

12.1 Introduction

This chapter of the EIS presents the findings of a landscape and visual assessment (LVA) to assess the potential effects of the proposed waste management facility on landscape character and visual amenity.

The study comprises a *landscape character assessment* and a *visual assessment*. The landscape assessment includes a *description of the landscape context of the site and the surrounding area*, together with an evaluation of the potential effects of the proposals. The viewpoint analysis includes a description and analysis of the potential visual effects that the development would have on the locality, taking in representative viewpoints.

The assessment takes account of the potential effects of the development during construction, operation, and restoration of the site. The assessment is described in the following sections:

- **Method of Assessment** - an explanation of the assessment methodology, with reference to standard methods, guidelines and information sources;
- **Baseline Conditions** - a description of the existing landscape and visual context of the site and surroundings;
- **The Proposed Development** - a description of the main aspects of the development with the potential to cause a visual effect and the mitigation measures incorporated into the project design;
- **Assessment of Effects** - an assessment of the magnitude and significance of the potential residual effects of the development on the landscape character and visual amenity of the study area;
- **Discussion and Conclusions** - discussion of the effect that the development will have on landscape character and visual amenity. Conclusions as to whether, the development is acceptable in this locality.

The assessment is illustrated by Figures 12.1. The viewpoints are illustrated by the series of Figures 12.2.1-12.2.6.

12.2 Study Methodology

12.2.1 General Approach

The general approach taken in this assessment has been to:

- Establish the existing baseline conditions in terms of the landscape and visual resource of the study area, including the identification of *potentially sensitive visual receptors*;
- Identify the likely sources of visual effects arising from the proposed development;
- Predict the potential magnitude of the changes to the baseline conditions; and
- Assess the significance of these changes.

The method of assessment has been based on guidelines provided in the following publications:

- The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (Second Edition 2002) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment*, E & FN Spon, London.

- Department of the Environment and Local Government (June 2000) *Landscape and Landscape Assessment, Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities*.

Baseline assessment

The first stage of the assessment reviewed the existing landscape and visual resource of the study area. The baseline assessment forms the basis against which to review the magnitude and significance of the predicted landscape and visual impacts arising from the proposed development.

The assessment of existing landscape character, quality and sensitivity has concentrated on a 3km radius study area, centred on the proposed development. A study area of 3km has been defined due to the main area throughout which the proposals may be visible and as a catchments for potential receptors identified within the region including residents and road users. A more detailed description of the predicted visibility of the proposals is provided later in this chapter. The assessment requires description, classification and evaluation of the landscape as follows:

- **Description** is the process of collecting and presenting information about landscape and visual resources in a systematic manner;
- **Classification** is the more analytical activity whereby the landscape is refined into units of distinct and recognisable character; and
- **Evaluation** is the process of attributing a value to a given landscape or visual resource, by reference to specified criteria.

The baseline assessment comprises three stages: desk study, field survey and analysis. These are described as follows:

Desk study

Existing Ordnance Survey Ireland maps and written data about the development site and the study area were reviewed, including extracts from the Westmeath County Development Plan 2002-2008 and details of the proposed development.

The desk study also defined the baseline landscape and visual resource of the study area and established the main users of the area, key viewpoints and key features. The aim of the baseline visual assessment was to ensure that an appropriate range of viewpoints is included in the visual assessment.

A generalised visual envelope has been prepared to support the assessment. This is based on the topography of the surrounding landscape, key areas of vegetation (i.e. blocks of woodland) and built development. The selection of viewpoints has been based on the proximity of nearby sensitive receptors and consideration of suitable distant viewpoints, particularly from slightly elevated locations. A selection of viewpoints has been chosen to ensure that the viewpoint assessment includes a representative range of receptors in relation to the following criteria:

- **Type of receptor** - based on above, and including different landscape character types;
- **Elevation**;

- Distance of receptor from proposed development - to a maximum distance of 3km from the proposed development; and
- Direction of receptor from proposed development, with the aim of achieving a distribution from different compass points around the site.

The desk study therefore provided the basis for subsequent field survey work. It enabled the delineation of draft landscape character types within the 3km study area, defined the potential zone of visual influence, and identified the principal viewpoints and receptors, which were subsequently confirmed during the field survey.

Field survey

The baseline landscape assessment included field survey work, carried out to verify and refine the landscape character types identified within the study area and gain a full appreciation of the relationship between the proposed development and the landscape. All field work was undertaken during April 2004.

The baseline visual assessment included field survey work to verify the appropriateness of the list of viewpoints. This involved confirming initial viewpoint grid references on the ground, to ensure that there would be views of the site from these locations. The fieldwork was supported by details of the proposed development, and observations were recorded photographically.

Analysis and reporting

Analysis and reporting of the baseline assessment takes place after completion of the desk and field surveys.

The baseline landscape assessment provided a description, classification and evaluation of the landscape of the study area, from which to assess the potential landscape effects of the proposed development.

The baseline visual assessment provided a list of viewpoints, agreed with statutory consultees, for the viewpoint assessment, with initial commentary on viewpoint grid reference, distance from the proposed development, receptors and rationale for selection.

The baseline assessment as a whole, therefore provides a robust description of the landscape and visual resource from which to assess the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development and advise, in landscape and visual terms, on the development's acceptability in principle and its preferred siting, layout and design. The baseline assessment contributed to influencing the scheme design and the development of mitigation measures.

Assessment of residual effects

The impact assessment aims to:

- Identify systematically all the potential landscape and visual impacts of the development incorporating its proposed mitigation measures;
- Predict and estimate the magnitude of these effects as accurately as possible; and
- Assess the significance of potential effects in a logical and well-reasoned fashion.

The assessment describes the changes in the character and quality of the landscape and visual resources that are expected to result from the proposed development. It covers both: landscape impacts - that is changes in the fabric, character and key defining characteristics of the landscape; and visual impacts - that is changes in available views of the landscape and the effect of those changes on people.

The landscape and visual assessment has involved a desk study, fieldwork, analysis and interpretation using professional judgement.

Assessment criteria

The aim of the environmental assessment is to identify, predict and evaluate potential key effects arising from a proposed development. Wherever possible identified effects are quantified, however, the nature of landscape and visual assessment requires interpretation by professional judgement. In order to provide a level of consistency to the assessment, the prediction of magnitude and assessment of significance of the residual landscape and visual effects have been based on pre-defined criteria.

The sensitivity of the landscape is not absolute and varies according to the existing landscape, the nature of the proposed development and the type of change being considered. Determination of the sensitivity of the landscape resource to changes associated with the proposed development is defined as *high, medium, low* or *negligible* based on professional interpretation of a combination of parameters, as follows:

- Landscape value - as reflected by local, regional or national landscape designation;
- Landscape scale - which is the relative size of the main landscape elements and components;
- Landscape character and quality - which is a professional evaluation based on the collective characteristics of the landscape; and
- The nature of views - whether open, closed, long or short distance, simple or diverse.

The weighting of visual receptor sensitivity is based on an interpretation of a combination of parameters as follows:

- The location of the viewpoint;
- The context of the view;
- The activity of the receptor; and
- Frequency and duration of the view.

Visual receptor sensitivity is defined as *high, medium, low* or *negligible* as follows:

Table 12.1 Definition of visual receptor sensitivity

High	Users of outdoor recreational facilities including strategic recreational footpaths, cycle routes or rights of way, whose attention may be focused on the landscape; important landscape features with physical, cultural or historic attributes; the principal views from residential buildings; beauty spots and picnic areas.
Medium	Other footpaths; secondary views from residential buildings; people travelling through or past the landscape on local roads, train lines or other local transport routes; views from passenger ferries and cruisers.
Low	People engaged in outdoor sports or recreation (other than appreciation of the landscape), commercial buildings or commercially engaged pedestrians, whose attention may be focused on their work or activity rather than the wider landscape. People travelling through or passed the landscape on major roads and motorways.
Negligible	Views from heavily industrialised areas.

The magnitude of change arising from the proposed development at any particular viewpoint is described as substantial, moderate, slight or negligible based on the interpretation of a combination of largely quantifiable parameters, as follows:

- distance of the viewpoint from the development;

- duration of effect;
- angle of view in relation to main receptor activity;
- proportion of the field of view occupied by the development;
- background to the development; and
- extent of other built development visible, particularly vertical elements.

The significance of any identified landscape or visual effect has been assessed in terms of major, moderate, minor or none. These categories have been determined by consideration of viewpoint or landscape sensitivity and predicted magnitude of change, with the use of the matrix illustrated in Table 12.2 as a guide to correlating sensitivity and magnitude to determine significance of effects.

Consideration has been given to the direct effects that the development will have on the landscape fabric. This includes the following:

- Consideration of landscape features and elements that will be lost as a result of the proposals;
- Analysis of the proposed restoration contours and discussion of how this fits with the immediate surrounding topography; and
- Assessment of the proposed restoration scheme and discussion of how this fits with the surrounding landscape character.

The significance of these effects are considered in this assessment.

Table 12.2 Correlation of Sensitivity and Magnitude of Effect to Determine the Significance of Effects

	Magnitude of Change			
Landscape and Visual Sensitivity	Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
High	Major	Major/moderate	Moderate	Moderate/minor
Medium	Major/moderate	Moderate	Moderate/minor	Minor
Low	Moderate	Moderate/minor	Minor	Minor/none
Negligible	Moderate/minor	Minor	Minor/none	None

It is important to note that the matrix is not used as a prescriptive tool, and the methodology and analysis of potential effects at any particular location must make allowance for the exercise of professional judgement. Thus, in some instances a particular parameter may be considered as having a determining effect on the analysis.

Where the landscape or visual effect has been classified as major or major/moderate, this is considered to be a significant effect as referred to in the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. It should be noted that significant effects need not be unacceptable or necessarily negative and may be reversible.

12.3 Landscape Description

12.3.1 General

The site lies within a gently rolling lowland plain, which generally lies at between 85m and 89m AOD. The land is predominantly used for pasture, grazed by cattle and sheep, with occasional fields used for arable and root crops. On the whole, these fields are delineated by mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees, typically deciduous in nature. To the south of the site there are extensive areas of peat bog including a proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA). Some of the peat bog in the immediate vicinity of the site is under commercial extraction. In addition to these there are a number of woodland plantations throughout the study area. The area is transected by numerous small streams with associated shallow valleys. Drainage ditches are another common feature within the region, typically lining road ways and in places forming field boundaries.

There are no dominant landscape features such as rivers or hills within the locale or in close proximity to the study area. There is a distinct lack of visual references within the landscape other than the tall smoke stacks and larger built elements of the peat fired power station to the east/south of the site

There are a number of dwellings in the vicinity of the site, the nearest of these lying approximately 650m to the northeast of the proposed facility. The town of Mullingar lies approximately 10.5km to the north west of the site and lies outside the study area. Milltownpass is the only settlement within the study area of any size, however it also contains a number of dispersed farmsteads and properties, usually occurring in ribbon developments along the minor roadways throughout the area.

The area studied in detail to assess the impact of the proposed development on landscape character extends 3km from the site following the appraisal of the potential inter-visibility of the proposed facility on site. The extent of the landscape character areas is illustrated by Figure 12.1. The identified landscape character area contains one principal character area with two further landscape sub units as follows:

12.3.2 Undulating Agricultural Land

This landscape character area forms the principle component of the study area and is comprised of farmland, predominantly used as pasture, with occasional fields set to arable crops. The fields are enclosed by a combination of hedgerows and post and wire fences. The hedgerows are, in the main, continuous with few gaps, although they are frequently left unmanaged and are consequently often overgrown. Within the hedgerows there are many mature trees, in addition to these there are small pockets of mixed woodland, and scrub woodland which is particularly associated with watercourses.

The topography of the area is gently undulating, occasionally interrupted by small more steeply sloping valleys along the routes of minor watercourses.

The village of Milltownpass is located within this area (the only nucleated settlement of significant size), and in addition to this there are occasional clusters of residential development such as Enniscoffey and Hightown. Throughout this character type there are a number of farmsteads with associated sheds and outbuildings and isolated residential properties.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity to change within the Undulating Agricultural Land character area is considered to be major/moderate in the area including the proposed site and its immediate vicinity and reducing to minor throughout the wider area. This is due to the nature of the views which range between short to medium due to the rolling nature of the landscape and the extent of tree cover and hedgerows.

Within the Undulating Agricultural Land character type are two further smaller units which have been considered as part of this assessment; plantation woodland and ribbon development. These are described in Sections 12.3.3 and 12.3.4.

12.3.3 Plantation Woodland

There are numerous patches of commercial plantation woodland located throughout the study area. These are predominantly coniferous plantations; however there are also areas of broad-leaved and mixed woodland. The plantations within the study area contain a mixture of age classes and species, include Sitka Spruce, Douglas Fir, Scots Pine, Norway Spruce, Ash, Beech, Poplar, and Oak. Typically public access to the plantations is limited, although some offer parking facilities and open trails.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the plantation woodlands as a landscape type to changes outside the character unit area is considered to be low due to the enclosed nature of such landscapes and the resulting severely restricted views into the surrounding landscape.

12.3.4 Ribbon Development

Ribbon development comprises the siting of housing developments, typically detached, along the road corridors throughout the region and without a prescribed nucleus or centre. The properties may consist of either single or double storey developments set within garden space generally defined by a combination of ornamental walling, hedging and fencing.

The extent of ribbon development in certain instances, within the study area and outlying region, introduces a new continuous built feature to what is primarily a rural situation and becomes a character area in its own right with the introduction of untypical boundary treatments, building styles and the introduction of exotic plant species.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this character type to change beyond its boundaries is deemed to be low - medium. This is due to the extent of perimeter planting and boundary construction typically associated with the properties and the extent of intervening features such as vegetation and the rolling topography throughout the area that typically preclude medium to long distance views.

12.3.5 Landscape Designations

There are no designations that relate to the preservation of landscape character that apply to the site itself, the study area or the surrounding landscape. It is noted that Milltownpass Bog, a Natural Heritage Area (NHA) lies immediately to the south of the proposed development. Milltownpass Bog is an area of raised bog comprising elements of both high bog and cutover bog, and areas of woodland. Further details regarding Milltownpass Bog can be found in Chapter 14 of this Statement.

12.4 The Proposed Development

12.4.1 General

This section describes in brief, the main elements of the proposed development that would change the visual baseline conditions, and the proposed measures that will be incorporated into the scheme to reduce adverse effects. Full details of the proposed development are contained in Chapter 4.

12.4.2 Outline of the Proposed Development

The proposed development will consist of the following key elements:

- Waste reception;
- Mixing and handling areas;
- Tunnel composting plant;
- Aerated composting pad;
- Compost storage area;
- Loading bay; and
- Ancillary service buildings and offices.

12.4.3 Elements of Proposed Development Affecting the Baseline Conditions

The development of the composting facility has been divided into two key stages; advance works and site operations. It is anticipated that the site will be in operation for the foreseeable future, however, a decommissioning and restoration strategy will be put into effect should the facility close. Details of this strategy are provided in Chapter 4.

The composting facility will comprise an area of 17.5ha. Full details of the proposed site facilities can be found in Chapter 4. The main elements of the scheme that will have a potential to affect the existing Landscape and Visual amenity include:

- weighbridge and weighbridge office;
- management offices;
- staff facilities (foul drainage from the site offices and mess facilities will be to proprietary treatment system);
- car parking;
- wheel cleaning facilities (water from the wheel cleaner will be contained in a circulation system, mud and silt will be settled out in a separate tank and disposed of to landfill);
- waste inspection area;
- waste quarantine area;
- maintenance buildings and bunded fuel tank;
- composting process areas;
- compost storage and loading area;
- leachate control compound;
- surface water controls compound; and
- services i.e. electricity, telephone and water.

12.4.4 Construction Works

Before the installation of the facility and the commencement of operations on site it will be necessary to carry out a programme of preparation and engineering works. The initial preparation of the site will include:

- The construction of the site access roads including construction of a new link road to the third class road adjoining the site;
- Excavation and compaction of soils to form a suitable base profile;
- Contouring of excess soils around the facility and planting of the site with trees to reduce the visual impact of the development;
- Construction of the tunnel composting process area, green waste process area, aerated pads and storage area and associated ancillary equipment;
- Installation of the site infrastructure including site offices, weighbridge, wheelwash and treatment systems for process air, leachate, and surface water; and
- Installation of environmental monitoring equipment (additional environmental monitoring may be required during the construction work - this will be agreed with EPA under the terms of the Waste Licence).

12.4.5 Operational Stage

The aspects of the development that are likely to cause a visual effect during the operational stage include:

- The buildings which comprise the composting facility;
- Storage and composting areas;
- Vehicle movements on the site (i.e. waste collection vehicles, compactor, loading shovel and dump truck); and
- Vehicle movements to and from the site.

Mitigation Measures

Measures that have been included within the scheme to reduce the impact that the development has on landscape character and visual amenity include the following:

- Retention of the woodland and hedgerow planting surrounding the site, this will provide effective screening for onsite operations and associated buildings;
- The establishment of woodland planting to the eastern, southern and northern boundaries of the site to further reduce any visual impact;
- The creation of bunds;
- The alignment of the access road, which will be kinked to prevent direct visibility of the operational composting facility once the surrounding vegetation is established; and
- The colour of finish to the buildings on the site will be selected with the goal of minimising the degree of visual intrusion of the development. A suitable colour finish would be muted shades of green and/or brown, the final colour will be selected and agreed in advance with the planning authority. This will reduce their visibility and blend the buildings with the surrounding woodland.

12.5 Assessment of Effects

12.5.1 Visibility

The visual assessment analyses the effect that the development will have on the visual amenity of local residents and visitors to the area. It takes account of the effect that the development will have on views from residential properties and roads within 3km of the site.

Potential receptors within the study area were initially identified using Ordnance Survey Ireland mapping prior to the site visit and visited as part of the field study. Viewpoint locations were then selected to represent views that will be seen by different receptors, i.e. residents, road users etc towards the proposed development. From this exercise, seven viewpoint locations were selected which represent views from residential receptors and road users surrounding the site and one viewpoint located on the minor road to the immediate south of the site. The viewpoints were visited and photography undertaken in April 2004.

Using these field observations, and sections, the existing and predicted views from the 7 viewpoints have been examined to determine the effect of the proposals on the existing visual amenity. The effect of the proposals is determined through the assessment of the sensitivity of each viewpoint and the magnitude of the change that is predicted. An assessment of the significance of the residual visual effects has been undertaken to assess the effect of the proposals after mitigation measures are in place.

The baseline visual assessment identifies the receptor location both by viewpoint name and OS grid coordinates, receptor type, the proximity and direction of the receptor from the edge and the centre of the development. A description of the existing view is given, together with an assessment of the visibility of the site. The extent of visibility is discussed in Section 12.6.

12.6 Viewpoint Assessment

The effect that the development will have on the surrounding area has been predicted through the analysis of specific viewpoints. The viewpoints have been carefully selected to represent views that will be seen by different receptors, i.e. residents, road users etc. In addition to this the viewpoints have been selected at a range of distances and directions from the site in order that a comprehensive picture of the effects of the development can be predicted. The details of the viewpoints selected are outlined in Table 12.4, and the effects of the development are discussed in the subsequent text. Where appropriate the predicted view has been broken down to cover specific elements of the development, i.e. construction works, site operation. A summary of the predicted effects that the proposed development will have on landscape character and visual amenity is presented in Tables 12.5 and 12.6 at the end of this section. Where the assessment has identified an effect, this will be negative.

It should be noted that there are several farms and dispersed individual properties in the area immediately surrounding the site, however it has not been possible to assess these individually due to access restrictions. Whilst it has not been possible to specifically assess the potential impact of the development on these properties, it is considered that due to the elevation of the properties, the nature of the landform and the extent of intervening woodland and hedgerows it is anticipated that the visual impact on the residents of these properties will be extremely restricted and as such will not be significant.

Table 12.3 Viewpoint Details

No	Viewpoint	Elevation (mAOD) at Ground Level	Distance to the Proposed Development (km)	Direction of View to the Proposed Development	Receptors
1	Properties to the North East of the Site	90	0.5km	SW	Residents, road users
2	Minor Road, south west of Crossanstown	102	2.1km	SW	Residents, road users
3	Properties South of Heathstown	98	2.2km	S	Residents, road users
4	Hightown	100	1.6km	S	Residents, road users
5	Milltownpass West	89	2.3km	NE	Residents, road users
6	Milltownpass East	88	1.6km	NE	Residents, road users
7	Minor Road adjacent to the Site	90	<0.1km	NW	Road users

12.6.1 Figure 12.2.1 - Viewpoint 1 : Properties to the North East of the Site

Existing View:

The viewpoint is located on the minor road which forms the eastern boundary of the site which leads to the N4 at the nearest dwellings to the proposed facility. The existing view is illustrated in Figure 12.2.1, which includes a photograph (panorama) from the viewpoint, the approximate centre of the site being located in the middle of the panorama. The viewpoint is 0.5km from the southern edge of the site. The view is representative of that seen by residents and road users.

The view overlooks the gardens to the properties north east of the proposed development, the minor road leading to Milltownpass and the pastoral fields of this region. It is clear from the viewpoint the extent of which the hedgerows and trees play a part in determining the extent of visibility within the region and the nature of views across a generally level/gently rolling landscape. The vegetation also highlights the linearity of the roadway with the planting establishing to either side of the road corridor. The planting to the residences is typical of the region with the establishment of an evergreen hedge to define the boundaries of the property and provide a degree of privacy. Views are generally limited to the immediate area due to the extent and nature of the planting except in instances where the field boundary is defined by post and wire fence.

The sensitivity of the viewpoint is considered to be high (residents) and medium (road users- local road).

Predicted View:

From this viewpoint, views of the proposed composting facility will be screened through a combination of the intervening hedgerows, woodland and topography. The result of this will be that the composting facility will not be visible from this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change:

There will be no anticipated change in the existing view.

Effect on Landscape Character:

The viewpoint is located within the Undulating Agricultural Land character type. Due to the absence of inter-visibility between the viewpoint location and the proposed development site it is anticipated that there will be no discernible effect on landscape character in the vicinity of this viewpoint.

Effect on Visual Amenity:

There will be no effect on the visual amenity as currently experienced from this viewpoint.

12.6.2 Figure 12.2.1 - Viewpoint 2: Minor Road South West of Crossanstown

Existing View:

The viewpoint is located 2.1km to the north east of the site on the minor road leading from Milltownpass to the N4 junction at Correllstown. The existing view is illustrated in Figure 12.2.2. The view is representative of that seen by road users.

The viewpoint is relatively elevated above much of the surrounding farmland which allows for longer distance views than would normally be attained in this region, specifically to the south west towards Milltownpass. The roadway is the principle feature of the view, its linearity highlighted with lengths of hedgerow and in the far distance hedgerow trees. To either side in the foreground, views are possible into neighbouring fields; however the hedgerows and woodlands which define the field patterns form numerous horizon lines and curtail visibility to the mid ground. It should be noted that the properties discussed in Viewpoint 1 lie between this viewpoint and the proposed development are not visible.

The sensitivity of the viewpoint is considered to be high (residents) and medium (road users- local road).

Predicted View:

From this viewpoint, views of the proposed composting facility will be screened through a combination of the intervening hedgerows, woodland and the topography. The result of this will be that the composting facility will not be visible from this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change:

There will be no anticipated change in the existing view.

Effect on Landscape Character:

Viewpoint 2 is located within the Undulating Agricultural Land character type. Due to the absence of inter-visibility between the location and the proposed development site it is considered that there will be no effect on landscape character in the vicinity of this viewpoint.

Effect on Visual Amenity:

There will be no effect on the visual amenity as currently experienced from this viewpoint.

12.6.3 Figure 12.2.2 - Viewpoint 3: Properties South of Heathstown

Existing View:

The viewpoint is located 2.2km to the north north east of the site on the minor road leading from Hightown to Knocksimon. The existing view is illustrated in Figure 12.2.3. The view is representative of that seen by road users and residents.

The view is representative of the extent of visibility available along much of the unclassified road between Hightown and Knocksimon. Views are typically short distance and limited by the presence of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and pockets of woodland/individual trees. Glimpses of the rolling landscape beyond and the field boundaries in the mid-ground and background are in place available but are not typical.

The sensitivity of the viewpoint is considered to be high (residents) and medium (road users- local road).

Predicted View:

From this viewpoint, views of the proposed composting facility will be screened through a combination of the intervening hedgerows, woodland and the topography. The result of this will be that the composting facility will not be visible from this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change:

There will be no anticipated change in the existing view.

Effect on Landscape Character:

Viewpoint 3 is located in the Ribbon Development character unit. As the proposed composting facility will not be visible from this location it is anticipated that there will be no effect on landscape character in the vicinity of this viewpoint.

Effect on Visual Amenity:

There will be no effect on the visual amenity as currently experienced from this viewpoint.

12.6.4 Figure 12.2.2 - Viewpoint 4: Hightown

Existing View:

The viewpoint is located 1.6km to the north north west of the site on the minor road leading from Knockaville to Hightown. The existing view is illustrated in Figure 12.2.4. The view is representative of that seen by road users and residents.

Potential visibility of the development from the properties located at the end of a small track leading south from Hightown was considered, however access to the road end was not possible.

The view is typically pastoral in setting, overlooking arable fields, presently tilled, formed by hedgerows and post and wire fencing. Mature trees and hedgerow trees add diversity to the view but in the middle and longer distances in conjunction with the generally level landform, limit the visible extent.

The sensitivity of the viewpoint is considered to be high (residents) and medium (road users- local road).

Predicted View:

From this viewpoint, views of the proposed composting facility will be screened through a combination of the intervening hedgerows, woodland and the topography. The result of this will be that the composting facility will not be visible from the viewpoint located at Hightown.

Magnitude of Change:

There will be no anticipated change in the existing view.

Effect on Landscape Character:

Viewpoint 4 is located within the Ribbon Development character unit. Due to the absence of inter-visibility between the proposed development site and the viewpoint location it is considered that there will be no effect on landscape character in the vicinity of this viewpoint.

Effect on Visual Amenity:

There will be no effect on the visual amenity as currently experienced from this viewpoint.

12.6.5 Figure 12.2.3 - Viewpoint 5: Milltownpass West

Existing View:

The viewpoint is located 2.3km to the south west of the site on the minor road leading from Milltownpass to Enniscoffey. The existing view is illustrated in Figure 12.2.5. The view is representative of that seen by road users and residents.

The view is typically rural in setting, overlooking pastoral fields, formed by hedgerows and post and wire fencing. Views are primarily limited to the foreground due to the extent of and maturity of the woodland within the view in the midground. The subtle rolling of the landscape adds another mitigating effect to the available extent of views.

The sensitivity of the viewpoint is considered to be high (residents) and medium (road users- local road).

Predicted View:

From this viewpoint, views of the proposed composting facility will be screened through a combination of the intervening hedgerows, woodland and the topography. The result of this will be that the composting facility will not be visible from the viewpoint located at Hightown.

Magnitude of Change:

There will be no anticipated change in the existing view.

Effect on Landscape Character:

Viewpoint 5 is located within the Undulating Agricultural Land character type within the western extent of Milltownpass. Due to the absence of inter-visibility between the proposed development site and the viewpoint location it is considered that there will be no effect on landscape character in the vicinity of this viewpoint.

Effect on Visual Amenity:

There will be no effect on the visual amenity as currently experienced from this viewpoint.

12.6.6 Figure 12.2.3 - Viewpoint 6: Milltownpass East

Existing View:

The viewpoint is located 1.6km to the south west of the site at the junction of the N6 and the unclassified road running past the proposed development site. The existing view is illustrated in Figure 12.2.6. The view is representative of the typical visual amenity available to road users and residents.

The view generally consists of the busy N6 routeway but also overlooks the easternmost properties of Milltownpass and the farmland to the south/east of the unclassified road to Crossanstown/Killucan. The extent of visibility is prescribed and generally limited by the evergreen hedging to the residential properties and the hedgerows and trees which define the field pattern to the farmland.

The sensitivity of the viewpoint is considered to be high (residents) and medium (road users- local road).

Predicted View:

From this viewpoint, views of the proposed composting facility will be screened through the interplay of the intervening hedgerows, woodland and the topography. The result of this will be that the composting facility will not be visible from the Milltownpass East.

Magnitude of Change:

There will be no anticipated change in the existing view.

Effect on Landscape Character:

Viewpoint 6 is located within the Undulating Agricultural Land character type within the eastern extent of Milltownpass. Due to the absence of inter-visibility between the proposed development site and the viewpoint location it is considered that there will be no effect on landscape character in the vicinity of this viewpoint.

Effect on Visual Amenity:

There will be no effect on the visual amenity as currently experienced from this viewpoint.

12.6.7 Figure 12.2.4 - Viewpoint 7: Minor Road adjacent to Site

Existing View:

The viewpoint is located adjacent to the proposed entrance to the development on the unclassified road from Milltownpass to Crossanstown/Killucan which forms the eastern border of the application site. The existing view is illustrated in Figure 12.2.7. The view is representative of that seen by road users and represents a worst case example of the views available along the perimeter of the application site.

The view directly overlooks the application site and the recent planting work undertaken to establish a natural screen to the proposed facility. The photograph represents a worst case view available from the road corridor, where the hedgerow, which defines the boundary of the site, gives way to allow an access point to the site.

The sensitivity of the viewpoint is considered to be medium (road users- local road).

Predicted View:

From this viewpoint, views of the proposed composting facility will be filtered by the existing hedgerow planting and the new woodland planting to the perimeter of the site. With the maturing of the structure planting, and the establishment of the proposed soil berm to the east and north of the facility, the composting facility will become generally screened from view.

Magnitude of Change:

The magnitude of change for the proposed composting facility is considered to be substantial, as the development is adjacent to the viewpoint. The implementation however, of a substantial woodland belt to the roadside, will as it matures, effectively screen views from the roadside and appear to be a natural extension of the neighbouring areas of woodland and the planting commonly found along the roadsides.

Effect on Landscape Character:

Viewpoint 7 is located within the Undulating Agricultural Land character type (sensitivity - medium). As the magnitude of change will be moderate, the effect of the development on this landscape area within the immediate vicinity and including the site will be major/moderate, and as such, the effect of the development during the operational phase will be significant. Outside the site, perceived effects on the undulating agricultural landscape type will reduce over distance with the screening effects of intervening tree cover and the establishment of the onsite planting. It is also considered that agricultural sheds and buildings form a component of the Undulating Agricultural Land character type throughout the region and that the nature and appearance of the proposed composting facility in many ways will be similar to these. Generally, the effects on the landscape character outside the site will be minor.

Effect on Visual Amenity:

The effect on visual amenity for road users will be major/moderate initially which will reduce to minor/negligible upon the establishment of the soil berm and woodland planting to the perimeter of the site.

12.7 Summary

The following tables summarise the findings of the assessment into the effects on landscape character and visual amenity.

Table 12.4 Summary of Magnitude of Change and Effect on Landscape Character

Magnitude of Change and Effect on Landscape Character				
No.	Viewpoint	Landscape Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effect
1	Properties to the North East of the Site	Medium	No Effect	No Effect
2	Minor Road, South West of Crossanstown	Medium	No Effect	No Effect
3	Properties South of Heathstown	Low - Medium	No Effect	No Effect
4	Hightown	Low - Medium	No Effect	No Effect
5	Milltownpass West	Low - Medium	No Effect	No Effect
6	Milltownpass East	Low - Medium	No Effect	No Effect
7	Minor Road Adjacent to the Site	Medium	Substantial	Locally: Major/Moderate Generally: minor

Table 12.5 Summary of Magnitude of Change and Effect on Visual Amenity

No.	Viewpoint	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Effect on Visual Amenity
1	Properties to the North East of the Site	High Medium	None	None
2	Minor Road, South West of Crossanstown	Medium	None	None
3	Properties South of Heathstown	High Medium	None	None
4	Hightown	High Medium	None	None
5	Milltownpass West	High Medium	None	None
6	Milltownpass East	High Medium	None	None
7	Minor Road Adjacent to the Site	Medium	Substantial	Major/moderate

12.8 Discussion

The potential effects arising from the proposed composting facility have been examined in relation to landscape character and key sensitive receptors and are summarised below:

12.8.1 Effect on Landscape Character

Undulating Agricultural Land

There will be no significant effect on the overall landscape character of Undulating Agricultural Land, however in the immediate vicinity of the site the effect will be significant as demonstrated by the analysis of Viewpoint. This effect will be moderated by a number of factors as follows:

- the nature of the proposed buildings - which are generally simple in design and similar to the agricultural buildings currently present within this landscape character type. The colour palette and finish of the proposed buildings will be low-key and designed to allow the buildings to merge with the surrounding vegetation.
- The tree species used to create the screen/structure planting will be similar to the species make-up of the woodland and hedgerows found throughout the locale.
- Bunding (soil berm).

Through these measures the proposed facility will become integrated into the Undulating Agricultural Land character type in due course and appear to be a part of the prevailing rural scene.

Plantation Woodland

The proposed composting facility will not have a negative effect on the qualities and nature of the plantation woodland character unit. Building works will not encroach into any areas of the existing woodland, and as such, this resource within the landscape will not be reduced. Rather, the establishment of the woodland screen/structure planting to the perimeter of the site will add to this resource and will extend the character unit.

Ribbon Development

The development will not affect the character of the Ribbon Development character unit. The quality of this sub unit is defined by the nature of the buildings and the typically insular enclosure of the individual developments which limit the degree of inter-visibility and interaction with the setting into which the property developments are introduced.

12.8.2 Effect on Visual Amenity

The operational phase of the development will have some minor effects on visual amenity for a localised area immediately around the development and, more significantly, along the minor road from Milltownpass.

The effect of the development on road users, including those travelling on the N6 as well as the network of minor roads will be limited, due to the intermittent nature of the views due to the screening qualities of the existing hedgerow planting to the roadside and the prevailing rolling topography. Over time, the available views of the facility will be reduced with the establishment of the woodland planting to the perimeter of the site and the soil berm to the north and east of the facility which will also be planted with trees. These measures will appear as a natural extension of the neighbouring woodland/hedgerows in the vicinity of the development.

There is one property in the vicinity of the site which may experience a change in its existing visual amenity to the north of the site, however due to access restrictions it was not possible to confirm the extent of view available. The structure appears to be a farm building. It is considered, that the conifer planting which lies between the proposed facility and this structure will, as it matures, effectively screen the development from view.

Overall, it is considered that the proposed composting facility can be effectively integrated into the prevailing landscape through the use of planting and the choice of materials and finishes which will be in keeping with other agricultural sheds/farm buildings throughout the locale. The extent of mature tree planting, woodland/plantations and hedgerows throughout this rolling landscape restricts visibility to a high degree. Additionally, the soil berm that is proposed around the north and east of the facility and which will be planted with trees will further reduce the visibility of the site. As such, there will be minimal effect on the existing visual amenity beyond the immediate vicinity of the proposed development.

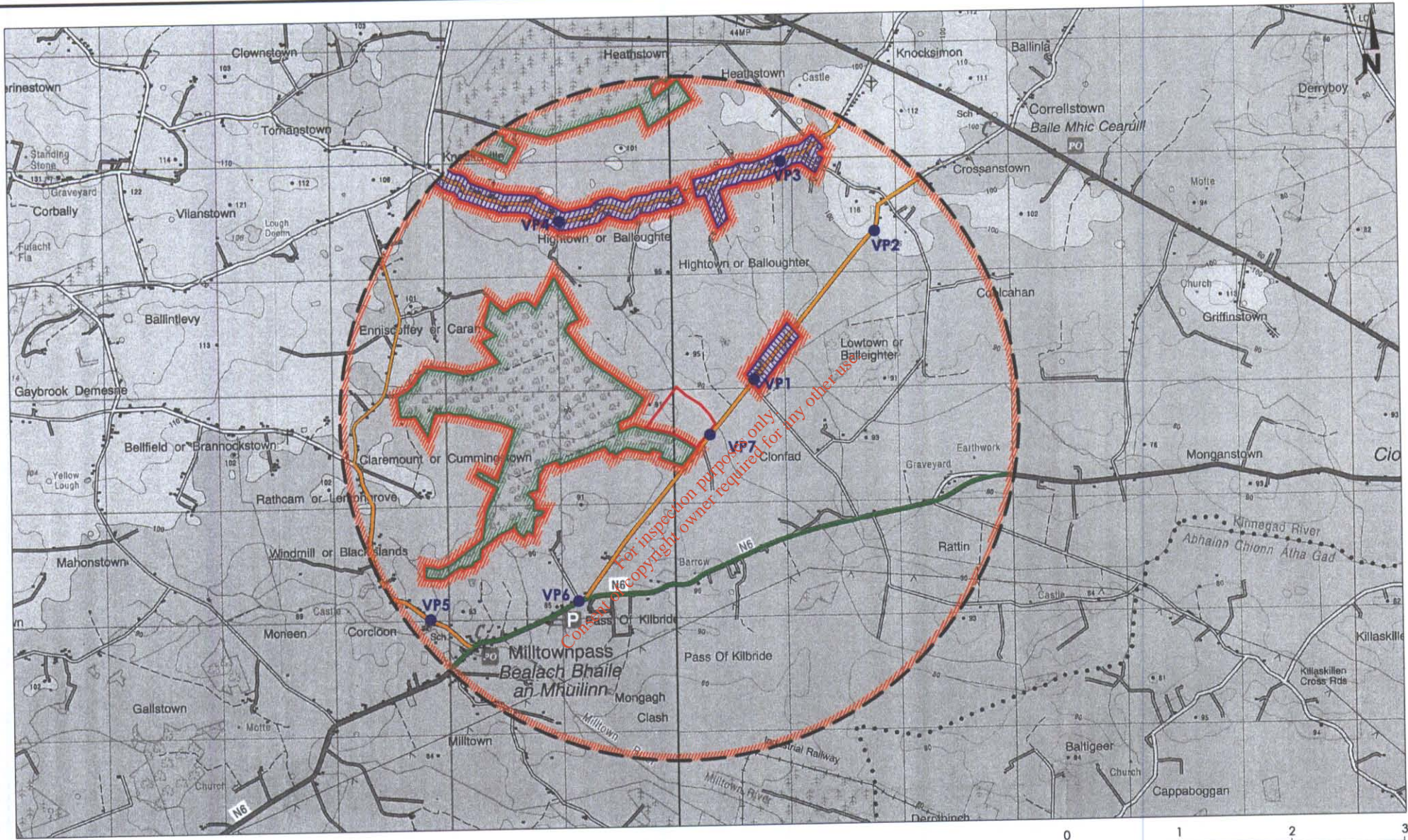
12.9 Conclusions

The landscape and visual assessment has shown that the potential effect of the proposed development is limited to those areas where the composting facility can be viewed from. These vantage points are limited due to the rolling nature of the landscape and the extent of mature tree planting within it. In addition, it is clear through the assessment that the effect of the proposed development will reduce over time as the proposed perimeter woodlands establish and as woodlands and conifer plantations in the broader landscape mature.

The viewpoint assessment has identified that there will not be significant effects on either the landscape character or visual amenity as experienced at the majority of locations around the site. Where notable effects occur, as identified to the south east of the site along the minor road, these will begin to reduce with the establishment of the woodland/screen planting to the roadside. The viewpoint analysis indicates that residents in close proximity to the proposed facility will not experience significant effects/views to the site. It is noted that there are several other residences/farms in the area immediately surrounding the site, but it has not been possible to assess these individually due to access restrictions. These properties are generally at a similar level as the proposed development beyond elements of intervening planting and as such visual impact is not expected to be significant. Analysis of longer distance views indicates that residents and road users will not experience significant effects at greater distances from the site.

Therefore, through an assessment of the landscape character and visual amenity of the proposed composting facility at Kilbride, it can be concluded that the proposals will not significantly affect either the existing visual amenity or landscape character found within the study area.

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FIGURE 12.1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PLAN

KEY:			
	Site location		Major roadway (N6)
	Undulating Agricultural Land		Minor roadway
	Ribbon Development (Landscape Character Sub Unit)		Extent of study area
	Plantation Woodland (Landscape Character Sub Unit)		Viewpoint location



Viewpoint 1: Properties to the north east of the site



Viewpoint 2: Minor road, south west of Crossanstown

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FIGURE 12.2.1
VIEWPOINTS 1 & 2



Viewpoint 3: Properties south of Heathstown



Viewpoint 4: Hightown

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FIGURE 12.2.2
VIEWPOINTS 3 & 4



Viewpoint 5: Milltownpass (West)

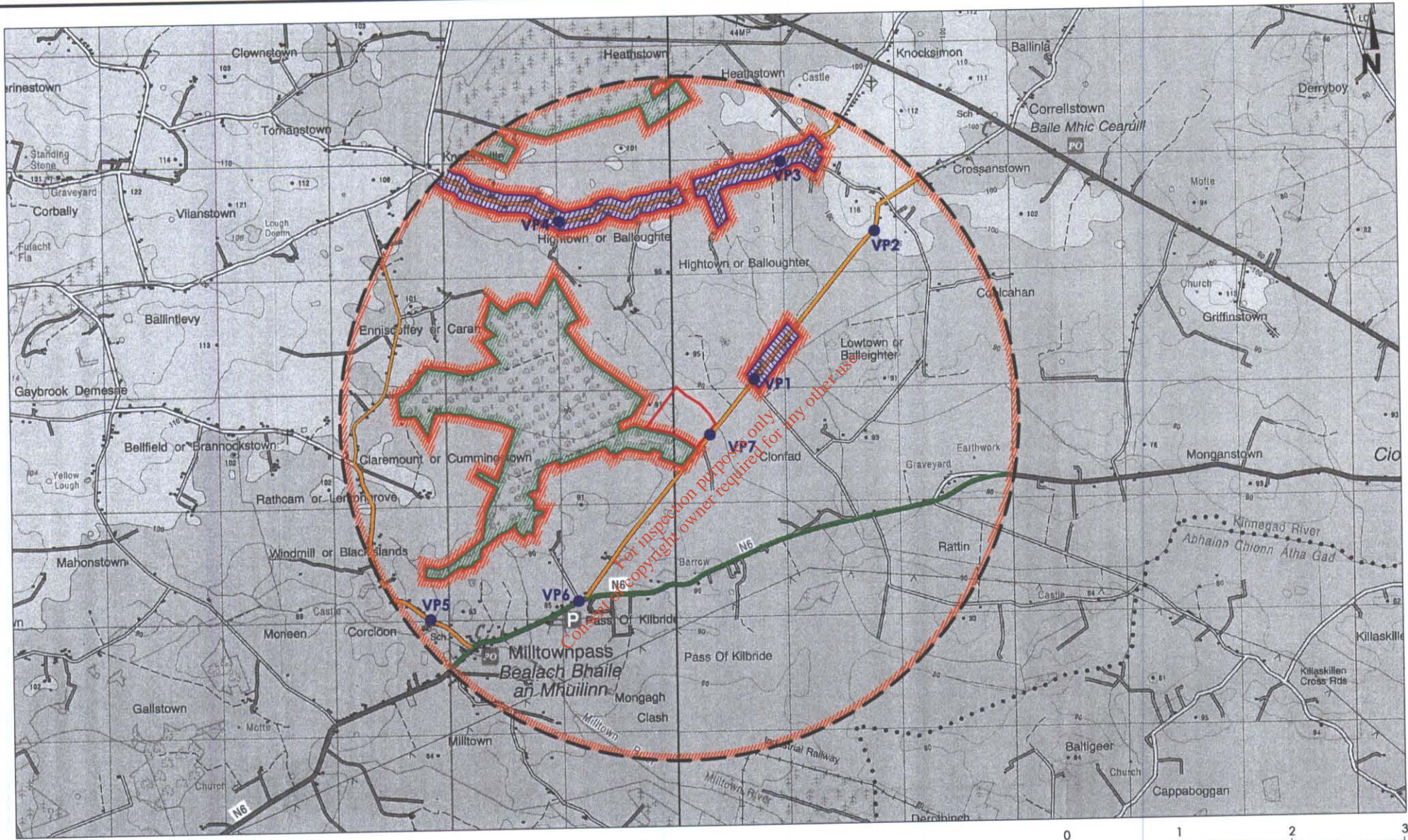


Viewpoint 6: Milltownpass (East)

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FIGURE 12.2.3
VIEWPOINTS 5 & 6











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FIGURE 12.1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PLAN

KEY:

-  Site location
-  Undulating Agricultural Land
-  Ribbon Development (Landscape Character Sub Unit)
-  Plantation Woodland (Landscape Character Sub Unit)
-  Major roadway (N6)
-  Minor roadway
-  Extent of study area
-  Viewpoint location