m) which will experience the greatest magnitude of change in their views (Viewpoints 01, 02 and 03), and regional road R287 which coincides with a portion of Scenic Route 14 distanced c. 1km south of the Proposed Development (Viewpoint 04). These sensitive visual receptors informed the selection of 4 no. viewpoints for the preparation of verified photomontages.

From these viewpoints, the Proposed Development is only visible within views directed away from the views of scenic value, and due to its siting upon an elevated crest of a rise in topography, it is always viewed above the horizon and does not obscure any valuable long-ranging landscape views. The Proposed Development visually assimilates with the existing settlement pattern within the landscape and does not cause a large alteration to the character of the existing views. Considering this, visual effects from these sensitive receptors (nearby residential receptors) were deemed to be Medium (Viewpoints 01, 02, and 03). Visual effects arising from Viewpoint 04 (Scenic Route 14) were considered Low considering the relatively low impact on the view which is not of any particular scenic quality.

Overall, the Proposed Development was considered to comprise a Medium visual effect as it will be seen and will alter the view from sensitive visual receptors, mainly along Cairns Road and in proximity to the site itself. However, it was deemed not impactful to the key scenic sensitivities of the landscape and the wider landscape character.