



16.1 Introduction

Material Assets are the activities and purposes to which land is currently put to or may be put to in the future for the benefit of the environment or the community. This chapter considers material assets in the context of the existing site and the proposed development and also in the immediate and surrounding areas. Material assets described include those resources which are available for local community use as well as the wider public. For this chapter, industry and commerce, housing, recreation and open space, tourism, agriculture and infrastructure has been addressed.

16.2 Study Methodology

The assessment of material assets in the vicinity of the proposed site has been conducted by reference to maps, telephone and trade directories, the Westmeath County Development Plan 2005 and the draft Milltownpass Village Plan 2004 - 2010 and by visual survey to determine the local land uses in the locale. The extent of resources currently available and their use, and potential use, was investigated. The potential and predicted impact on these resources from the introduction of a composting facility was then assessed.

The assessment criteria are based on the principles of sustainable development. i.e., the social, environmental and economic consequences of the development and the positive and negative balances between these aspects.

16.3 Receiving Environment

The proposed site is located in the townland of Pass of Kilbride, County Westmeath, approximately 8km to the west of Kinnegad and 10km to the South East of Mullingar town, off a minor road connecting the N4 and N6.

The site is part of a total landholding of 110 hectares of commercial forestry and 25 hectares of agricultural land. The facility would be located in the area that is currently agricultural land. The site has a band of newly planted trees to the northern, eastern and southern boundary and there is a small bank of peat adjacent to the western boundary.

16.4 Existing Environment

16.4.1 Tourism & Amenities

County Westmeath is geographically central to the island of Ireland. With a population of 63,314, the county of Westmeath has two main towns; Mullingar and Athlone. Neither towns are major tourist centres with the few tourist attractions in the County centred around the large lakes in more rural areas.

Westmeath with its historic and archaeologically rich landscape has a rolling undulating topography. When compared to the dramatic scenery west and south of the country it may be felt that Westmeath has a muted relief and limited expansive views. The County does, however, contain a number of large lakes with extremely pleasant attendant settings, whose recreational importance is heightened by the apparent lack of other more obvious tourist assets. Lough Lene has achieved EU Blue Flag beach quality standard and is promoted on this basis.

As a contribution to the development of the tourism industry in Westmeath, Westmeath County Council have identified various areas of high tourism potential and have undertaken specific initiatives.

The immediate vicinity of the site has not been identified in the County Development Plan 2002 as an area of high tourist potential although some of the land in the vicinity has been designated as a Natural Heritage Area (NHA). These NHAs are Milltownpass Bog (Site Code 2323) due to its classification as a raised bog habitat (See Chapter 14 for further details) and also Scragh Bog (Site Code 0692) located approximately 3.5km north of the site.

The importance of bogs has been communicated more widely to the general public, in recent years. Nowadays it is more generally recognised that bogs contain a unique record of the history of Ireland and that they are important habitats with some of the oldest communities dating back more than 10,000 years. Since the last review of the Westmeath County Development Plan four large areas of bogs which were considered of scientific interest have been downgraded and are no longer of interest because they have been exploited for peat. The Council recognises the importance of bogland as a major natural resource of raw material which is secondary to their importance for heritage and amenity value.

As a contribution to the development of the tourism industry in Westmeath, Westmeath County Council will undertake to seek to have further Blue Flag Beaches for the County e.g. Coosan and seek to re-attain Blue Flag status for Lough Ennell which is located approximately 9.5km west of the proposed site.

The surrounding villages of Milltownpass, Rochfortbridge and Kinnegad do not have any tourist attractions and are not regarded as tourist locations. The village of Kinnegad has for years been used as a resting place for people travelling to and from the west and restaurants in the village have attracted coach loads of travellers as point of refreshment.

The town of Mullingar has significant visitor attractions located in reasonable proximity, but at present these attractions do not feature very strongly in promotion and marketing. Belvedere House and Gardens have been restored and completed in recent years and are now being promoted as a major tourist attraction. Mullingar Railway Station has also been developed and the intended introduction of steam trains and an art and cultural centre at the station will provide another needed tourist attraction.

Milltownpass is the nearest village to the site, at approximately 2km to the south. It has two pubs, two shops, a Roman Catholic Church, a primary school and a GAA pitch and clubhouse. For a village its size it has a significant employment base including Bennetts Construction offices & yards, Leo Wrights Joinery and Sky Clad. It is a service centre for the surrounding hinterland and serves the following functions; commercial, recreational, residential, religious, education, community and employment.

There are no National Monuments, Zones of Archaeological Potential or Protected Structures within the site or within 1km of the site.

The site lies within the River Boyne Catchment System and there are many surface water features within the vicinity. Those of importance for tourism and as a source of amenity are The Royal Canal (a proposed Natural Heritage Area) located approximately 4km to the North of the site and also Lough Ennell (a proposed Natural Heritage Area, a candidate Special Area of Conservation and also a proposed Special Protection Area) is located approximately 15km to the west, Lough Ennell is renowned for its attractiveness to anglers.

16.4.2 Infrastructure

The road infrastructure in the Midlands is an extensive network of both minor roads and major corridors. Due to its location many of Ireland's major north/south and east/west routes pass through the region.

The population is particularly car dependent and will continue to be so due to the high incidence of dispersed rural communities and an under developed public transport service within the County although served by both Bus Eireann and Iarnrod Eireann.

The N6 Dublin - Galway national primary route runs 1.75km to the south of the site and the site is connected to it via a minor route. The National Development Plan 2000 - 2006 provides for the upgrade of the N6. The provision of a dual carriageway/motorway bypassing the villages of Milltownpass and Rochfortbridge will greatly benefit the local communities of both villages by re-routing traffic, thereby reducing journey time and accident rates, and significantly enhancing the environment of both villages. Grade separated interchanges will be provided on the R-400 Rochfortbridge to Rhode road providing for local access onto the new N6 dual carriageway. The programme for these road improvements anticipates completion by 2006.

The N4 Dublin - Sligo national primary route runs 4km to the northeast of the site and the site is also connected to this via a minor route. The minor route running along the western boundary of the site may be used as a link road between the N4 and the N6, linking Coralstown/Correlstown to Milltownpass.

Mullingar is located on the N4 and is 80km from Dublin and 117km from Sligo. Mullingar is a hub location with regard to the national road network, although its north-south linkages are not as good as its east-west links. Accessibility to Mullingar has been greatly enhanced in recent years with the completion of the M4 motorway from Dublin to Kilcock.

The Midland counties are relatively well served by rail with a number of mainline routes passing through one or more counties. Mullingar is served by the Dublin-Sligo rail line and is served by 5 trains to Dublin daily. Commuting time to the Capital is approximately 70 minutes. Athlone is an important node on the rail network, with the Westport and Galway lines meeting and serving Dublin via Tullamore and Portarlinton. Athlone is also linked to Mullingar by a line via Moate.

The road network in the vicinity of the site is well developed due to its close proximity to both the N4 and N6 ensuring easy access to the main national routes leading both east and west. There is a large proportion of small minor roads in the area which are mainly dominated by cars, delivery vans and small numbers of HGVs. The site is accessed via the county road to the east and access to the proposed facility would necessitate upgrading the entrance road between the site and the county road (See Chapter 9, Traffic for further details).

16.4.3 Agriculture

Agriculture is an important part of the economic life of Co. Westmeath. It is the predominant land use but, unlike its neighbouring counties, the agricultural sector is much less important as a source of employment in the county. In the districts that are economically dependent on Athlone and Mullingar/Kinnegad, the share of the workforce in this sector is very low due to the large numbers of people working in other sectors, although a sizeable proportion of the labour force from around Mullingar, in particular, are likely to be employed outside the county.

The average farm size in Co. Westmeath is 28.8 ha which is above the national average of 26 ha and greater than those in two of their neighbouring counties of Longford (22 ha) and Roscommon (20 ha). Farm size in Economic Size Units (ESUs) takes account of the system of farming that is practised and the level of productivity and is thus a preferable indicator of the income-generating capacity of the sector. On this index, Westmeath fares reasonably well (10.3 ESU), although it lags behind the national average (11.6 ESU) ¹.

As the agricultural industry has continued to undergo substantial change in Ireland, with changes in farm income a result of price support policies and market changes, many farmers have looked for alternative sources of income to supplement that derived from farming. Part-time farming is very important in Co. Westmeath with 29.7% of farmers involved in agriculture on a part-time basis compared to the national average of 26.6%. This figure also reflects the availability of off-farm employment opportunities in and around Athlone and Mullingar.

The area surrounding the site has a mixture of land uses. The site itself is located within a young forestry plantation which extends to the west. The western part of the site was historically used for peat extraction and the land to the south of the site has been designated as a Natural Heritage Area due to the presence of a raised bog area (see Section 1.6). The area specialises in beef production with 27.7 - 42.8% of farms concentrating on this sector of farming. The next largest sector is in dairying with 16.1 to 21.4% of farms concentrating on this area of farming. Tillage only accounts for 1.2 to 2.9% of farms¹. These are relatively low value-added enterprises and also highly subsidised sectors.

The nearest farm building to the proposed facility is located approximately 250m to the north east of the site boundary.

The subject of agriculture and soils is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 13.

16.4.4 Renewable and Non Renewable Resources

Trees are classified as renewable resources. The site has a border of newly planted trees to the north, east and south boundaries. These were recently planted as a mitigation measure and it is not intended that any will be removed to facilitate the development.

Peat is also classified as a non-renewable resource and is considered a protected type of habitat, as evident from the designation of Milltownpass Bog as a Natural Heritage Area (Site Code 2323) due to its classification as a raised bog habitat and also Scragh Bog (Site Code 0692) located approximately 3.5km north of the site. A peat extraction business operates to the southeast of the site.

There is a small bank of peat adjacent to the site boundary, to the west of the proposed facility. The facility has been positioned so as not to encroach on this bank of peat.

16.5 Evaluation and Mitigation of Impacts

Material assets in the area consist of agriculture, forestry, infrastructure, housing and tourism. Although within 5km of the site material assets are very limited due to the remote nature of the site.

The development will not have any significant negative impact on material assets in the area.

¹ Analysis of the Economic, Social and Cultural Profile of County Westmeath. Prepared for Westmeath County Development Board by The National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), NUI, Maynooth 2001.

17.1 Scope of Study

This chapter includes discussion of the interactions between the proposed composting facility and its surrounding environment. It is a requirement of the European Communities Environmental Impact Assessment (Amendment) Regulations, 1998 that an environmental impact assessment describes the impacts of the proposed development and likely significant effects, both direct and indirect on the interaction between the various environmental media.

This chapter summarises the interactions between the following media. Further discussion of these interactions can be found in the various Chapters of this EIS.

- Human Beings (chapter 5)
- Air Quality (chapter 6)
- Climate (chapter 7)
- Noise (chapter 8)
- Traffic (chapter 9)
- Surface water (chapter 10)
- Groundwater/Geology (chapter 11)
- Landscape (chapter 12)
- Soils/Agriculture (chapter 13)
- Flora/Fauna (chapter 14)
- Cultural Heritage (chapter 15)
- Material Assets (chapter 16)

Table 17.1 identifies the potential interactions between the various environmental media.

Table 17.1 Interactions

	Human Beings	Air Quality	Climate	Noise	Traffic	Surface water	Groundwater/Geology	Landscape	Soils/Agriculture	Flora/Fauna	Cultural Heritage	Material Assets
Human Beings												
Air Quality	✓											
Climate	✓	✓										
Noise	✓	x	x									
Traffic	✓	x	x	✓								
Surface water	✓	x	✓	x	x							
Groundwater/Geology	✓	x	x	x	x	✓						
Landscape	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x					
Soils/Agriculture	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x				
Flora/Fauna	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓			
Cultural Heritage	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Material Assets	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

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The identified interactions are:

17.2 Human Beings/Air Quality

Changes in local air quality as a result of emissions of dust and bioaerosol emissions have the potential to cause nuisance and health impacts. A health impact assessment has been carried out and is detailed in Chapter 5. This concluded that there would be an insignificant health risk to the local population. The proposed facility employs advanced air handling technology during composting in the tunnels and the aerated static piles. This technology, together with good operational practices will limit the potential for air emissions to impact on the local population.

17.3 Human Beings/Climate

Changes in the local climate are not predicted. The facility would have a small, positive impact on the global environment as it would lead to reduced methane emissions which contribute to global warming. See Chapter 7 for further details.

17.4 Human Beings/Noise

An increase in noise levels as a result of the construction and operation of the facility has the potential to cause a nuisance to the local population. Chapter 8 includes predictions of noise levels attributable to the facility. By using good operational practices and incorporating noise attenuation measures into the design of the facility, noise impact on the local population can be mitigated against. See Chapter 8 for further details.

17.5 Human Beings/Traffic

The facility would lead to an increase in traffic using the local roads, which has the potential to cause a nuisance to neighbours. Chapter 9 predicts the increase in traffic as a result of the facility and assesses the most favourable routes for limiting the impact on the local population.

17.6 Human Beings/Surface water & Groundwater

Deterioration in surface water quality as a result of the facility could lead to deterioration in groundwater quality, and vice versa. An impact on the local population could occur as a result of pollution of local water supply wells. The potential impacts on surface water and groundwater are addressed in Chapters 10 and 11 respectively. The proposed mitigation measures incorporated into the design of the facility will ensure that potential impacts are mitigated against.

17.7 Human Beings/Landscape & Visual

The facility has the potential to cause a change in the landscape and visual amenity in the area, which in turn has the potential to cause visual nuisance to local residents and visitors to the area. Due to the remote location of the facility and the nature of the landscape, the impact on landscape and visual amenity is limited. The proposed mitigation measures outlined in Chapter 12 will ensure that the impact is reduced to a minimum.

17.8 Human Beings/Soils & Agriculture

An impact on the soil quality in the area as a result of the facility could impact on the human population who use the surrounding land for agricultural purposes. This issue is discussed in Chapter 13, which concludes that there will be an insignificant impact.

17.9 Human Beings/Flora & Fauna

An impact on the flora and fauna of the locality could in turn impact on the local population or visitors to the area who may enjoy observing the local ecology as a recreational pastime. Chapter 14 describes the predicted impacts on flora and fauna and proposed mitigation measures that will ensure that any impact on the ecology in the areas surrounding the site is kept to a minimum. With regard to the proposed site Chapter 14 notes that the removal of the majority of the cultivated land habitat within the site will present no ecological impact.

17.10 Human Beings/Cultural Heritage

Similarly, an impact on the cultural heritage of the locality could in turn impact on the local population or visitors to the area who may enjoy observing the cultural heritage as a recreational pastime. There are no archaeological features on the proposed site. Chapter 14 discusses the likelihood of archaeological finds being encountered during construction of the facility and proposes mitigation measures.

17.11 Human Beings/Material Assets

Any loss of material assets as a result of the facility would impact on human beings. Chapter 16 identifies the impact on material assets and concludes that there is an insignificant risk of adverse impacts. A positive impact on material assets that interacts with the local population is the introduction of up to 20 new jobs to the area.

17.12 Air Quality/Climate

The direction of the prevailing wind has the potential to change the levels of dust, odours and bioaerosols at sensitive receptors. Chapter 6 of the EIS assesses the likely impact of dust, odours and bioaerosols at

sensitive receptors, taking into account wind speeds and directions. It is concluded that with the proposed mitigation measures in place there will be an insignificant impact.

17.13 Climate/Surface Water

Climatic changes could impact on surface water levels in that increased rainfall could lead to increased surface water run-off from the site. Chapter 10 of the EIS identified that mitigation measures would be required to prevent large quantities of water reaching the stream during times of excessive rainfall. A soakaway was therefore incorporated into the design of the facility.

The soakaway will provide storage for excess water and will enable the water to slowly infiltrate through the base of the soakaway into the groundwater table, which supplies base flow for the stream in the north of the site. This operation will delay large quantities of water reaching the stream.

17.14 Noise/Traffic

An increase in traffic would result in an increase in noise levels. Baseline noise assessments have been carried out and are detailed in Chapter 8. The chapter also predicts the likely increase in noise attributable to the development. Mitigation measures to reduce the noise levels are proposed. Chapter 9 includes an assessment of alternative routes to and from the facility, to minimise the impact on local residents.

17.15 Noise/Flora and Fauna

An increase in noise levels could cause a disruption to fauna habitats on or near to the site. This interaction is considered in Chapter 14. Given that the subject lands are located close to existing noisy operations such as the road and the peat extraction industry it is considered unlikely that the predicted increase in noise levels will bring about any secondary ecological impacts to adjacent habitats.

17.16 Surface Water/Groundwater

Deterioration in surface water quality as a result of the facility could lead to deterioration in groundwater quality, and vice versa. The potential impacts on surface water and groundwater are addressed in chapters 10 and 11 respectively. The proposed mitigation measures will ensure that potential impacts are mitigated against.

17.17 Surface Water/Groundwater/Soils & Agriculture

The soil/bedrock beneath the site can act as a pathway for potentially polluting contaminants reaching ground and surface water, causing water contamination. There is a potential for the facility to have a negative impact on surface water quality and surface water levels. This in turn could cause pollution of local soils and impact on agricultural enterprises in the area. Chapter 10 assesses the impact on surface waters and describes the mitigation measures that are proposed. It is anticipated that there will be limited impact following the implementation of all the proposed mitigation measures.

17.18 Surface Water/Groundwater/Flora & Fauna

Contaminated run-off from the facility reaching the ditch which runs near the northern side of the site has the potential to reduce the water quality particularly given that this ditch generally has a small flow volume. The design measures described in Chapters 14 will mitigate any potential impacts from the proposed development.

17.19 Soils and Agriculture/Flora and Fauna

A change in soil quality or removal of soils has the potential to impact on flora and fauna. Chapter 14 discusses these impacts and notes that the removal of the majority of the cultivated land habitat within the site will present no ecological impact.