

AVR – Environmental Solutions Ltd.

LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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**SWS ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
SHINAGH HOUSE
BANDON
CO. CORK**

SWS Environmental Services

MEMBER OF



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Landscape Assessment Policy in Ireland

The Heritage Act, 1995 identifies landscape and seascape as part of the Irish Heritage.

A European Landscape Convention was signed in 2000 by EU member states. Since this development, a more defined landscape policy in Ireland has filtered down from national to local level.

Landscape characterisation and assessment in Ireland is primarily carried out by local authorities. In June 2000, the (then) Department of Environment and Local Government issued Consultation Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities for the purposes of Landscape and Landscape Assessment.

These guidelines were introduced in preface to the National Spatial Strategy, and reflect the awareness of the Government of the changing nature of the landscape due to increasing development pressure. These guidelines identify mechanisms for the planning authorities to identify the types of landscape and categorise those landscapes within their boundaries.

More recently, in 2002 the Heritage Council published its Policy Paper on Ireland's Landscape and the National Heritage. This document outlines the strategies the Heritage Council would like to see the relevant authorities adopt with regard to the Irish Landscape. The vision of the Heritage Council for the Irish landscape is identified as:

The Irish landscape will be a dynamic, living landscape, one which accommodates the physical and spiritual needs of people with the needs of nature in a harmonious manner, and as a result brings long term benefits to both.

1.2 Local Planning Policy for Landscapes

The site of the proposed development falls within the administrative boundary of Cork County Council. The Cork County Development Plan, 2003, outlines the policy of Cork County Council with regard to visual and scenic amenity. The landscape and scenic amenity considerations in the Plan have been drafted in keeping with the Draft Guidelines as issued by the DOELG (see section 1.1)

The key objectives stated in the plan are:

ENV 3-2: It is a general objective to protect the visual and scenic amenities of County Cork's built and natural environment.

ENV 3-3: It is a particular objective to preserve the visual and scenic amenities of those areas of natural beauty identified as scenic landscape and shown in Scenic Amenity Maps of this plan.

ENV 3-4: It is a general objective to preserve the character of all important views and prospects, particularly sea views, river or lake views, views of unspoilt mountain, upland or coastal landscapes, views of historical or cultural significance (including buildings and townscapes) and views of natural beauty.

ENV 3-5: It is a particular objective to preserve the character of those views and prospects obtainable from scenic routes identified in this plan.

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1.3 Assessment Methodology

The visual impact of the development on the landscape was assessed as follows:

- The existing landscape in the study area was described and assessed to determine its sensitivity,
- A Landscape Development Proposal Report was drawn up with measures designed to enhance the immediate surroundings and visual attractiveness of the site,
- The impact of the visibility of the proposed development on the surrounding environment was examined and mitigation strategies were outlined accordingly to reduce any negative impacts on both the landscape of the area and visibility of the site,

The overall visual impact of the development on the landscape was determined based on the results of the landscape assessment, visibility analysis and desktop studies.

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2.0 Existing Landscape

2.1 Site Location

The area of the proposed development is zoned Industrial/Enterprise in the Cork County Development Plan 2003 (refer to Fig. 1.2 Cork County Planning Zones).

Youghal Landfill and Civic Amenity Centre which is operated by Cork County Council is adjacent to the site. Other facilities in the vicinity of the site include the Youghal National Car Test Centre, Foxhole IDA Industrial Estate c.350m away on the R634 out of the town and the Foxhole Business Park incorporating Millennium Court office buildings. The nearest dwelling house is at the junction of the site access road and the R634. The site is a brownfield site and currently used to store empty skips and containers.

2.2 Elevation

The site occupies a very low-lying elevation, as it is enclosed to a significant extent by the confluence of rivers that surrounds it. Elevations changes across the site are negligible in comparison to the surrounding landscape. The site can be seen from the N25 scenic particularly in Waterford section directly opposite the site. However the Youghal Landfill and Civic Amenity Centre is the focal point of this fragmented landscape. The proposed development will form a linear block between the NCT Centre and the Youghal Landfill and Civic Amenity reducing the visual impact of the existing developments.

2.3 Aspect and Site Exposure

The relative geographical context of the existing site to its surrounding landscape is significant in terms of the visibility from the site and visibility to the site from the surrounding hinterland. Visibility from the site (in the absence of any new development within it) is enclosed to a certain extent by the slightly more elevated terrain to the south, west and north of the site.

Site Aspect is south facing with the minimal sloping degree of 0-1. Therefore, site exposure is greatest on the eastern and southern side of the site, across the Blackwater Estuary and Youghal Bay.

2.4 Landcover and Landuse

The land cover classification within the site is categorized as built landscape and land cover within the hinterland is dominated by both wet and dry grassland. These land covers historically occupied the proposed site area. The Cork County Development Plan 2003,

supports the Landcover classification as the site is located in an area zoned for industrial and enterprise development.

The overall visual impression of the site is a brown field site with a complex of built anthropogenic structures such as high metal fencing and posts, telephone and electricity poles, Youghal Landfill and Civic Amenity Centre, the NCT Centre, Foxhole IDA Industrial Estate and Foxhole Business Park incorporating Millennium Court office Buildings.

Beyond the site, the landscape of the wider area also demonstrates a blend of natural and anthropogenic features. From most prospects around Youghal, there are a number of man-made features visible, particularly on the horizon. These include the water tower on Cork Hill, the spire of a church in Youghal town and a communications mast. The undulating hills at Youghal Bay are indented with residential developments.

Agricultural practices such as tillage, grasslands and forestry dominate the landuse patterns of the hills.

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3.0 Impact of Proposed Development

3.1 Impact of the Proposed Development on the Immediate Surroundings

A Landscape Development Proposal Report was under taken (Refer to Appendix 9). A Landscape Masterplan and detailed planting specifications for the proposed site was prepared and the proposed planting is based on the recommendations of the Cork Rural design Guide published by Cork County Council.

This outlines the measures designed to enhance the immediate surroundings and visual attractiveness of the site.

Landscape proposals are shown on Landscape drawing numbers 04409-301 and 04490-302 attached in the Landscape Development Proposal Report in Appendix 9. The main purpose of the landscape proposals is to provide effective and visually stimulating screening to the proposed development, whilst adding to the existing secure boundary. The primary landscape elements to the site will be positioned along the entire length of the site boundary. The planting shall compromise native/naturalised tree planting and a variety of shrub species.

3.2 Impact of the Proposed Development on the Surrounding Environment

A number of viewpoints were selected from vantage points surrounding the site in order to best assess the impact of the proposed development. These viewpoints vary in elevation and orientation around the site. For viewpoint locations see Fig. 3.1.

Criteria in the selection of these viewpoints included views of the proposed development from roads and from amenity areas and residential areas. The landscape and visual impact report for Youghal Landfill, prepared on behalf of Cork County Council, was also consulted due to the adjacency of the landfill to the site of the proposed development.

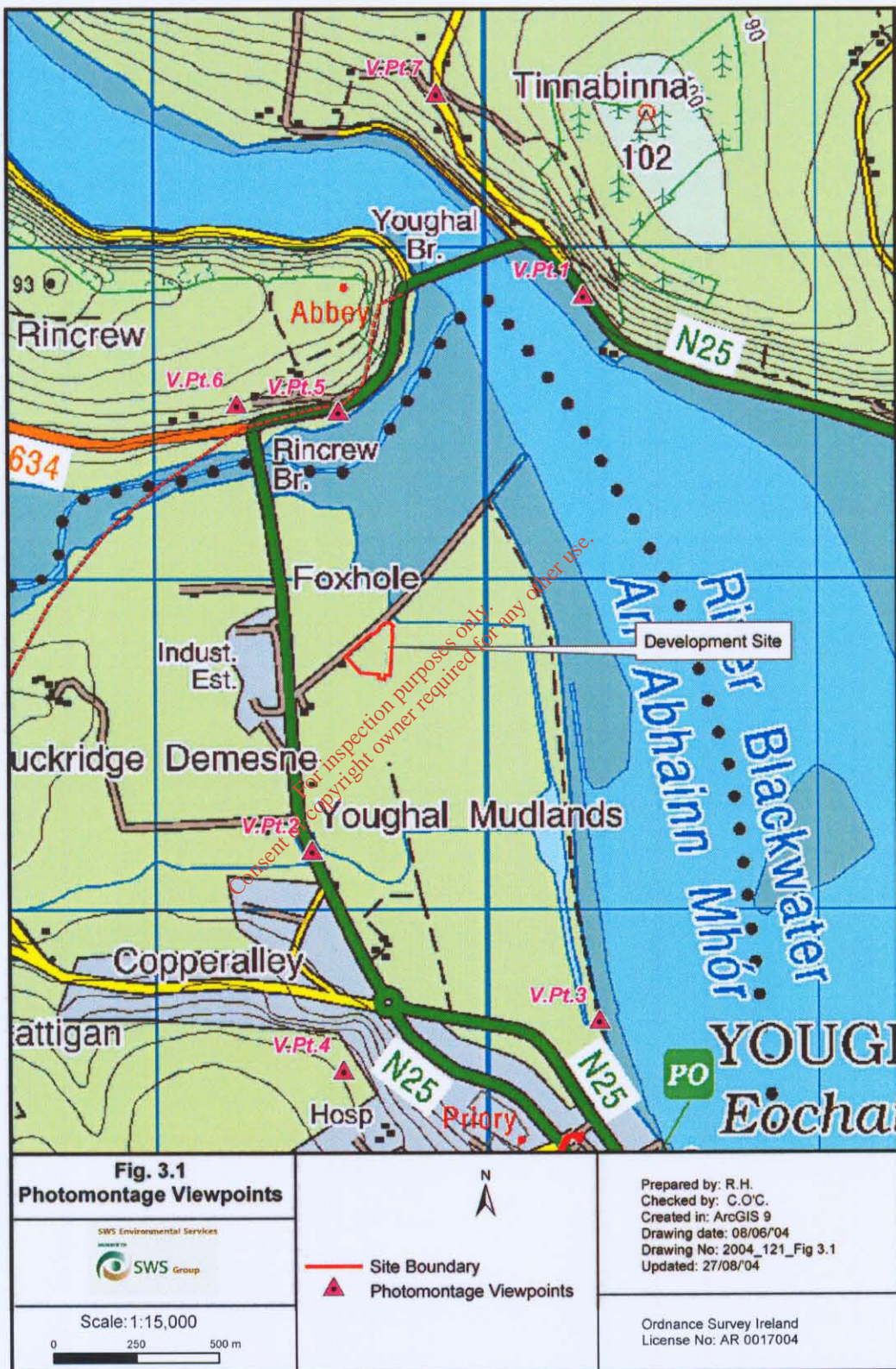


Figure 3.1 Viewpoint Location Map

3.3 Visual Impact from Selected Locations

Viewpoint 1

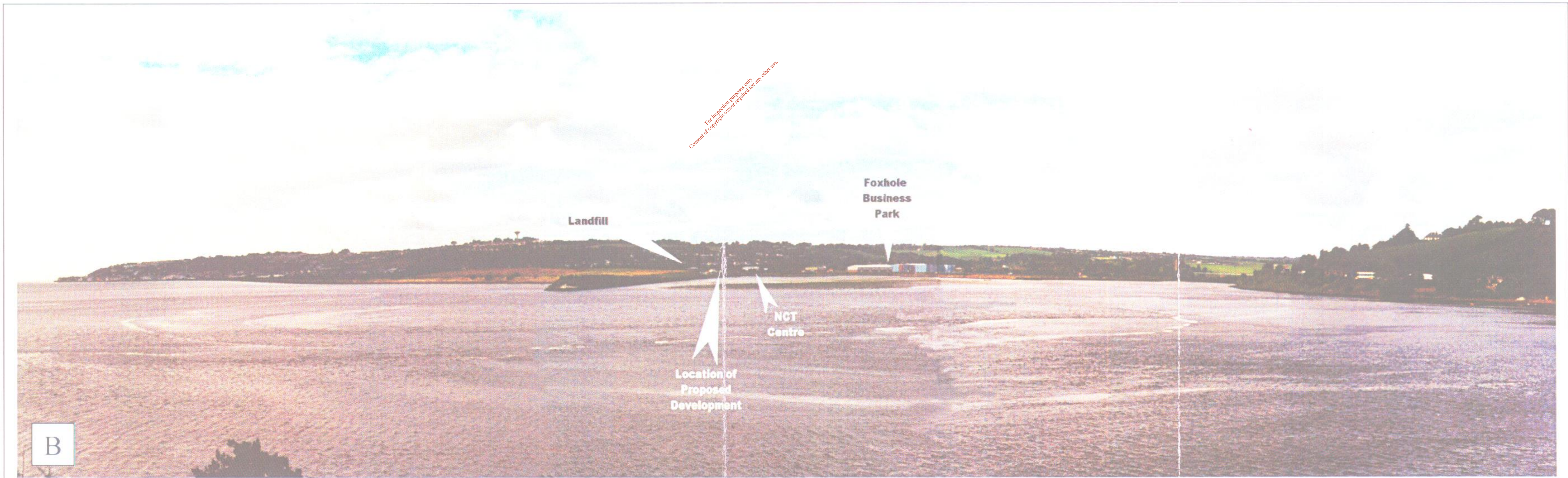
Viewpoint 1 (Fig. 3.2) is located on the N25, along the Blackwater Estuary looking south west towards the site of the proposed development.

The near-sight view from this location is dominated by the estuary itself. The Youghal Syncline dominates the overall landscape; some features identifiable along its crest include the water tower and a church spire in Youghal Town as well as trees. Indentations on the syncline include modern residential developments such as on Cork Hill.

The low-lying tidal area directly across the estuary from this viewpoint is principally dominated by the buildings of the Foxhole Business Park (including Millennium Court and other warehousing units). The strong colour scheme of these buildings contrasts with the background greens of the grasslands.

Also visible from this location are the Youghal Mudlands. These are primarily wet grasslands with a network of low hedgerows.

Fig. 3.2 (b) illustrates the location of existing man-made features and the location of the proposed development. The proposed development is surrounded by a context of recent commercial/industrial structures, some of which (e.g. Millennium Court) are on a larger scale than the buildings of the proposed development. Therefore, the proposed development will not represent a significant visual intrusion on the existing landscape from this prospect.



VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF
 A WASTE RECOVERY/TRANSFER AND SLUDGE DRYING FACILITY
 AT FOXHOLE, YOUGHAL.

View from the N25 south east of Youghal Bridge, Co. Waterford.
 View Position: E 210295 N 80855
 Camera Height: 1.8 m

VIEWPOINT 1
 FIGURE 3.2



Viewpoint 2

This viewpoint (Fig. 3.3) was chosen as a representation of the view driving north along the R634 from Youghal town to the Youghal By Pass.

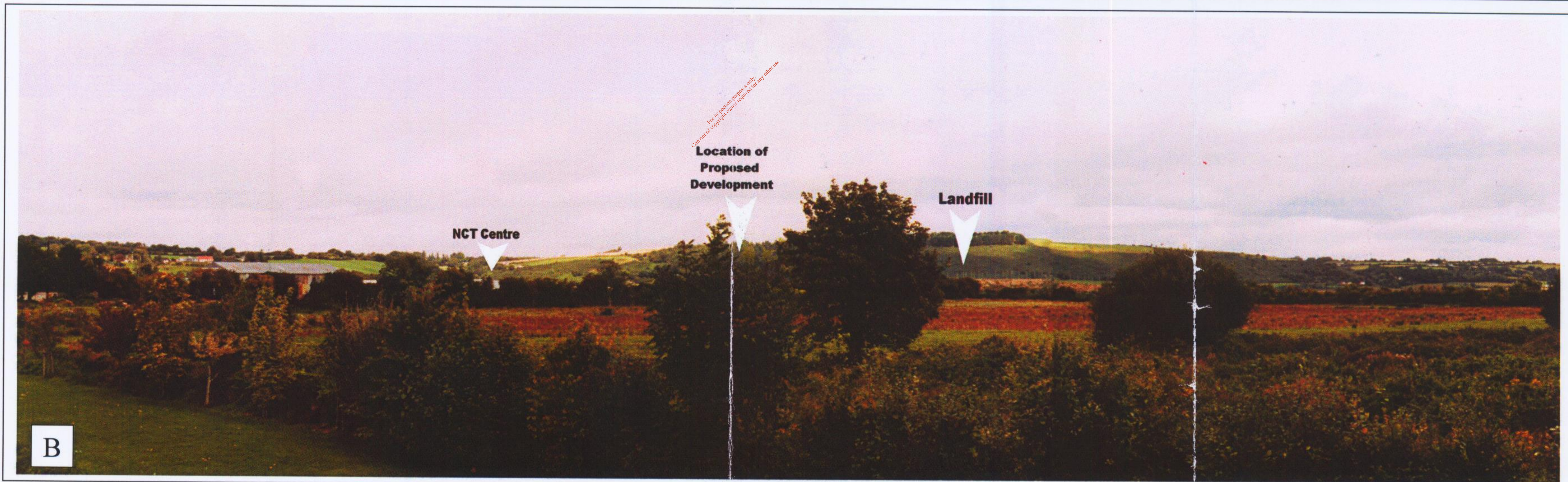
The overall view from this location is influenced by the wet grasslands of Youghal Mudlands and the farmed hillsides beyond. Features on the low-lying lands are scarcely visible due to the presence of vegetation along the roadside and a network of hedgerows across the grasslands.

Hedgerows dominate the view from the road towards the site of the proposed development. These hedgerows provide screening from the recent developments at Foxhole Business Park as well as the NCT Centre and the Youghal Landfill (Fig. 3.3 (b)). Therefore, these are also likely to provide adequate screening of potential views of the proposed development from this location.

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A



B

VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF
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View from the R634, north of Youghal town.

View Position: E 209468 N 79184
Camera Height: 1.8 m

VIEWPOINT 2

FIGURE 3.3

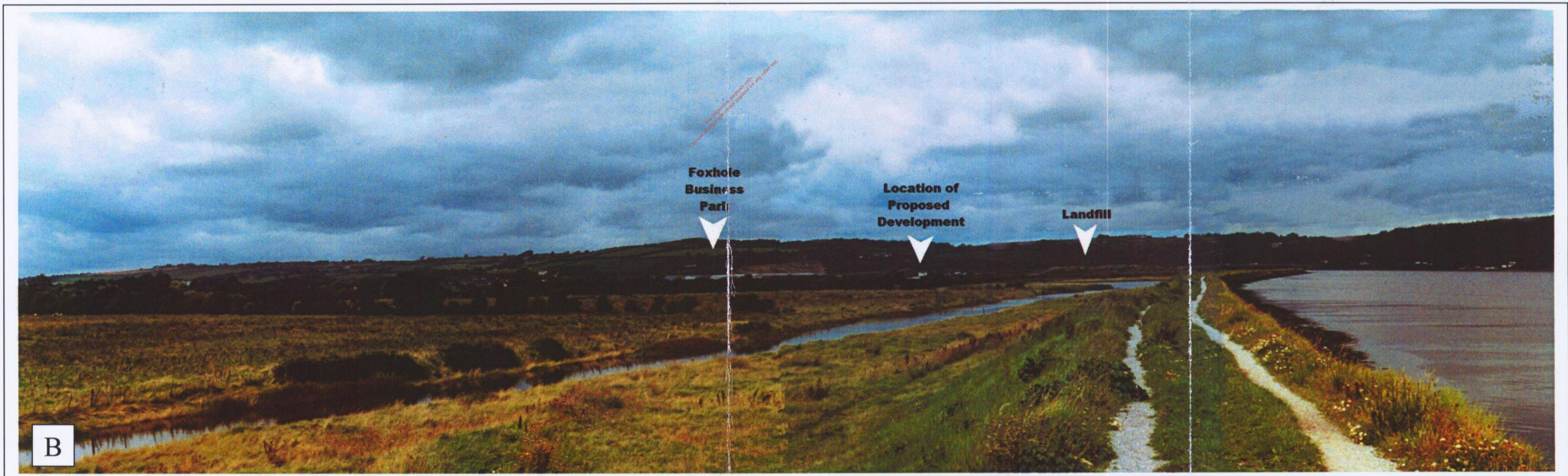
Viewpoint 3

Viewpoint 3 (Fig. 3.4) is located at the border of Youghal Mudlands with the Blackwater Estuary. The Mudlands are encircled by pathways which have become a public amenity. This viewpoint was chosen to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on view from this amenity area.

The backdrop of the view from this site is of the hillside trending east-west. The farmland patterns dominate the landuse impression of this view. The hedgerow network in the Mudlands offers screening to the structures of the Foxhole Industrial Estate (which is not visible), Foxhole Business Park, the NCT centre and Youghal Landfill.

The existing view is dominated by vegetation in the hedgerows of the Mudlands and the background hillsides. Existing structures in keeping with the nature of the proposed development do not cause a significant visual intrusion in this area. Therefore it is unlikely that the proposed development will further impair this landscape.

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VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF
 A WASTE RECOVERY/TRANSFER AND SLUDGE DRYING FACILITY
 AT FOXHOLE, YOUGHAL.

View from an amenity area on the border of Youghal Mudlands
 and the Blackwater Estuary.

View Position: E 210335 N 78672
 Camera Height: 1.8 m

VIEWPOINT 3
 FIGURE 3.4



Viewpoint 4

Viewpoint 4 (Fig. 3.5) is located on Cork Hill on the northern side of Youghal Town. A residential and holiday home development has been constructed at this location to take advantage of the views and prospects offered at this elevated position.

In the far distance mountains are visible; to the North, the peaks of the Knockmealdown Mountains can be discerned, while to the East, Drum Hills can be seen.

Youghal Mudlands spread out from North to South from this vantage point. The network of hedgerows produces an agricultural pattern on the landscape both in the Mudlands and on the hills beyond. The grey cladding of buildings in the vicinity of the proposed development serves to minimise their intrusion upon the landscape from this viewpoint. The scale of the hills to the north of the estuary serves to further diminish the impact of these structures.

The scale of the proposed development does not exceed that of existing structures in the landscape. These anthropogenic structures and the distance from the proposed site will significantly reduce the visibility of the proposed site. Therefore, the proposed development will not have a significant visual impact on this viewpoint.

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VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF
 A WASTE RECOVERY/TRANSFER AND SLUDGE DRYING FACILITY
 AT FOXHOLE, YOUGHAL.

View from a residential and holiday home development on Cork Hill.

 View Position: E 209560 N 78524
 Camera Height: 1.8 m

VIEWPOINT 4
 FIGURE 3.5



Viewpoint 5

Viewpoint 5 (Fig. 3.6) reflects the view from the N25, between Rincrew and Youghal Bridges. A mobile catering unit operates nearby and a lay-by offers tourists an opportunity to take in the view of the Blackwater Estuary and Youghal Town.

Youghal town and its periphery developments are central to the view from this location. On both sides, the hillsides with their farmland patterns and trees surround the town. The residential areas of the town can be determined on the hills.

The commercial/industrial developments at Foxhole (Business Park in particular) are clearly visible from this location. The absence of any screening on the northern side of these structures renders them highly visible from this vantage point.

The proposed development is similar in scale to the existing developments at Foxhole (Fig. 3.6(b)). The proposed development is located further from the vantage point than the current Foxhole developments and thus will have less of a visual impact.

The proposed development will not significantly reduce views of Youghal town from this location. Furthermore, the Landscape Development Proposal Report which has been prepared for the proposed development will offer screening consisting of a 2m buffer of trees, using the preferred planting list, detailed in the Cork County Development Plan 2003, around the site, unlike the current structures at Foxhole. Therefore, the proposed development will have a minimal impact on the view from this location.



VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF
A WASTE RECOVERY/TRANSFER AND SLUDGE DRYING FACILITY
AT FOXHOLE, YOUGHAL.

View from the N25, between Rincrew and Youghal Bridge.

View Position: E 209553 N 80505
Camera Height: 1.8 m

VIEWPOINT 5

FIGURE 3.6

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Viewpoint 6

A number of houses are located on the hillside above Rincrew Bridge. Viewpoint 6 (Fig. 3.7) was chosen to assess the potential visual impact of the proposed development on these residences.

In the distance, Youghal town can be seen from this location. The hillside residential areas as well as the waterside developments are visible. The headland on the Waterford side of the estuary is also a prominent feature on the landscape.

The view of the Mudlands area close to the viewpoint is dominated by the R634, from Youghal Town to the N25 and the Foxhole commercial/industrial developments (Fig. 3.7(b)). Foxhole Business Park, due to the lack of any screening, is of particular prominence. By comparison, Foxhole Industrial Estate demonstrates the effectiveness of screening offered by vegetation.

The proposed development will not obscure views of Youghal Town or the surrounding hills. The scale of the proposed development is in keeping with the existing developments in close proximity to the site.

Furthermore, the Landscape Development Proposal Report which has been prepared for the proposed development will offer screening consisting of a 2m buffer of trees, using the preferred planting list, detailed in the Cork County Development Plan 2003, around the site. Therefore, the proposed development will have a minimal impact on the view from this location.



VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF
A WASTE RECOVERY/TRANSFER AND SLUDGE DRYING FACILITY
AT FOXHOLE, YOUGHAL.

View from residential houses from the hillside above Rincrew
Bridge.

View Position: E 209246 N 80527
Camera Height: 1.8 m

VIEWPOINT 6

FIGURE 3.7

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Viewpoint 7

Viewpoint 7 (Fig. 3.8) is at an elevated location North of Youghal Bridge. Several residences are located along the third class road, which abuts the N25 just East of Youghal Bridge.

Hedgerows are present on both sides of the third class road along which this viewpoint was taken. These hedges significantly limit the view from both the roadside and the houses. Views of Youghal Town and the estuary are intermittent.

The view from this location is dominated by the estuary and the headland of Rincrew. In the distance, Youghal Mudlands and Youghal Town are visible. Foxhole Business Park and Foxhole Industrial Estate are both screened by the Rincrew headland. Anthropogenic features clearly visible include housing developments, some commercial/industrial developments and infrastructural features (powerlines, water tower, etc.).

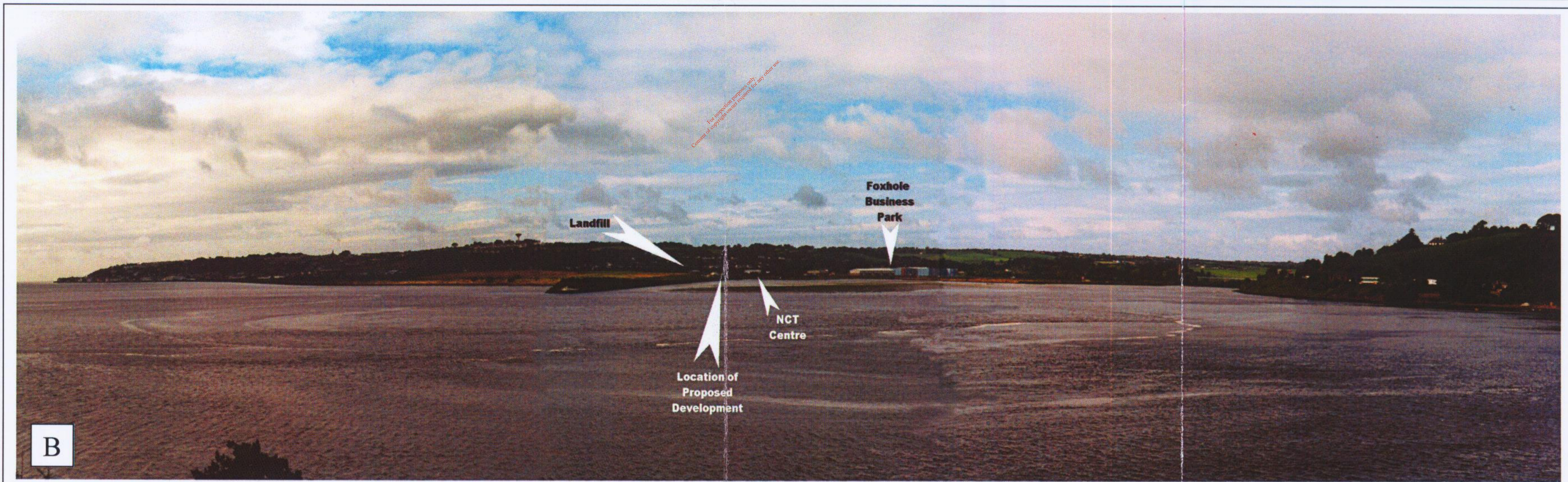
The NCT Centre and Youghal Landfill (Fig. 3.8 (b)) are visible from this location.

The proposed development includes a Landscape Development Proposal Report which outlines a 2m buffer of trees, to encircle the site. This measure should provide reasonable screening of the proposed development. There is an existing context of developments associated with Youghal Town in the landscape. Therefore the proposed development will not represent a significant visual intrusion on the landscape.


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A



B

<p>VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF A WASTE RECOVERY/TRANSFER AND SLUDGE DRYING FACILITY AT FOXHOLE, YOUGHAL.</p>	<p>View from the N25 south east of Youghal Bridge, Co. Waterford.</p> <p>View Position: E 210295 N 80855 Camera Height: 1.8 m</p>	<p>VIEWPOINT 1 FIGURE 3.2</p>
		<p>SWS Environmental Services MEMBER OF </p>

3.4 Visual Impact of Proposed Development from Roads

Much of the roadways in the vicinity of the site (i.e. N25 and R634) are well screened by the presence of hedgerows. Therefore, the proposed development is not significantly visible from roads. Intermittent views may occur. These will be further obscured by the landscaping measures for the site itself.

The R634 from Youghal Town to the N25 was also assessed to determine potential visibility. Viewpoint 2 illustrates the level of screening that roadside and grassland vegetation provides to the site of the proposed development from the edge of Youghal Town. Viewpoint 7 provides the best indicator of visibility from the northern end of this section of road. This viewpoint is at an elevated position above the site. The commercial/industrial developments at Foxhole (Business Park in particular) are clearly visible from this location. The absence of any screening on the northern side of these structures renders them highly visible. However, screening of the proposed development from these buildings and from the tree planting detailed in the Landscape Development Report will reduce the visual impact of the development significantly.

Overall, the visual impact of the proposed development on the surround roads will be minor.

Visibility from Scenic Routes

Two scenic routes from the Cork County Development Plan (A46 & A47) occur within 5km of the site. However, the site of the proposed development is not visible from either of these routes (Figure 3.9).

The site of the proposed development is not within or adjacent to a Scenic Landscape as classified by Cork County Council in the Development Plan, 2003.

Since the site is adjacent to and thus potentially visible also in Co. Waterford, the Waterford County Development Plan, 1999 was also consulted. A Scenic Landscape Evaluation was undertaken by Waterford County Council as part of the Development Plan.

This Evaluation lists landscapes designated as "vulnerable"; in particular the banks of the River Blackwater are mentioned. Vulnerable skylines are also itemised: however, the site of the proposed development is at a low elevation and therefore represents no visual impact on skylines.

Scenic routes in the county are also considered in the Scenic Landscape Evaluation. The N25 from Youghal Bridge to Dungarvan is a designated scenic route (Figure 3.9). Viewpoint

1 was chosen to assess the potential visual impact of the proposed development on this route.

The overall view from this scenic route is of the rolling hillsides meeting the Blackwater Estuary. The proposed development will be on a scale with existing structures in the Foxhole area. The Youghal Landfill and Civic Amenity Centre is the focal point of this fragmented landscape. The proposed development will form a linear block between the NCT Centre and the Youghal Landfill and Civic Amenity reducing the visual impact of the existing developments.

The distance from the proposed site as well as landscaping outlined in the Landscape Development Proposal Report will limit the visibility of the site buildings from this route. Therefore the proposed development will not have a significant visual impact on the view from this scenic route.

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Figure 3.9 Scenic Routes

3.5 Visual Impact of Proposed Development from Residences

The viewpoints taken surrounding the site are representative of the views that are available from any of the residential houses in each viewpoint area.

Two viewpoint locations were specifically selected (Viewpoint 4 (Figure 3.5) and Viewpoint 6 (Figure 3.7)) to highlight the views from residential houses or developments.

Both these view points are at higher elevations, looking down over the proposed development.

From Viewpoint 4, existing structures and buildings in the area of the proposed development adds to the anthropogenic nature of the landscape. With the scale of the proposed development not exceeding that of other buildings and the distance from the proposed site to the viewpoint the visibility of the proposed development will be significantly reduced. Therefore, the proposed development will not have a significant visual impact on the residential houses this viewpoint.

Viewpoint 6 is dominated by the R634, from Youghal Town to the N25 and the Foxhole commercial/industrial developments. The scale of the proposed development is in keeping with the existing developments in close proximity to the site. Furthermore, the Landscape Development Proposal Report will provide screening consisting of a 2m buffer of trees around the site. Therefore, the proposed development will have a minimal impact on the view from this location.

Overall, the visual impact of the proposed development on the surrounding residences of the area will be minor to negligible.

4.0 Conclusion

The selected viewpoints are representative of the views and prospects of the proposed development from the surrounding landscape.

From these viewpoints it has been highlighted that the overall visual impact of the proposed development on the surrounding landscape is minor to negligible.