

14 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

14.1 INTRODUCTION

ARC Consultants have been commissioned by the Applicant to carry out a visual impact assessment of the development which is the subject of this planning application. The proposed development relates to the conversion of two temporary buildings (a modular office building and a spare parts building) to permanent use and three temporary areas of hard standing as part of the existing Waste-to-Energy Facility at Carranstown, Duleek, County Meath. The subject application also seeks to increase the through-put of the facility from 200,000 tonnes per annum to 220,000 tonnes per annum (a 10% increase).

14.2 METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL VISUAL IMPACTS

In order to assess the likely visibility and consequent visual impact of the proposed development, staff from ARC visited the site on Friday the 27th of January 2012 to take photographs within the site and from the R152 where it passes the site. The conditions were clear and sunny with good long distance visibility. Photographs were taken with a high-resolution digital camera using a lens with a horizontal angle of coverage of some 73.5 degrees.

14.3 DEFINITION OF VISUAL IMPACTS

The assessment of visual impacts on landscape and on the built environment had regard to the *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Statements* prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency (2002), and to the *European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations, 1999*.

The list of definitions given below is taken from *Section 5: Glossary of Impacts* contained in the *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Statements* prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency. Some comment is also given below on what these definitions might imply in the case of visual impact or landscape and visual impact. The definitions from the EPA document are in italics.

Imperceptible Impact: *An impact capable of measurement but without noticeable consequences.*
The definition implies that the development would be visible, capable of detection by the eye, but not noticeable. If the development were not visible, there could be no impact.

Slight Impact: *An impact which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities.* For this definition to apply, a development would be both visible and

noticeable, and would also bring about a change in the visual character of the environment. However, apart from the development itself, the visual sensitivity of the surrounding environment should remain unchanged.

Moderate Impact: *An impact that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with emerging trends.* In this case, a development must bring about a change in the visual character of the environment; and this change must be consistent with a pattern of change that is already taking place.

Significant Impact: *An impact which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment.* The wording of the definition is clear. Difficulty in assessing whether an impact might or might not be significant lies in the word 'sensitive'. In visual terms, particularly when related to the appearance of landscape or the built environment, what one person might be sensitive to another might not. A conservative approach, classifying impacts as significant even though many observers might not regard them as significant, is taken here.

Profound Impact: *An impact which obliterates sensitive characteristics.* In visual terms, profound impacts are only likely to occur on a development site, in that it is only on the site that all previous visually sensitive characteristics could be obliterated. Outside the site, some visual characteristic of the original environment is likely to remain.

The range of possible impacts listed above deal largely with the extent of impact; and the extent of the impact of a development is usually proportional to the extent to which that development is visible. The extent of impact will also, in part, depend on the sensitivity of the spaces from which the development is seen. This proportionality may be modified by the extent to which a development is regarded as culturally or socially acceptable.

The character of the impact: positive, negative or neutral, will depend on how well a development is received by the public, and on the general contribution of the development to the built environment. The character of a visual impact, and even the duration of a visual impact, is very dependent on the attitude of the viewer. If a viewer is opposed to a new building for reasons other than visual, that viewer is likely to see the building in a negative light, no matter beautiful the building might be. It is also the case that a building thought startling when first built, in time becomes part of the background, and what at first might have been regarded by the public a significant impact, fades to slight. Though buildings are intended to be permanent, and will be permanently visible, the extent of visual impact associated with a building often diminishes with time.

14.4 POTENTIAL VISUAL IMPACTS

From ARC's on-site assessment, it is clear that neither of the two buildings and none of the three areas of hard-standing are readily visible from outside the site. Glimpses of one of the buildings and one of the areas of hard-standing may be possible from just inside the gate. Since these features will not be visible from outside the site, they can have no visual impact on the surroundings.

The proposed increase in through-put at the facility will result in additional truck movements on the R152. However, as detailed in Chapter 13 Traffic, these additional truck movements are very minor when compared to peak traffic flow on the R152. Therefore this will not give rise to any additional visual impact. In addition, the traffic impact assessment points out that the existing operating hours are 10 hours per day, whereas the proposed operating hours with the additional through-put are to be 14 hours a day, an increase of 40%. It, therefore, appears that there will be a 10% increase in truck movements, but a 40% increase in the period of time over which truck movements may be spread. This would suggest that the number of truck movements per hour would actually reduce.

Two photomontages produced in August 2009 as part of a previous planning application are reproduced on the following pages. Photographs taken from the same locations as these photomontages are also reproduced. The photographs demonstrate that the two subject buildings and three subject areas of hard-standing are not visible from either location. It will be noted that the planting shown in the photomontages is indicated as more mature than that in the photographs. The photomontages were also produced in the summer and show summer foliage, whereas the photographs were taken in January of this year. The photographs also show that some small areas of planting are not yet complete. It is expected that, when planting matures, it will be similar to that represented in the photomontages.

14.5 MITIGATION

This assessment identified no potential visual impacts so no mitigation measures are proposed.

14.6 PREDICTED VISUAL IMPACTS

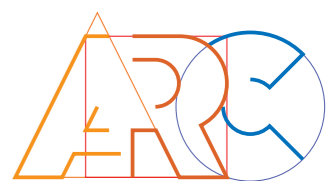
It is predicted that the development which is the subject of this application will not result in any visual impacts.



Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO EXISTING PLANNING PERMISSION

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Map Showing Location of Views



Photomontage view from the R152, prepared in August 2009

View 1 • Looking north towards the entrance to the plant

Note: the blue line indicates the outline of the plant as approved under a planning application prior to 2009





Photograph taken in January 2012

View 1 • Looking north towards the entrance to the plant



Photomontage view from the R152, prepared in August 2009

View 2 • Looking south west towards the entrance to the plant

Note: the blue line indicates the outline of the plant as approved under a planning application prior to 2009





Photograph taken in January 2012

View 2 • Looking south west towards the entrance to the plant

