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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

- 10.1 This study presents available information on the landscape features within and immediately beyond the site of the proposed inert waste recovery facility to be operated by Roadstone Wood Ltd. at the Old Quarry at Brownswood, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.
- 10.2 It is prepared as part of an Environmental Impact Statement providing supporting information to accompany an application for planning permission to Wexford County Council and a waste licence application (WLA) to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the proposed inert waste recovery facility at Brownswood.
- 10.3 The study will identify how the landscape and visual environment will be impacted by the proposed waste recovery facility and, where possible, will identify how these impacts may be mitigated.
- 10.4 The application site located entirely within the townland of Brownswood, Co. Wexford approximately 2.5km south of Enniscorthy town. The plan extent of the lands owned by Roadstone Wood Ltd. is outlined in blue on a 1:10,000 scale map of the area, reproduced as Figure 10-1. The plan extent of the application site is also outlined in red on the same figure.
- 10.5 The application site covers an area of approximately 8.3hectares (20.0acres) and comprises a worked out quarry largely developed in granodiorite rock.
- 10.6 The boundaries of the proposed application site have been influenced by a desire to avoid conflict with established or former land-use and other site activities (including concrete, asphalt and block production areas), but includes access roadways and all shared infrastructure necessary to operate the proposed inert waste recovery facility (including offices, wheelwash, weighbridge, maintenance sheds, hardstand areas etc.)
- 10.7 This section of the EIS describes, classifies and evaluates the existing landscape and visual resource, focusing on its sensitivity and ability to accommodate change. The proposed inert waste recovery facility was then applied to the baseline conditions to allow identification of potential impacts, prediction of their magnitude and assessment of their significance. Mitigation measures were then identified to eliminate and reduce, insofar as practical, potential environmental impacts

Difficulties Encountered in Compilation

- 10.8 This impact assessment is based on a visual inspection of the site, published landscaped characterisation maps and a review of County Development Plan policy. No particular difficulties were identified in preparing this report.

RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

Outline of the Baseline Study

- 10.9 The initial data to assess the significant effect on the landscape was acquired through:
- Inspection and walkover of application site
 - Review of topographical survey data in respect of application site and its surrounds
 - Photographic surveys of the site and its surrounds
- 10.10 This information was then evaluated and assessed:
- Considering the layout of future works at the application site.
 - Using cross-sections through the existing site, overlain with the proposed layout of the development.

Existing Environment – Land Use

- 10.11 The application site is located within a rural landscape at Brownswood, Co. Wexford, on the same landholding as an existing aggregate and concrete production facility operated by Roadstone Wood Ltd. The use of the site for production of construction materials constitutes a locally significant land use, particularly given that the predominant land-use in the surrounding area is limited to agriculture and isolated rural housing. The extent of the Applicant's landholding and the application site are shown on Figure 10-1.
- 10.12 Traffic access to the application site and Roadstone Wood Ltd.'s existing facilities at Brownswood is obtained via the Brownswood Junction on the N11 National Primary Road. Traffic turning off the N11 and immediately right (south) leads to the entrance to Roadstone Wood Ltd.'s existing facility after a short distance.
- 10.13 Traffic movement within Roadstone Wood Ltd.'s landholding is over sections of paved road between the existing site entrance and the site offices. Traffic crossing the landholding runs over a network of paved and/or unpaved haul roads.

Existing Environment – Topography

- 10.14 The application site is located immediately adjacent to a designated candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) and a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) and within a landscape character area designated as *Policy Area 2 – Lowlands* (Wexford County Development Plan 2007-2013 – Map No. 7); refer to Figure 10-7.
- 10.15 The extent of the designated area is locally defined by the valley of the River Slaney to the west of the application site. The area encompasses the townlands of Salville or Motabeg, Crefoge and St. John's. Although the area is physically open, it does not retain an undisturbed rural character, due to relatively high levels of development in the form of roads and housing.

- 10.16 The application site is located within the rural hinterland of an expanding town. The lands surrounding the landholding for the Old Quarry (Folio WX18232) have a variety of land uses. Approximately 10 No. residential properties are clustered amongst agricultural land immediately north of the Old Quarry. The existing N11 National Primary Road and the River Slaney are located immediately beyond the western boundary, while Murphy's Quarry and approximately 7 No. residential properties are located beyond the southern boundary.
- 10.17 A local (county) road is located immediately beyond the eastern site boundary. Land on the eastern side of this road largely is used for agricultural purposes and includes occasional interspersed residential property. Planning permission was granted to Roadstone Wood Ltd. in 2003 for an eastward extension of the Old Quarry into these agricultural lands. Existing land-use in the vicinity of the application site, including residential development, is shown on the land-use map in Figure 1.3.
- 10.18 Within the Old Quarry landholding itself, the land immediately north and south of the application site is used for stockpiling of aggregates and materials. Plant and equipment used in production of ready mixed concrete, concrete blocks and asphalt is located to the north-west and west of the application site, while perimeter screen mounds are located to the east.
- 10.19 Ground levels across the application site generally fall south and westwards, from a maximum of approximately 55mOD (Malin) on the eastern side to 8mOD on the western side and from approximately 28mOD on the northern side to 12m to 14mOD on the southern side. The worked out quarry void covers an area of approximately 3.4 hectares (8.2 acres). Floor level at the base of the worked out quarry lies at approximately -22mOD and its depth from existing ground level typically varies from 50m to 36m at its northern and southern faces, to over 70m along its eastern faces.
- 10.20 Given the gently sloping nature of the landscape surrounding the application site and the presence of moderately tall hedgerows, there are only limited long-distance views into the site. There are views into the site from local roads where breaks occur in the line of hedgerows to the north-west only.

Planning Considerations

- 10.21 Aspects of the Wexford County Development Plan (2007-2013) which relate to policy / planning guidance connected to landscape designations are examined below.

Section 9.4.4 Landscape

All aspects of natural, built and cultural heritage come together in the landscapes experienced in County Wexford. Landscapes give a sense of place. Identification with particular landscapes may contribute to a sense of wellbeing. In County Wexford the coastline and countryside are a source of pride, inspiration and well being for many residents and visitors alike. Landscapes are continually changing. Change may be driven by natural forces (e.g. climate), but is largely the result of the actions of many different people and agencies. The challenge the Council faces is to manage the landscapes so that change is positive in its effects, so that the landscapes which

are valued will be protected and those which have been degraded are enhanced. Ireland has signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention which entails a commitment to introducing policies to effect landscape protection and management. A Landscape Character Assessment forms part of this plan

Policy L1

In assessing developments the Council will have regard to the guidance contained in the Landscape Character Assessment. Proposed developments should reflect the guidance contained in the Landscape Character Assessment and seek to minimise the visual impact, particularly in areas designated as Sensitive and Vulnerable Landscapes.

The **lowland areas** are anticipated to continue in use as agricultural lands due to the high quality and fertility of the soils and the importance of agriculture in these areas. Slight changes are anticipated due to intensification of agricultural practices and expansion of urban settlements. Within these areas river corridors are likely to change as a result of management strategies for nature protection, amenity, water sports, tourism, etc.

10.22 Wexford County Development Plan (2007-2013) Landscape Character Assessment indicates that Brownswood, the townland in which the application site is located and the surrounding area are part of the Landscape Categorisation known as the *Policy Area 2 - Lowlands - Slaney Valley*. An extract from the Landscape Character Assessment Map is shown on Figure 10.7.

10.23 Wexford County Council's Landscape Character Assessment (2007) classifies landscapes in Wexford according to their landscape stability (as outlined in Appendix 5 thereof). Relevant extracts from this study are reproduced below:

LANDSCAPE STABILITY

It has been established that County Wexford's landscapes are dynamic and will continue to change (see Section 3.1). However, these changes will be more definite in some areas than in others. It is anticipated that there will be centres of change and centres of stability throughout the County.

The lowland areas are anticipated to continue in use as agricultural lands due to the high quality and fertility of the soils and the importance of agriculture in these areas. Slight changes are anticipated due to intensification of agricultural practices and expansion of urban settlements. Within these areas river corridors are likely to change as a result of management strategies for nature protection, amenity, water sports, tourism, etc.

10.24 It is considered that in order to meet stated planning policy objectives, the worked out quarry void will require to be backfilled in order to create a landform that will integrate the site with the surrounding landform and facilitate its return to agricultural use.

IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED WASTE FACILITY

10.25 Current landscape assessment practice often utilises 'landscape character assessment' as the method for analysing and assessing the local landscape.

LANDSCAPE 10

The UK Countryside Agency guidelines¹ make a clear distinction between the characterisation process (in which the attributes of the landscape are described) and the judgement making process. Wexford County Council has divided the County into landscape character units. The lowland unit was described previously in Paragraph 10.21 and 10.23 of this Chapter.

- 10.26 This section of the landscape assessment addresses how these categories are defined, while later sections make judgements about the potential effects of the proposed inert waste recovery facility, based on preservation of their important attributes.
- 10.27 A common human response to most extractive and related activities is that they reduce landscape quality. The extent to which this is considered a negative visual impact on the surrounding landscape is influenced by a number of factors including:
- The extent, scale and shape of the quarry development.
 - The contrast in colour between the exposed quarry faces, if visible, and its surroundings.
 - The accumulation of industrial type buildings that are out of scale and character with those normally found in the surrounding area.
- 10.28 A further consideration is not just its proximity to human habitations but also the number of people who pass through the area, for whatever reason, who may feel that the visual quality of the area has been degraded by the presence of a quarry, related construction materials production facilities and/or an inert waste recovery facility.
- 10.29 In the case of the application site at Brownswood, although rock excavation has ceased, a significant area of bare exposed soil occurs across the site. In assessing the visual impacts arising from the facility, the main requirement is to assess the following:
- The views and viewers affected (refer to Figure 10-1 and Figures 10-2 to 10-6).
 - The distance of the view (refer to Figure 10-1).
- 10.30 The application site comprises of two main areas; the existing quarry void area and the site entrance / infrastructure area;
- The worked-out quarry on the eastern side of the application site covers an area of approximately c. 3.5 hectares. At the current quarry void, water level is approximately 7.2mOD. It was previously worked to a depth of approximately -22.0mOD. The eastern extraction area is screened by natural vegetation and is hidden from public view along the road and from nearby residences. Current views into the site are shown on Figure 10-2 to 10-6.

¹ Landscape Character Assessment – Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002)

- The site entrance / infrastructure area houses the site office, weighbridge, patio display area, wheelwash and parking area at a ground level of approximately 11mOD to 12mOD. This area is currently screened from external view by natural vegetation.
- 10.31 It is envisaged that the waste recovery operations at Brownswood will use existing site infrastructure, such as site entrance, weighbridge, office and wheelwash facilities, that are currently used for processing / valued added activities within Roadstone Wood Ltd.'s landholding.
- 10.32 The process involved in backfilling and restoring the quarry is in contrast to former extraction activities. Ultimately, continued backfilling of the site using imported materials will result in the entire site being returned to agricultural use, refer to Figure 2-4. On completion of the quarry backfilling operations, the site will better blend into the surrounding landscape, reducing the negative visual impact associated with the existing large open void. The long-term permanent enhancement of the local landscape arising from the quarry backfilling works will constitute a moderate positive impact.
- 10.33 The quarry backfilling activities in particular are expected to have only limited temporary visual impact due to the natural screening afforded the site by the surrounding landscape elements, a combination of the undulating topography and existing hedgerows. Only a very limited amount of quarry backfilling activity will be open to public view (if at all), and where it is, this will be of an intermittent nature and as such could constitute a temporary, minor negative impact.
- 10.34 In accordance with the Environmental Protection Agency publication "*Guidelines on Information to be Contained in an EIS*" particular attention has been paid to potential views into the application site from the following locations;
- Designated tourism routes and viewpoints;
 - Other roads and residences, hotels and amenities and
 - Sites and monuments of archaeological, architectural or historical interest
- 10.35 The definition of the term "views" in the EPA Guidelines is taken to imply significant visibility.

Views and Prospects of Special Amenity

- 10.36 Section 9 of the Wexford County Development Plan identifies the heritage, conservation and landscape aspects within the County. There are no significant views and prospects to / from the site.
- 10.37 The River Slaney Valley candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC Site Ref. 000781) lies immediately west of the existing N11 National Primary Road and is contiguous to Roadstone Wood Ltd.'s landholding. The site is protected as it contains a number of designated habitats listed in Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, including alluvial wet woodlands, estuaries, mudflats and old oak woodlands. It also supports populations of several species listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive.

- 10.38 There will be no significant visibility of the existing or future landform from any prospects identified by the County Development Plan.
- 10.39 Wexford County Development Plan identifies an extensive coastal area / nature reserve area to be protected. Views of these areas from the study area are considered to be at too great a distance and there will be no impact on them from the proposed development.

Direct Impacts

- 10.40 The proposed inert waste recovery activity at the application site will not have any significant impacts on designated view and/or prospects of special amenity on account of its location; the intervening undulating topography; screening by hedgerows and the proposed mitigation measures. The scheme will not restrict or obscure any westward vistas along the adjoining local roads.
- 10.41 The application site is too distant and fully screened by intervening vegetation to be perceptible from the any designated views or prospects. During the quarry backfilling works, there will be no temporary visual impact on views.

Indirect Impacts

- 10.42 The quarry backfilling works will not have any significant indirect impacts on designated view and/or prospects of special amenity.

Other Roads and Residences, Hotels and Amenities

- 10.43 The visual impact of the proposed inert waste recovery facility is primarily limited to views from the closest residences and roads within the area (refer to Figure 10-1). A photographic survey was undertaken which involved taking still digital photographs from a number of locations (including a number of residences), the locations of which are indicated on Figure 10-1. The photographs were taken at eye level (c. 1.5 metres above ground level) at the points indicated, towards the development. The views are shown on Figures 10-2 to 10-6
- 10.44 To assess the specific, existing, visual significance of the site and to form a baseline for accurate assessment of visual impact, a series of viewpoints have been used.
- 10.45 An initial study of Ordnance Survey Ireland 1:50,000 maps were made to identify potential views and areas for field investigation based on the following criteria:
- proximity to the site;
 - high concentrations of viewers, such as settlements, local recreational facilities etc;
 - views from designated areas, private properties, footpaths and other receptors; and
 - views illustrating the visual character of the surrounding area.

Direct Impacts

- 10.46 Potential views from residences into the application site are, and will, be restricted to a small number of local dwellings to the north-west. Many of these dwellings are fully or partially screened by a combination of the existing hedgerows (to be retained) and / or topography. The area of the site to be backfilled has had regard to the need to minimise the impacts on views from nearby residences. Due to the separation distance and intervening topography, the impact on views from residences, if any, will constitute a minor to moderate negative impact for a limited duration during the quarry backfilling operation. In the longer term, backfilling the former quarry is likely to have a minor positive impact.

Indirect Impacts

- 10.47 The development will not have any significant indirect impacts on views from roads, residences, hotels and amenities.

Sites and Monuments of Archaeological, Architectural or Historical Interest

- 10.48 There are no significant views from identified sites and monuments of archaeological, architectural, cultural or historical interest directly adjacent to the development; refer to Chapter 9 of this EIS (Cultural Heritage).

Direct Impacts

- 10.49 The development will not have any impacts on sites and monuments of archaeological, architectural or historical interest due to its location or distance to identified sites, intervening topography and vegetation and the design and phasing of the workings.

Indirect Impacts

- 10.50 The development will not have any indirect impacts on identified sites and monuments of archaeological, architectural or historical interest.

Interaction with Other Impacts

- 10.51 Potential interactions with other impacts associated with visual intrusion (e.g. human beings or material assets) are discussed in the relevant sections of the EIS.

Conclusions

- 10.52 The existing visual influence of the application site is generally limited to the area immediately north (represented by Viewpoint B) of the worked out quarry due to its close proximity to the adjacent residences. Given that the existing landform continues rising northwards, there is little opportunity for longer distance views into the site. There is some potential to reduce the visual impact of the site by backfilling and restoring the quarry void. The existing void is not visible from any other viewpoint location.

- 10.53 The worked-out quarry is surrounded by significant mature woodland and scrub vegetation which also serves to screen views, and restrict potential views to a much greater extent on the western side of the site.

MITIGATION MEASURES

- 10.54 Measures taken to further minimise the potential visual impacts associated with the existing and proposed development can be classified as;
- *Avoidance*
 - *Mitigation*
- 10.55 The primary measure taken to minimise visual impacts is through their avoidance. It is considered that the proposed waste recovery facility and the positioning of the site infrastructure (principally the existing screening), together with existing hedgerows along the site boundary and the surrounding topography, will ensure that the visual impact of the development has no impact on the adjacent surroundings.
- 10.56 The following landscape mitigation measures should be put in place to further eliminate and / or minimise any potential visual impact associated with the proposed waste recovery activities:
- Retain all hedgerows along the existing site boundary;
 - Provide for off-site removal, re-use and/or recovery of all plant, infrastructure and paved surfaces on completion of quarry backfilling activities;
 - Ensure the final restored landform is graded at a shallow angle so as to merge in with the surrounding landscape.
- 10.57 These mitigation measures are in accordance with the recommendations provided in the DoEHLG (2004) publication 'Quarries and Ancillary Activities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities'.
- 10.58 Overall, it is considered that the potential for negative visual impacts arising from the proposed inert waste recovery activities at the application site will generally be limited on account of
- the physical distance between the site and publicly accessible areas
 - the existing undulating topography
 - the phasing and direction of backfilling during the quarry backfilling works
 - the positioning of site infrastructure and
 - the final restored profile of the site.
- 10.59 On cessation of soil backfilling activities, all associated plant and machinery will be removed from site. Any hardcore surfaces will be ripped up and topsoil and subsoil re-spread over the operational area. Restoration grass mix will be sown over the area and maintained by an experienced landscaping contractor until it has taken hold. Thereafter the lands shall be mown regularly or grazed by farm animals. Fertilisers and weed control will be applied where required.

FIGURES

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