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14. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

14.1. RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

14.1.1 Introduction

The subject site consists of a series of agricultural fields located on the west side of the R152 at Carranstown, to the southwest of the town of Drogheda, at a distance of 3km. The village of Duleek is located approximately 2.5km further to the south. The alignment of the M1 motorway runs in a north/south direction immediately to the east of the subject site.

14.1.2 Methodology

The analysis of the site environment, taken together with its hinterland, was based on an examination of available aerial photography, Ordnance Survey mapping data, and a detailed topographical survey of the site itself.

In addition to the above, a number of visual inspections of the site were undertaken during the course of 2005, and a photographic survey of the receiving environment was compiled.

14.1.3 Topography

The subject site slopes, at a relatively even fall, from a high point of over 39.0 metres O.D. at the northeastern corner to a low point of under 30.0 metres O.D. adjacent to the south-western corner (Fig.14.1).

14.1.4 Slope Regime

The slope map is an indicator of the potential developability of a particular site. Slopes in the 1 in 50 and less are developable with no encumbrance. Slopes in the 1 in 20 to 1 in 50 range generally require relatively minor site works, while slopes in the 1 in 10 to 1 in 20 range generally require significant site works to accommodate development – mounding, banking, retaining walls etc. Slopes over 1 in 10 are generally considered to be undevelopable (Fig.14.2).

14.1.5 Vegetation

The general ground cover of the subject site is meadow grass, in the form of agricultural pastureland (Fig.14.3). The majority of the woody plants – i.e. trees and shrubs are confined to a series of hedgerows, which consist of large species such as Ash and Sycamore and small tree species such as Hawthorn, Sloe etc., interspersed with shrubs such as Bramble etc.

14.1.6 Land Use

The general land-use of the area to the southwest of Drogheda is agriculture (Fig.14.4), and the subject site forms part of this. There are small pockets of low-density residential development scattered throughout this landscape, a pattern typical of much of rural Ireland. However, immediately to the north and west of the subject site there are significant areas of industrial and extractive land-uses – in the form of the Platin Cement Plant to the north, and stone quarrying to the west. A railway line serving the Platin plant runs on a north-west/south-east axis immediately to the west of the site.

14.1.7 Visual Analysis

The subject site itself is visually unremarkable, consisting as it does, of a series of small-scaled agricultural paddocks with hedgerows typical of much of the landscape of this part of County Meath. Similarly, the immediate site hinterland is visually dominated by the industrial complex at Platin Cement works, which consists of an array of tall silos and associated industrial sheds. The extensive area of extractive industry to the west, while not overly visually intrusive is a major change-agent in the overall agricultural landscape, with local visual impacts on the surrounding roads and boundaries (Fig.14.5).

There is already visual intrusion on the subject site in the form of an 110kV power line and a 210kV power line traversing in a north to south direction.

The principal views to the subject site are from the southwest and northwest, from the alignment of the R152, connecting Drogheda with the village of Duleek. These views are partially screened by the existing hedgerow structure along the western edge of the R152. The Platin Cement Plant is also highly visible from the alignment of the M1 motorway, and, as such, visually dominates the subject site.

There are views into the site from the west. The screen planting and mounding associated with the quarrying operations effectively blocks views from this direction. Views out from the site are limited, due to the presence of boundary hedgerow planting. There are partial views to the east and south from the site into the corridor of the R152 and a local access laneway, respectively.

14.1.8 Do Nothing Scenario

Should planning permission not be granted for the proposed development, the subject site will remain in use in relatively low-grade agricultural production – primarily as pasture land.

14.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development will consist of the insertion of the following elements, as described in Section 5 of this document:

- Gatehouse and associated weighbridges.
- Warehouse, workshop and education centre.
- Pump house and water storage.
- Waste reception and Processing building.

The overall site area to be developed will be approximately 4 hectares (approximately 10 acres), with the remaining site area to be used for visual buffering.

The most obtrusive element in the complex will be the stack, which will be 65.0 metres above the ambient site level at a height of 95.3 m O.D; however the colour scheme of the proposed buildings will be shaded in an effort to blend in with the natural surroundings (See photomontages for further details).

There are existing overhead powerlines traversing the site in a northeast to southwest direction, which have a significant visual impact on the receiving environment. It is not intended to move these lines, or in any way ameliorate the existing impact.

The building fabric is generally industrial in character, i.e. proprietary profiled metal cladding panels in a selected colour.

In addition to the above there will be a network of access roads, hardstanding, surface parking, site lighting, screen planting etc.

14.3 POTENTIAL IMPACT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

In landscape and visual terms the proposed development will impact in varying degrees upon the inter-related aspects, as follows:-

- The perceived character of the area.
- The existing views.
- Its visual and recreational amenity.

The following terms are used, as appropriate to describe the degree, quality, and duration of an impact:

Imperceptible/No Impact - the development proposal is either distant or adequately screened by existing landform, vegetation or built environment.

Low Impact views affected by the proposal form only a small element in the overall panorama, or where there is substantial intervening screening in the form of topography and /or vegetation.

Moderate Impact an appreciable segment of the existing view is affected or where there is intrusion in the foreground.

Significant Impact the proposed development will have a significant effect on the existing view or where the view is obstructed or so dominated by the proposed scheme that it becomes the focus of the viewer's attention. A significant impact arises where there is a substantial alteration in the character of an area but the essential experience of the original remains.

Profound Impact a significant view is completely obscured or altered or where the character of an area has been completely changed.

Note: Moderate impacts are not referred to in the EPA Glossary of impacts. Moderate impacts have been included in the scale of impacts to cover the substantial gap between low and significant impacts.

Terms used to describe the quality of change are:-

Negative Impact a change that reduces the quality of the visual environment or adversely affects the character of the landscape.

Neutral Impact – a change which does not effect the quality of the landscape.

Positive Impact a change that improves the quality of the landscape.

Terms used to describe the duration of impact;-

Temporary Impact – impact lasting for one year or less

Short Term Impact – impact lasting for one to seven years

Medium Term Impact – impact lasting for seven to twenty years

Long Term Impact – impact lasting for twenty to fifty years

Permanent Impact impact lasting for over fifty years

14.3.1 Impact on Landscape Character

The subject site presents as an area of agricultural land, with a relatively small field size, separated from each other by hedgerows of varying quality.

The site forms a small part of a much larger agricultural unit in an agricultural landscape. However, this landscape is already subject to a significant level of intrusion, in the form of the expansion of the village of Duleek to the south, the presence of the Platin cement-manufacturing complex to the north, the insertion of the M1 motorway to the east, and the various pockets of low-density residential units contiguous to the site. In addition to the above, the presence of the overhead power lines which traverse the site have had a significant impact on its landscape character.

The following assessment of the impact on the landscape character of the subject site and its hinterland is predicated upon the insertion of an industrial complex into its structure, and the removal of the existing landscape character.

The Master Landscape Plan (Fig.14.6 Plan and 14.7 Sections) will allow for the insertion of a new development structure into the site, and for the provision of extensive visual buffering of the complex through landscaping, which will assist in visually tying-in the development to the surrounding landscape.

The development, in overall terms will have a significant and neutral visual impact on the existing landscape character of the area. The existing agricultural landscape will be replaced by a complex which will be industrial in character.

In overall terms, the complex will present as a group of linked industrial buildings in a heavily-planted landscape, which will develop over time through the implementation of a proper maintenance regime.

14.3.2 Impact on Views

There will be a significant and neutral impact on views into the subject site. The existing agricultural landscape will be replaced by a complex of linked industrial buildings in a heavily planted buffer zone. The development will be perceived juxtaposed against the mass of the existing Platin Cement Plant, located immediately to the north.

14.3.3 Impact on Visual/Recreational Amenity

The subject site, at present has a relatively low level of visual amenity and no level of recreational amenity. The development, as proposed, will constitute a significant and neutral impact on the visual amenity of the area and will have no impact on the recreational amenity of the area.

14.4 MITIGATION MEASURES

The overall visual impact of the development will be reduced in the following important ways:-

- Through the positioning of the various industrial buildings on the site, so as to minimize the impact of views into the site from the east and north.
- Through the massing of all the built elements on site including the control of scale and the selection of materials on elevation – the use of colour, texture, etc.
- The insertion of strategically placed open space, which will function as a buffer zone against views into the complex.
- Through the planting of the open space, so as to visually reduce the apparent massing of the buildings in the landscape.
- Through the insertion of planted mounds to the north-east and south west of the facility. The earthworks for these mounds will be carried out at an early stage in the development allowing tree planting to be inserted early in the project, therefore, a partial visual screening effect will already be in place on the completion of the building works.

14.5 PREDICTED IMPACT OF PROPOSAL

Visual Impact

The development will have a significant and neutral impact on the visual amenity of the area. The existing and visually unremarkable agricultural landscape will be replaced by an industrial facility set in a planted landscape.

Impact on Views

Views numbers 1 to 17 of Appendix 14.1 are photomontages, which have been generated by computer. They show the “before” and “after” views of the proposed development, based on an accurate simulation of scale, colour and massing, utilizing baseline survey drawings. The convention in selecting views is that views into the subject site from the public domain are considered more important than views within the site or from private property. Where the development is not visible from a viewpoint, either due to the topography of the surrounding landscape or other intervening obstructions which might block the visibility of the development, the facility is shown outlined with a red line to give an indication of its position relative to the view.

Viewpoint 1: View from R152 at southern end of site

The existing hedgerow will be removed, and will be replaced by boundary wall, consisting of a stone base with metal railings. Screen planting and mounding will be inserted in the open space behind the wall.

The visual impact will be significant and neutral. The high visual quality of the boundary treatment and its associated landscaping will visually ameliorate the presence of the industrial buildings in the middle-distance.

Viewpoint 2: View from R152 near northern end of site.

The existing poorly developed hedgerow and concrete fence will be removed and replaced with a metal boundary fence planted with climbers. The open space inside the fence will be mounded and planted with dense tree planting.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be significant and neutral. The existing unremarkable agricultural landscape will be replaced by high quality planted parkland. The upper levels of the buildings and the stack will be visible in the background of view in the short term, and only the stack will be visible when screen planting has matured in the medium term.

Viewpoint 3: View from R152, north of existing tyre garage.

The main section of the complex together with the stack will be visible in the middle distance, juxtaposed against the surrounding agricultural landscape.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be significant and neutral. The complex will be viewed as an insertion into a changing agricultural landscape, which already contains the Platin Cement Plant. In the medium term the site planting will ameliorate the apparent massing of the complex in the landscape.

Viewpoint 4: View from minor road east of R152, adjacent to the existing cement works.

The complex will be visible in the distance, visually juxtaposed against the existing Platin silos.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be significant and neutral. The scale of the complex within the overall arc of view, which seen against the scale of Platin will ameliorate the impact of the complex in the landscape.

Viewpoint 5: View from R152, south of the site, at the closest houses to the proposed development

The upper levels of some of the industrial buildings, together with the upper section of the stack will be visible in the middle distance.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be slight and neutral. The facility will be partially screened by existing mature tree planting, and will be viewed juxtaposed against the existing Platin Cement Plant.

Viewpoint 6: View from R152, just north of Duleek

A small portion, principally the stack element of the facility will be visible in the distance.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be slight and neutral. The massing of the Platin Cement Plant will visually dominate the view.

Viewpoint 7: View from Dublin Road, just south of Drogheda Town

The existing Platin Cement Plant will be visible in the distance, and will dominate the view. By comparison, the proposed facility will not be visible in the landscape.

Therefore the visual impact will be imperceptible.

Viewpoint 8: View from Bellewstown, east of the racecourse

The existing Platin Cement Plant will be visible in the distance. By comparison, while the proposed facility should be visible it will not be apparent, given its scale in the overall arc of view.

Therefore the visual impact will be imperceptible.

Viewpoint 9: View from Bellewstown

The existing Platin Cement Plant will be visible in the distance and will dominate the view. By comparison, the proposed facility, while located adjacent to the cement plant, will not be visible in the landscape.

Therefore the visual impact will be imperceptible.

Viewpoint 10: View from minor road at Clonlusk, west of the site

The upper levels of the main buildings and the stack will be visible in the distance.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be slight and neutral. The existing Platin Cement Plant will be the dominant feature in the overall arc of view.

Viewpoint 11: View from road at reservoir on Redmountain, west of the site.

The upper levels of main industrial buildings will be visible in the distance, partially screened by the intervening high ground.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be slight and neutral. The existing bulk of the Platin Cement Plant will visually dominate in the overall arc of view.

Viewpoint 12: View from the M1 overpass at Rathmullan.

Due to the topography of the surrounding landscape and the intervening hedgerow planting between the viewpoint and the proposed facility the buildings will not be visible from this viewpoint. The position of the facility in the landscape relative to the viewpoint is shown outlined in red.

The visual impact will be imperceptible.

Viewpoint 13: View from M1 near Annagor.

The stack will be visible from this viewpoint, but the Platin Cement Plant will dominate the view.

Therefore the visual impact will be imperceptible.

Viewpoint 14: View from M1 overpass near Crufty.

The upper section of the stack will be visible from this viewpoint. The other elements will be screened by the existing intervening tree planting.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be slight and neutral. The massing of the existing Platin Cement Plant will dominate in the overall arc of view.

Viewpoint 15: View from Dowth

The existing Platin Cement Plant will be visible in the distance, and will dominate the view. By comparison, the proposed facility will not be visible in the landscape.

Therefore the visual impact will be imperceptible.

Viewpoint 16: View from Newgrange

Due to the distance from the site (5.8 Km approx.) and the topography of the surrounding landscape, i.e Redmountain with a height of 120.84 m O.D. between the viewpoint and the proposed development the facility will not be visible from this viewpoint. The position of the facility in the landscape relative to the viewpoint is shown outlined in red.

The visual impact will be imperceptible.

Viewpoint 17: View from the Battle of the Boyne

As in viewpoint 16 the distance from the site (5.461 Km approx.) and the topography of the surrounding landscape, i.e Redmountain with a height of 120.84 m O.D. between the viewpoint and the proposed development the facility will not be visible. The position of the facility in the landscape relative to the viewpoint is shown outlined in red.

The visual impact will be imperceptible.

Night Views

Viewpoints A, B and C of Appendix 11.2 are night time views to show the amount of light spillage that will be visible from various distances in the public domain. It is generally regarded as difficult to get an accurate simulation of night views, but the following views are a computer generated models showing the likely levels of light that will be associated with the facility.

Viewpoint A: View from R152 at southern end of site

The red lights at the top of the stack and light from general site lighting will be visible from this viewpoint, along with a glow of light from the facility buildings. However the amount of light spillage into the public domain will not present a significant impact.

Therefore the visual impact will be low and neutral.

Viewpoint B: View from R152, north of existing Tyre Garage

The red lights at the top of the stack along with a glow of light from the facility buildings are visible from this viewpoint. However the small amount of light visible, along with the lack of light spillage into the public domain renders the visual impact low and neutral.

Viewpoint C: View from road at reservoir on Redmountain, west of the site

The red light from the top of the stack along with the glow of light from the facility is visible in the middle distance. However the arc of view is dominated by the light from the Platin Cement Plant.

The visual impact from this viewpoint will be low and neutral

14.6 RESIDUAL IMPACTS/MONITORING

Control of individual building forms, materials and colour will ultimately be determined by the Planning Authority in the exercise of its statutory duties.

All planted installations within the project will be subject to on-going maintenance strategies and monitoring, to ensure the satisfactory establishment of the total planted installation and therefore the effectiveness of its screening potential over time.

14.7 SUMMARY

The subject site presents as an unremarkable piece of agricultural landscape, typical of the region. There are no elements of high visual amenity within the site or in its immediate hinterland. In fact, the general landscape amenity of the area has been impacted upon by the presence of the visually dominant Platin cement plant, and the extensive area of quarrying, both adjacent to the site. Access to the site is good and there are no major technical impediments on site to prohibit its full landscape development.

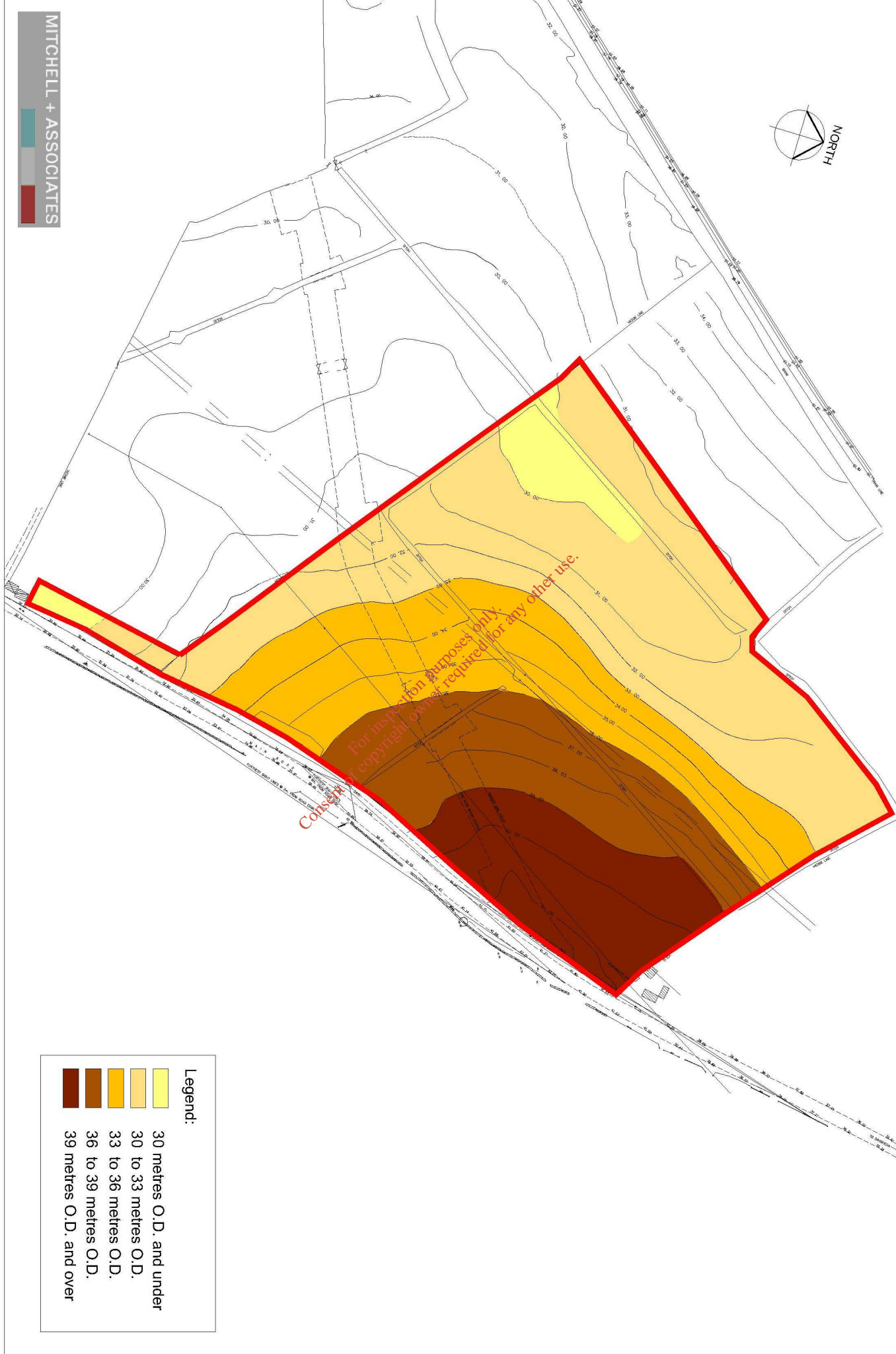


FIG. 14.1 TOPOGRAPHY MAP

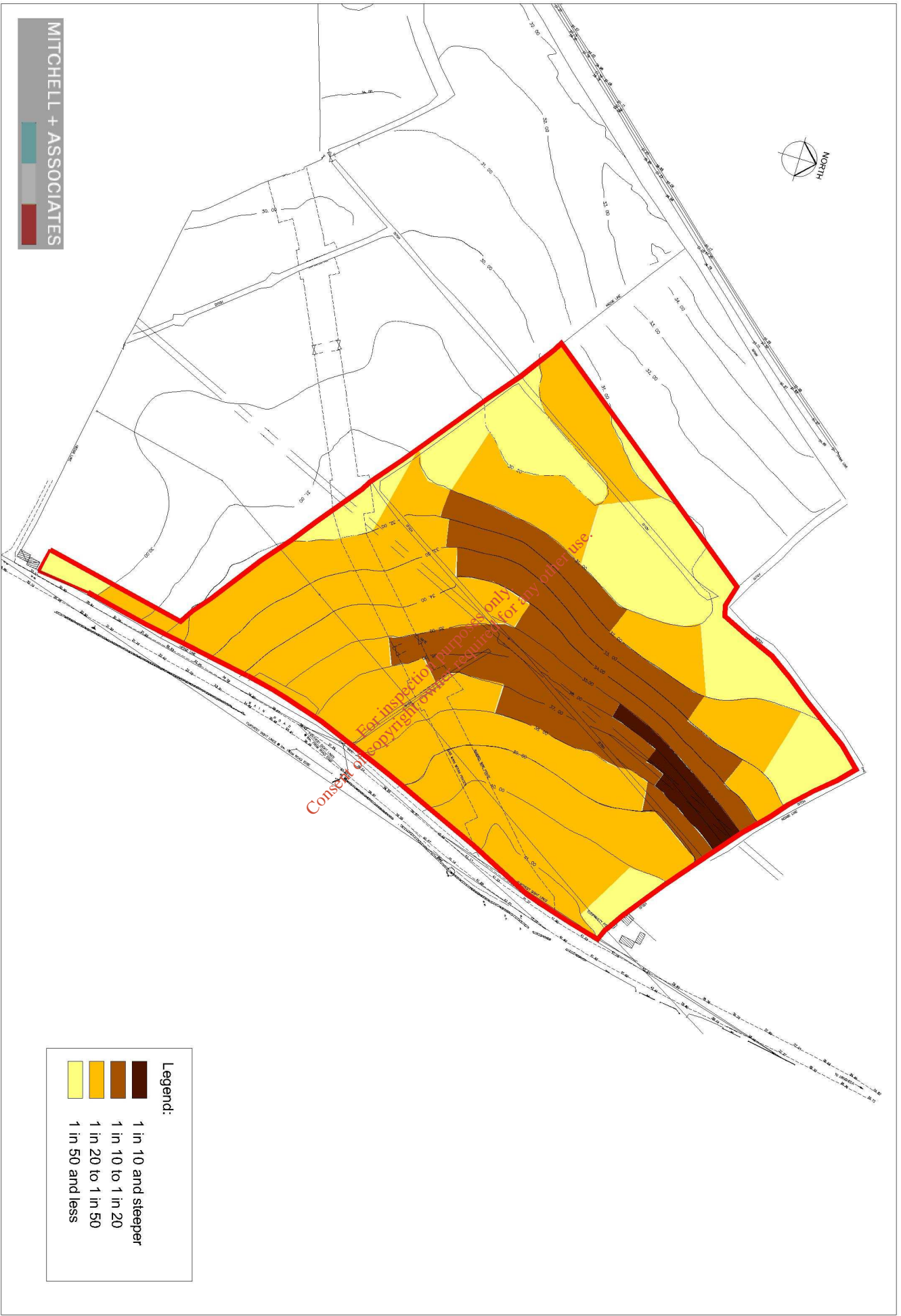
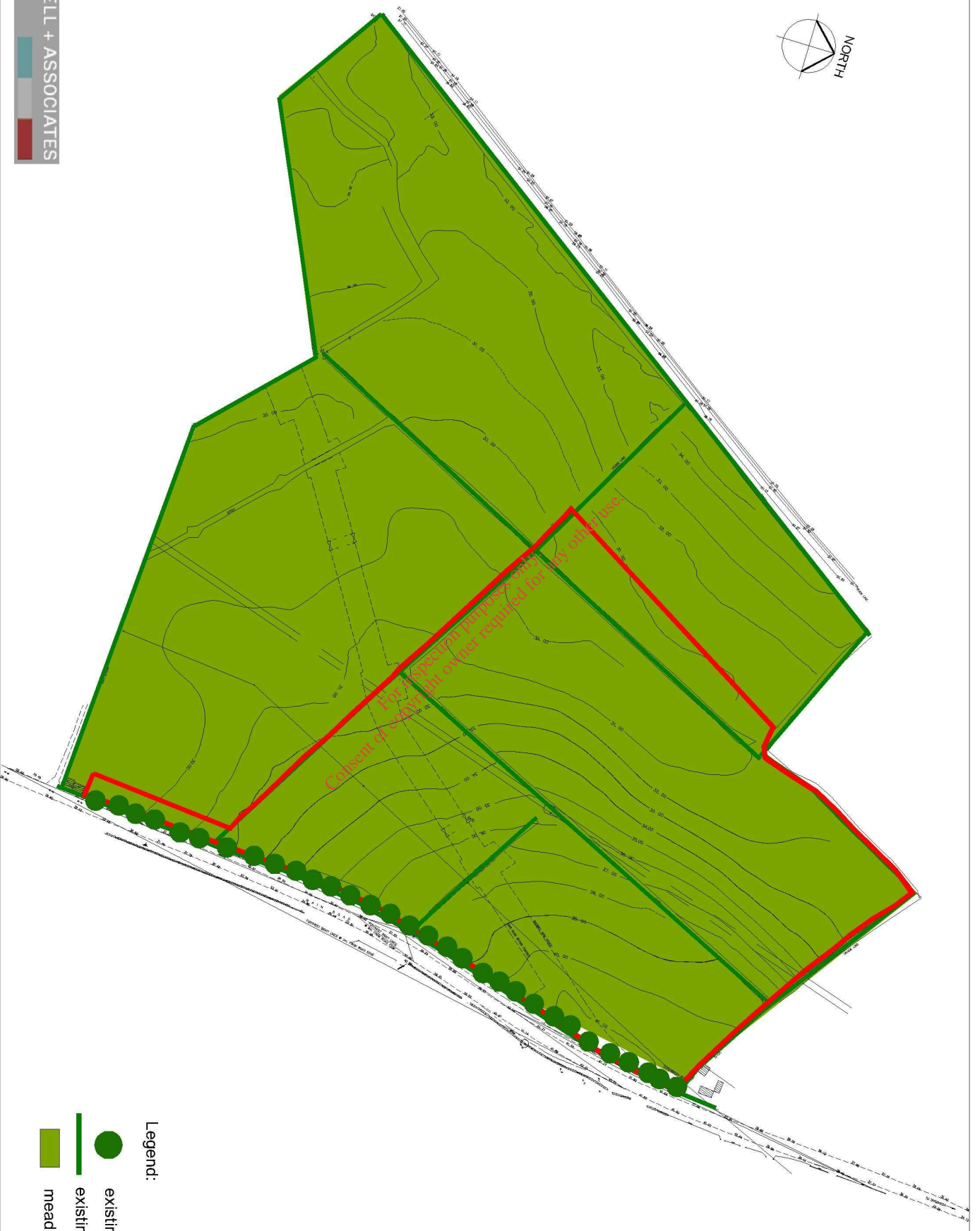


FIG. 14.2 SLOPE MAP

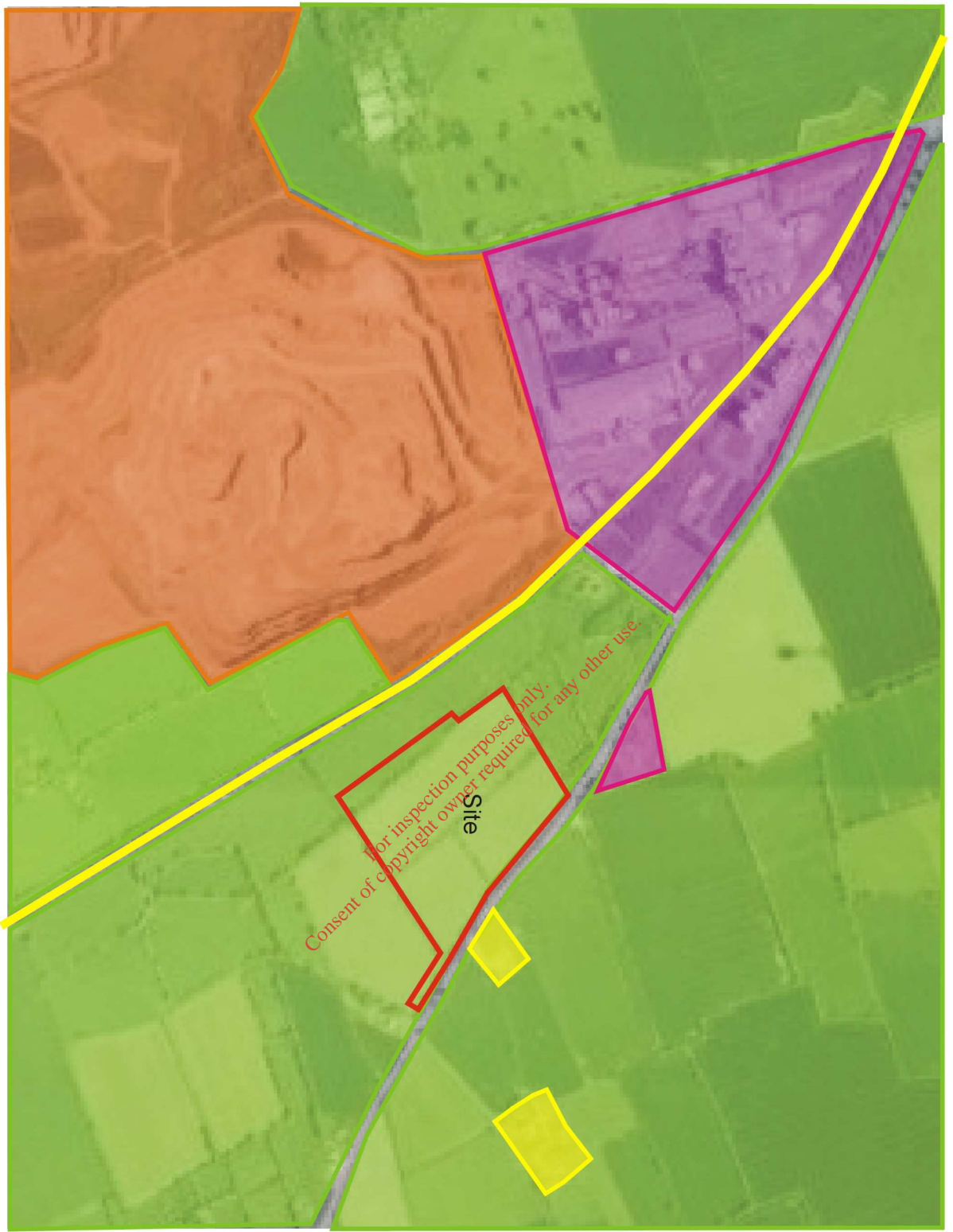


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- Legend:
- existing trees
 - existing hedgerow
 - meadow/grass

FIG. 14.3 VEGETATION MAP

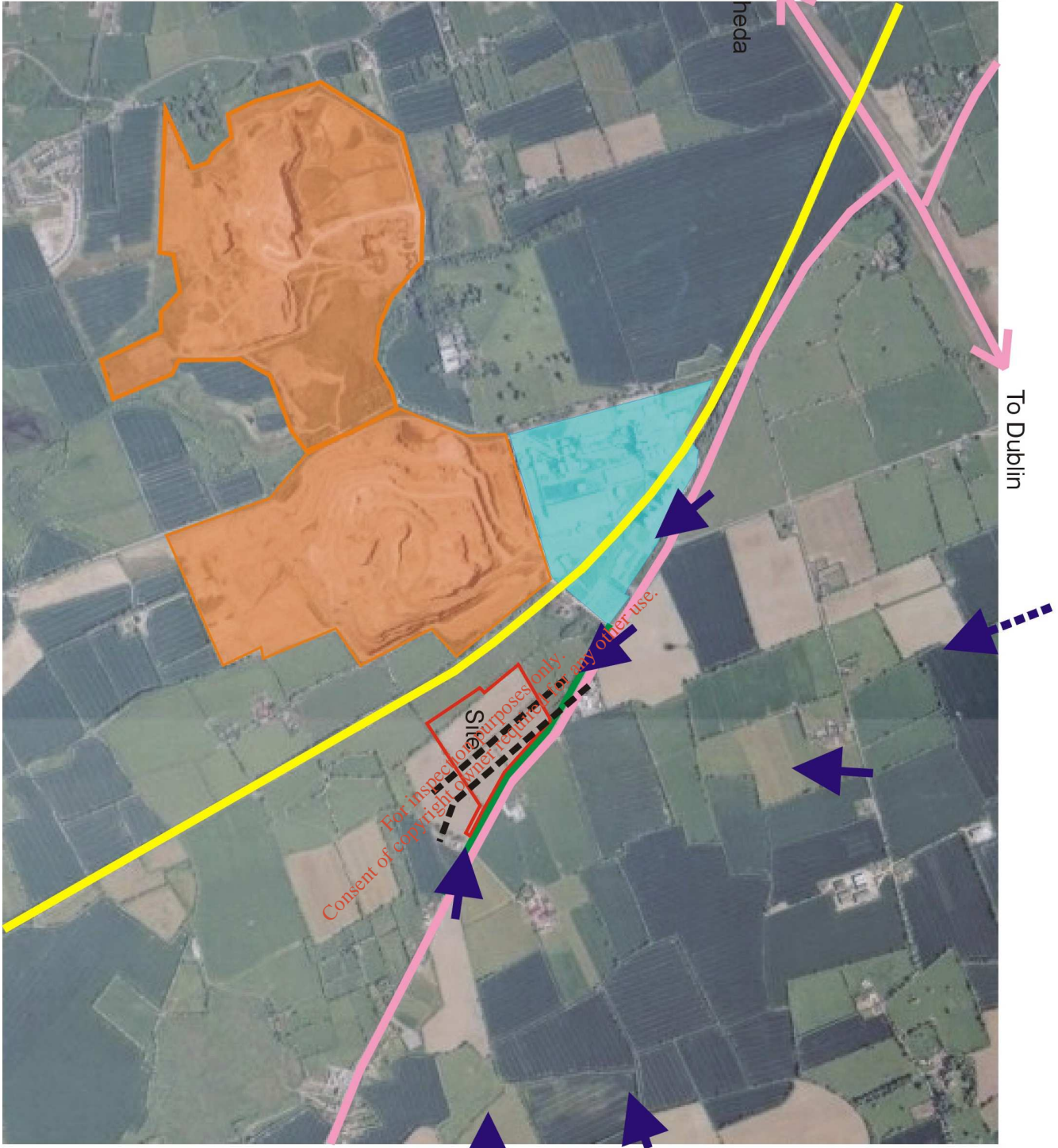


Legend:

- Agriculture
- Residential
- Commercial
- Quarry
- Railway line



Fig. 14.4 CONTIGUOUS LAND USE MAP



To Drogheda

To Dublin

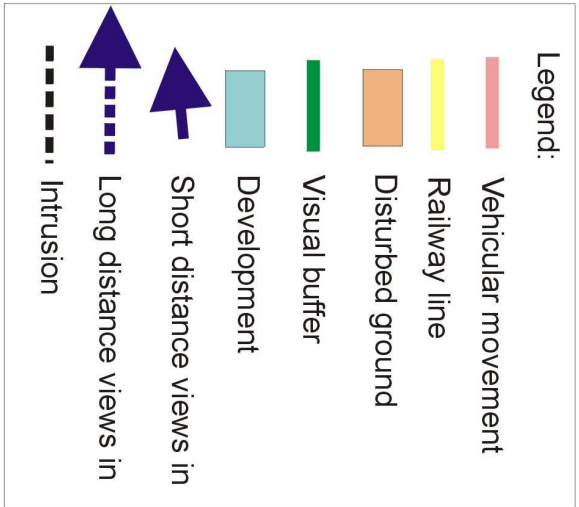


Fig. 14.5 VISUAL ANALYSIS



Legend:

	woodland screen planting to and around mounds		meadow grass land area
	woodland mix tree planting		grass seeding / lawn
	shrub / ground-cover planting		decorative tree planting

FIG. 14.6
LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN

(To be planted at 1m centres)

Latin name	Common name	Size
Ailix glandulosa	Alder	10-12cm
Betula pendula	Silver Birch	10-12cm
Betula pubescens	European Birch	10-12cm
Corylus avellana	Hazelnut	10-12cm
Crataegus monogyna	Hawthorn	10-12cm
Fraxinus excelsior	Ash	10-12cm
Ilex aquifolium	Holly	10-12cm
Pinus sylvestris	Scots Pine	10-12cm
Prunus serotina	Sweet cherry	10-12cm
Salix caprea	Willow	10-12cm
Viburnum opulus	Guelder Rose	10-12cm

To be planted at 1m centres)

Latin name	Common name	Size
Betula pendula	Silver Birch	10-12cm
Corylus avellana	Hazelnut	10-12cm
Fraxinus excelsior	Ash	10-12cm
Prunus sylvatica	Scots Pine	10-12cm
Quercus palustris	Oak	10-12cm

Latin name	Common name	Size
Betula pendula	Silver Birch	10-12cm
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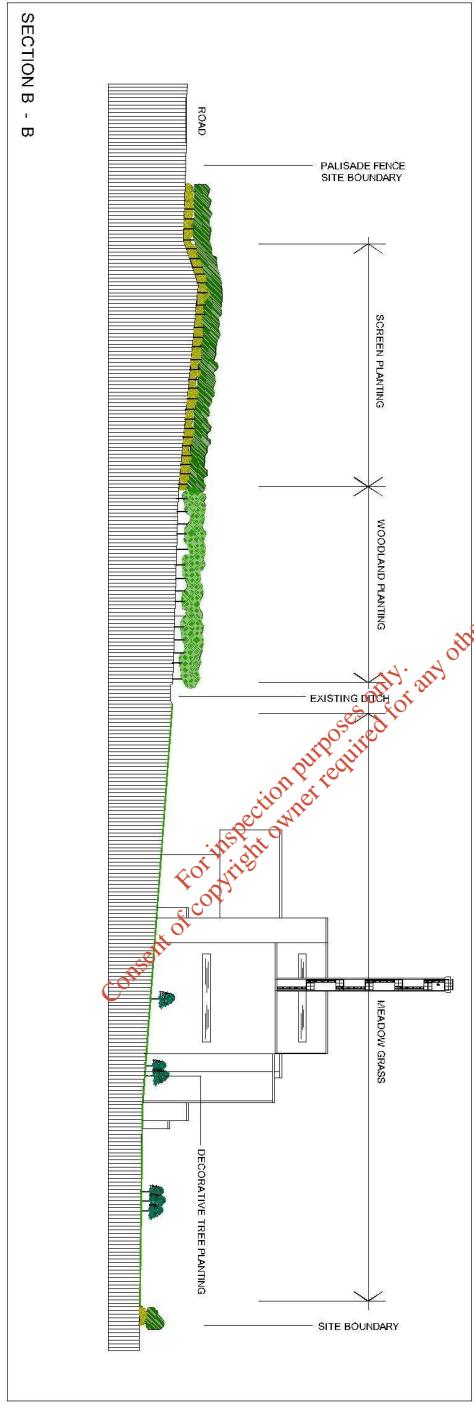
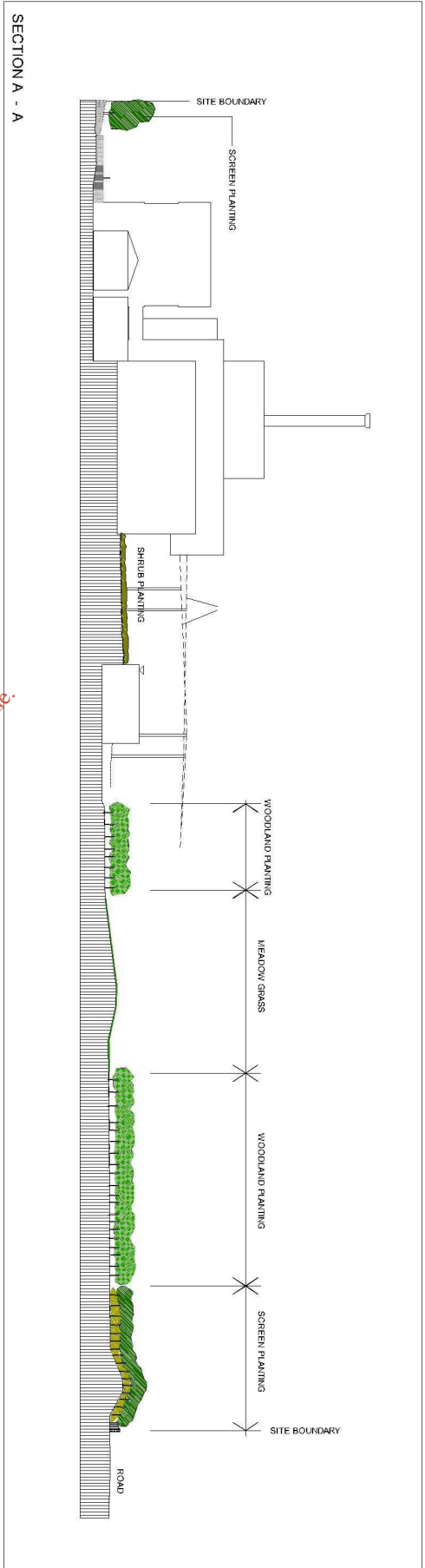
Latin name	Common name	Size
Betula pendula	Silver Birch	10-12cm
Prunus sylvatica	Scots Pine	10-12cm
Quercus palustris	Oak	10-12cm

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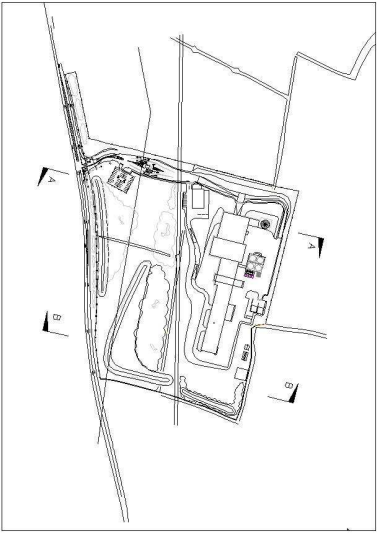


FIG. 14.7 LANDSCAPE SITE SECTIONS