

CUNNANE STRATTON REYNOLDS

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

Proposed Residential Scheme,
Monacnappa, Blarney,
Co. Cork.

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CUNNANE STRATTON REYNOLDS
LAND PLANNING & DESIGN
www.csrlandplan.ie

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1.1 Introduction

The Landscape and Visual Appraisal prepared by CSR was informed by a desktop study and a survey of the site and receiving environment in April 2021. The appraisal is in accordance with the methodology prescribed in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition, 2013 (GLVIA) published by the UK Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment and the relevant updates and Clarifications as issued by the Landscape Institute.

The chapter identifies and discusses the landscape and visual constraints, and likely effects in relation to the proposed residential development at Monacnappa, Blarney, Co. Cork.

1.2 Methodology

Ireland is a signatory to the European Landscape Convention (ELC). The ELC defines landscape as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'. This definition is important in that it expands beyond the idea that landscape is only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity. It encourages a focus on landscape as a resource in its own right - a shared resource providing a complex range of cultural, environmental, and economic benefits to individuals and society.

As a cultural resource, the landscape functions as the setting for our day-to-day lives, also providing opportunities for recreation and aesthetic enjoyment and inspiration. It contributes to the sense of place experienced by individuals and communities and provides a link to the past as a record of historic socio-economic and environmental conditions. As an environmental resource, the landscape provides habitat for fauna and flora. It receives, stores, conveys, and cleans water, and vegetation in the landscape stores carbon and produces oxygen. As an economic resource, the landscape provides the raw materials and space for the production of food, materials (e.g., timber, aggregates) and energy (e.g. carbon-based fuels, wind, solar), living space and for recreation and tourism activities.

Forces for Landscape Change

The GLVIA notes that the landscape is change is ongoing. Many different pressures have progressively altered familiar landscapes over time and will continue to do so in the future, creating new landscapes. For example, within the receiving environment, the environs of the proposed development have altered over the last thousand years, from wilderness to agriculture and settlement.

Many of the drivers for change arise from the requirement for development to meet the needs of a growing population and economy. The concept of sustainable development recognises that change must and will occur to meet the needs of the present, but that it should not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This involves finding an appropriate balance between economic, social, and environmental forces and values.

The reversibility of change is an important consideration. If change must occur to meet a current need, can it be reversed to return the resource (in this case, the landscape) to its previous state to allow for development or management for future needs.

Climate change is one of the major factors likely to bring about future change in the landscape, and it is accepted to be the most serious long-term threat to the natural environment, as well as economic activity (particularly primary production) and society. The need for climate change mitigation and adaptation, which includes the management of water and more extreme weather and rainfall patterns, is part of this.

1.2.1 Guidance

Landscape and Visual Appraisal is a tool used to identify the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource and on people's views and visual amenity. As this report is not part of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), and is instead a standalone Landscape and Visual Appraisal, the report does not include a statement of the significance of effects. However, the process by which the landscape and visual effects are identified is similar to that of a Landscape and Visual Assessment carried out as part of an EIAR.

The methodology is informed by the following key guidance documents, namely:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition 2013, published by the UK Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (hereafter referred to as the GLVIA).
- Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (Draft August 2017, EPA).

References are also made to the '*Landscape and Landscape Assessment – Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities*' document, published in 2000 by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Use of the Term 'Effect' vs 'Impact'

The GLVIA advises that the terms 'impact' and 'effect' should be clearly distinguished and consistently used in the preparation of an LVIA.

'*Impact*' is defined as the action being taken. In the case of the proposed works, the impact would include the construction of the proposed development.

'*Effect*' is defined as the change or changes resulting from those actions, e.g., a change in landscape character, or changes to the composition, character, and quality of views in the receiving environment. This report focusses on these effects.

1.2.2 Assessment of Both 'Landscape' and 'Visual' Effects

Another key distinction to make in a LVIA is that between landscape effects and the visual effects of development.

'*Landscape*' results from the interplay between the physical, natural, and cultural components of our surroundings. Different combinations of these elements and their spatial distribution create distinctive character of landscape in different places. 'Landscape character assessment' is the method used in LVIA to describe landscape, and by which to understand the potential effects of a development on the landscape as 'a resource'. Character is not just about the physical elements and features that make up a landscape, but also embraces the aesthetic, perceptual and experiential aspects of landscape that make a place distinctive.

Views and '*visual amenity*' refer to the interrelationship between people and the landscape. The GLVIA prescribes that effects on views and visual amenity should be assessed separately from landscape, although the two topics are inherently linked. Visual assessment is concerned with changes that arise in the composition of available views, the response of people to these changes and the overall effects on the area's visual amenity.

The appraisal of landscape and visual effects included a desktop study, review of the proposed development drawings and visualisations, and a site visit which was carried out in July 2020.

1.2.3 Methodology for Landscape Appraisal

Landscape appraisal considers the sensitivity of the receptor, and the likely nature and magnitude of the changes to the main landscape elements and characteristics. Existing trends of change in the landscape are taken into account.

Sensitivity of the Landscape Resource

Landscape Sensitivity: Landscape sensitivity is a function of its land use, landscape patterns and scale, visual enclosure and distribution of visual receptors, scope for mitigation, and the value placed on the landscape. It also relates to the nature and scale of development proposed. It includes consideration of landscape values as well as the susceptibility of the landscape to change.

Landscape values can be identified by the presence of landscape designations or policies which indicate particular values, either on a national or local level. In addition, a number of criteria are used to assess the value of a landscape. These are described further in Section 1.6 below.

Landscape susceptibility is defined in the GLVIA as *the ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline scenario and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies*. Susceptibility also relates to the type of development – a landscape may be highly susceptible to certain types of development but have a low susceptibility to other types of development.

For the purpose of assessment, three categories are used to classify the landscape sensitivity of the receiving environment.

Sensitivity is therefore a combination of Landscape value and Susceptibility.

Sensitivity	Description
High	Areas where the landscape exhibits strong, positive character with valued elements, features, and characteristics. The character of the landscape is such that it has limited/low capacity for accommodating change in the form of development. These attributes are recognised in landscape policy or designations as being of national, regional, or county value and the principal management objective for the area is conservation of the existing character.
Medium	Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features, or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong. The character of the landscape is such that there is some capacity for change in the form of development. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principal management objective may be to consolidate landscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change.
Low	Areas where the landscape has few valued elements, features or characteristics and the character is weak. The character of the landscape is such that it has capacity for change; where development would result in a minor change or would make a positive change. Such landscapes are generally unrecognised in policy and where the principal management objective is to facilitate change through development, repair, restoration, or enhancement.

Table 1.1 – Categories of Landscape Sensitivity

Magnitude of Landscape Change: The magnitude of change is a factor of the scale, extent and degree of change imposed on the landscape with reference to its key elements, features, and characteristics (also known as ‘landscape receptors’). Four categories are used to classify magnitude of landscape change.

Magnitude of Change	Description
High	Change that is moderate to large in extent, resulting in major alteration to key elements, features, or characteristics of the landscape and/or introduction of large elements considered uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in change to the character of the landscape.
Medium	Change that is moderate in extent, resulting in partial loss or alteration to key elements, features, or characteristics of the landscape, and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent but not necessarily substantially uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in change to the character of the landscape.
Low	Change that is moderate or limited in scale, resulting in minor alteration to key elements, features, or characteristics of the landscape, and/or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in minor change to the character of the landscape.

Negligible	Change that is limited in scale, resulting in no alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the landscape key elements features or characteristics of the landscape, and/or introduction of elements that are characteristic of the context. Such development results in no change to the landscape character.
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Table 1.2 – Categories of Landscape Change

Landscape Effects

A conclusion on the relative importance of landscape effects (either on physical landscape elements or on the landscape character) can be arrived at by combining the landscape sensitivity and the magnitude of change. This is illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

As this report is not part of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), and is instead a standalone Landscape and Visual Appraisal, the report does not include a statement of the significance of effects.

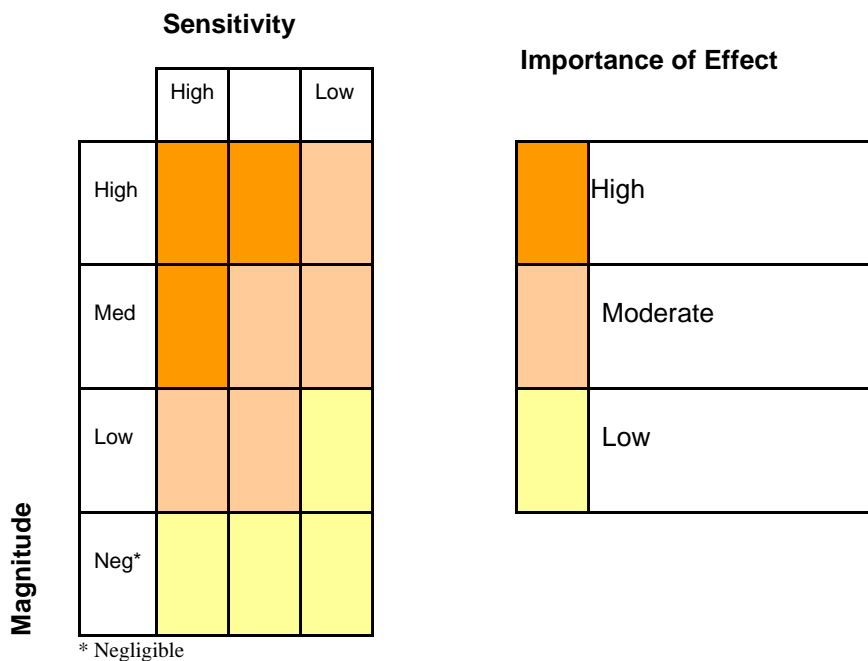


Figure 1.1: Guide to the classification of the level of effects

Landscape effects are also classified as positive, neutral, or negative/adverse. Development has the potential to improve the environment as well as damage it. In certain situations, there might be policy encouraging a type of change in the landscape, and if a development achieves the objective of the policy the resulting effect might be positive, even if the landscape character is profoundly changed.

1.2.4 Methodology for Visual Appraisal

Visual appraisal considers the changes to the composition of views, the character of the views, and the visual amenity experienced by visual receptors. Visual receptor sensitivity is a function of two main considerations:

- *Susceptibility of the visual receptor to change.* This depends on the occupation or activity of the people experiencing the view, and the extent to which their attention or interest is focussed on the views or visual amenity they experience at that location.

Visual receptors most susceptible to change include residents at home, people engaged in outdoor recreation focused on the landscape (e.g. trail users), and visitors to heritage or other attractions and places of community congregation where the setting contributes to the experience.

Visual receptors less susceptible to change include travellers on road, rail, and other transport routes (unless on recognised scenic routes which would be more susceptible, people engaged in outdoor recreation or sports where the surrounding landscape does not influence the experience, and people in their place of work or shopping where the setting does not influence their experience.

- *Value attached to the view.* This depends to a large extent on the subjective opinion of the visual receptor but also on factors such as policy and designations (e.g. scenic routes, protected views), or the view or setting being associated with a heritage asset, visitor attraction or having some other cultural status (e.g. by appearing in arts).

Three categories are used to classify a viewpoint’s sensitivity:

Sensitivity	Description
High	Viewers at viewpoints that are recognised in policy or otherwise designated as being of value, or viewpoints that are highly valued by people that experience them regularly (such as views from houses or outdoor recreation features) and views which are valued by the local community. This would include tourist attractions, and heritage features of regional or county value, and viewers travelling on scenic routes.
Medium	Viewers at viewpoints representing people travelling at slow or moderate speed through or past the affected landscape in cars or on public transport, where they are partly but not entirely focused on the landscape, or where the landscape has some valued views. The views are generally not designated, but which include panoramic views or views judged to be of some scenic quality, which demonstrate some sense of naturalness, tranquillity, or some rare element in the view.
Low	Viewers at viewpoints reflecting people involved in activities not focused on the landscape e.g. people at their place of work or engaged in similar activities such as shopping, etc. The view may present an attractive backdrop to these activities but there is no evidence of that the view is valued, and not regarded as an important element of these activities. Viewers travelling at high speeds (e.g. motorways) may also be considered of low susceptibility.

Table 1.3 – Categories of Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Magnitude of Change to the View

Classification of the magnitude of change takes into account the size or scale of the intrusion of development into the view (relative to the other elements and features in the composition, i.e. its relative visual dominance), the degree to which it contrasts or integrates with the other elements and the general character of the view, and the way in which the change will be experienced (e.g. in full view, partial or peripheral, or glimpses). It also considers the geographical extent of the change, the duration, and the reversibility of the visual effects.

Four categories are used to classify magnitude of change to a view.

Magnitude of Change	Description
High	Extensive intrusion of the development in the view, or partial intrusion that obstructs valued features, or introduction of elements that may be considered uncharacteristic in the context, to the extent that the development becomes co-dominant with other elements in the composition and affects the character of the view and the visual amenity.
Medium	Partial intrusion of the development in the view, or introduction of elements that may be prominent but not necessarily uncharacteristic in the context, resulting in

	change to the composition but not necessarily the character of the view or the visual amenity.
Low	Minor intrusion of the development into the view, or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic in the context, resulting in minor alteration to the composition and character of the view but no change to visual amenity.
Negligible	Barely discernible intrusion of the development into the view, or introduction of elements that are characteristic in the context, resulting in slight change to the composition of the view and no change in visual amenity.

Table 1.4 – Magnitude of Visual Change

Visual Effects

A conclusion on the relative importance of visual effects can be arrived at by combining the visual receptor sensitivity and the magnitude of change. This is included in Figure 1.1 above as for Landscape Effects.

As this report is not part of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, and is instead a standalone Landscape and Visual Appraisal, the report does not include a statement of the significance of effects.

Visual effects are also classified as positive, neutral, or negative/adverse as set out below:

Quality and Timescale of Effects

The predicted effects are also classified as beneficial, neutral, or adverse. This is not an absolute exercise; in particular, visual receptors’ attitudes to development, and thus their response to the impact of a development, will vary. However, the methodology applied is designed to provide robust justification for the conclusions drawn. These qualitative impacts/effects are defined as:

- Adverse – Scheme at variance with landform, scale, pattern. Would degrade, diminish, or destroy the integrity of valued features, elements or their setting or cause the quality of the landscape(townscape)/view to be diminished;
- Neutral - Scheme complements the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape(townscape)/view and maintains landscape quality;
- Beneficial – improves landscape(townscape)/view quality and character, fits with the scale, landform and pattern, and enables the restoration of valued characteristic features or repairs / removes damage caused by existing land uses.

Effects are also categorised according to their longevity or timescale:

- Temporary – Lasting for one year or less;
- Short Term – Lasting one to seven years;
- Medium Term – Lasting seven to fifteen years;
- Long Term – Lasting fifteen years to sixty years;
- Permanent – Lasting over sixty years.

1.3 The Proposed Development

The proposed development will consist of a strategic housing development of 143no. residential units (8no. 1-bed; 38no. 2-bed; 71no. 3-bed; and 26no. 4-bed units), comprising 105no. houses (3no. detached; 42no. semi-detached; and 60no. terraced units) and 38no. apartments. The proposed

development will also consist of the demolition of an existing garage and southern boundary wall, to be replaced with a new southern boundary wall, as well as the lowering of the existing eastern boundary wall and pier, at no. 1 Sunberry Drive; a crèche; all associated ancillary site development and landscaping works, to include bin stores, bicycle and car parking, ground works and retaining structures, foul drainage, stormwater drainage, water supply, service ducting and cabling, public lighting, relocation of existing ESB substation, and all boundary treatments. The proposed development is to be accessed via the existing Sunberry Heights/Sunberry Drive off the Blarney Relief Road (R617). An upgrade is proposed to the existing Sunberry Heights/Sunberry Drive and the existing access to the proposed strategic housing development, including the widening of the footpath at the junction with the Blarney Relief Road (R617), raised platforms, security barriers and fencing as necessary, road markings, and road resurfacing to facilitate improved pedestrian/cycle connectivity.

1.4 Receiving Environment – Policy Context

The following section includes policies and objectives from the Cork County Council Development Plan 2014 (hereafter referred as the Plan) which relate to the site zoning, including policies relating to landscape, views and prospects, and green infrastructure.

1.4.1 Cork County Council Development Plan 2014

The following section includes policies and objectives from the Cork County Development Plan 2014, hereafter referred to as the Plan.

These include policies relating to town centre development, cultural heritage, landscape character, value, and scenic routes.

Blarney Macroom Municipal District Local Area Plan Jan 2015 Volume 1

Population and Housing

3.2.8 *In the Cork County Development Plan 2014, Blarney has been allocated a population target of 7,533 representing growth of just over 5,096 people on Census 2011 figures (2,537). In order to accommodate this level of population growth, an additional 2,566 housing units will be required. The plan now makes provision for 152.31ha which is estimated to deliver 3,555 units.*

3.2.17 *In relation to BL-R-02 and the BL-R-03 sites, there is no direct access to the public road. Future development proposal on these sites will need to ensure that safe access is provided. This issue will be of particular concern when servicing the BL-R-03 site. Serious consideration should be given, in any proposal on this site, to the following traffic related issues;*

- *The impact of increased traffic at the junction of Sunberry Heights and the R617*
- *The gradient of Sunberry Heights as it approaches the Blarney Inner Relief Road.*
- *Pedestrian and cycling connectivity between BL-R-03 and the town centre.*

BL R-03 Medium B Density Residential Development including detached dwellings, limited to the lower portion of the site. The upper part of the site, closer to the ridge, is generally unsuitable for development and should be retained as open space land uses with long term strategic planting as part of the overall scheme

3.2.23 *Tourism is a significant industry in Blarney as it contains one of the principal tourist attractions in Ireland, Blarney Castle. This industry relies on the quality and attractiveness of the built and natural heritage of the local area. Is important therefore, that future development initiatives within the vicinity of the Castle do not compromise the tourism potential of the town and actively seek to enhance this important sector of the local economy.*

3.2.24 *The tourism offer has expanded in recent times and now includes Blarney House and the wider estate and gardens. As a result of this growth, there is a need to have regard to the impacts of proposed developments on both Blarney Castle and the wider Blarney Estate. Future development initiatives within the vicinity of the Estate should not compromise the landscape and heritage character of the area on which the local tourism economy relies.*

3.2.25 *When assessing development proposals in the vicinity of the Estate, regard should be given to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government "Guidelines on Architectural Heritage Protection", which acknowledge that new development can have a negative impact on a protected structure, even when the proposal is detached from the protected structure and outside the curtilage of the attendant grounds.*

Community Facilities / Green Infrastructure

3.2.34 *The scale of growth predicted for Blarney in this Plan will place significant new demands on social and community infrastructure (schools, recreational facilities, healthcare etc.) It is important that new community infrastructure is delivered in a timely fashion as the town grows so that it continues to perform as an attractive convenient town offering a good quality of life.*

Sporting and Cultural Facilities

3.2.39

The town has a limited supply of active and passive open spaces. Blarney is widely regarded as one of Ireland's most picturesque towns. One of the principal features of the town centre is the well-preserved village square maintained by Blarney Castle Estate. The castle, built nearly 600 years ago, is situated in over a thousand acres of woodland and is one of the principal tourist attractions in the country.

3.2.40

The future development of the town offers opportunities to develop an integrated open space strategy which can perform a number of function including passive and active amenity areas, wildlife corridors and carbon filters to offset impacts of increased development and traffic within the town. There is a need to identify areas of local biodiversity importance within the plan area so these can form part of the open space network. The area of woodland the Killowen River Valley should be protected and form part of any green infrastructure network.

Environment and Heritage

3.2.62 *There are 3 proposed Natural Heritage Areas in Blarney including;*

- Blarney Castle Woods*
- Ardamadame Wood*
- Blarney Bog*

Built Heritage

3.2.63

There are currently 4 structures on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) within the development boundary of Blarney including the following:

Blarney Catholic Church (00376), Blarney Bridge (00378), Blarney Woollen Mills (00383), and Blarney Church of Ireland Church (00384). There are four additional RPS located to the south of Blarney and outside the development boundary including the following:

Blarney Ornamental Tower (00379), Blarney Castle Country House (00380), Icehouse (00454), and Blarney Tower House & Bawn (00382).

3.2.64

The area of Blarney town centre and Blarney Castle Estate was designated as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) in the County Development Plan 2014. The Blarney ACA includes

the key buildings/groups of buildings of architectural, historical and cultural merit and public spaces around them in Blarney Town Centre.

Scenic Routes:

There are two scenic routes close to the subject site :-

- Scenic Route S39 Road between Clogheen, Tower and Blarney and the road to Blarney Lake
- Scenic Route S40 Road between Blarney and Grenagh

Draft Cork County Landscape Strategy 2007.

Landscape Typology:

The site is located within an area described as Type 6a Broad Fertile Lowland

Landscape Value: High

Landscape Sensitivity: High

Landscape Importance: County

Landscape Description This landscape type stretches west and east from the environs of Cork City but also includes a smaller area east of Rathcormac. The valleys in these areas are created by the rivers flowing east to west and are surrounded by low well spaced ridges. These shallow and flat valleys wind as they follow the course of the river, rising to the north and south with gentle slopes where the valley is wide but with steeper faced slopes where the valley narrows. Further upstream to the west the broad flatness narrows and winds between low hills. Landcover comprises highly fertile, regularly shaped fields typically of medium size and with mature broadleaf hedgerows. Agricultural use primarily involves intensive dairying as well as tillage, with farmsteads relatively well screened by the hedgerows. Some of the larger settlements include Bandon, Ballincollig and Blarney to the west of Cork City, Castlemartyr to the east and Rathcormack to the north. Major roads such as the N22 between Macroom and Cork City and the N71 between Innishannon and Bandon tend to follow the rivers.

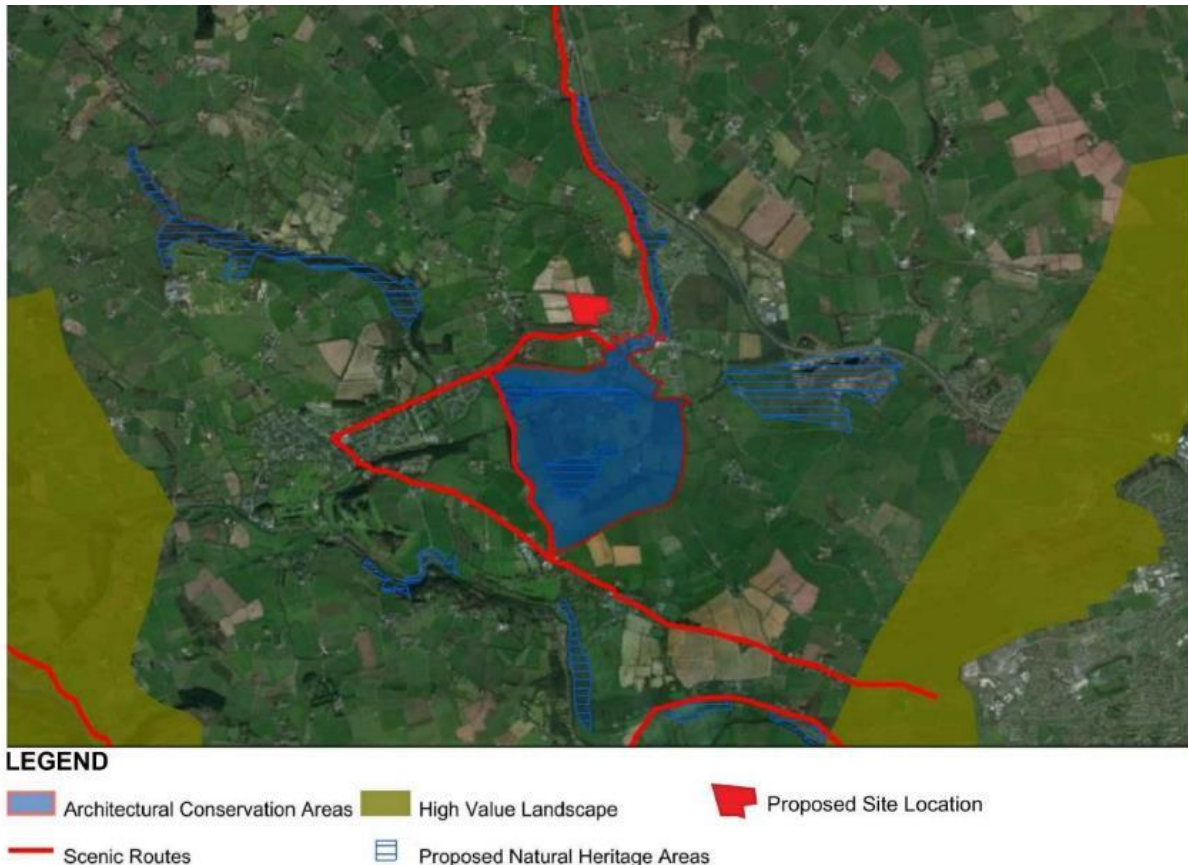
Recommendations

- *Conserve and enhance the characteristics in this Landscape Character Type that are important to tourism.*
- *Have regard to the rich and diverse natural heritage in this Landscape Character Type and the concentration of NHA's that are designated for protection. While protecting these areas it is also important to recognise their potential as key recreation and amenity sources.*
- *Protect the existing character and setting of villages and village nuclei which are under pressure from population growth particularly those villages which are located close to Cork City.*
- *Discourage ribbon development along approach roads to main settlements.*
- *Discourage sizable 'urban' style housing developments on the fringes of smaller settlements as these can have an adverse impact on the quality and character of an area.*

- *Promote best practice in design and layout through the use of the Cork Rural Design Guide. These guidelines are a positive step in addressing the issues of design, siting and overall approach to building dwellings in the countryside.*

1.5 The Site

Map 1.5 Site Location Plan



1.5.1 Description of Site and Local Area Context

The Site:-

Use: The site is currently devoted to tillage farming.

Landform: The hillside location gives rise to variations in levels across the site from +55m O.D. at the southern end of the site to +87m O.D. at the elevated northern end of the subject site.

Drainage: Drainage is across the site contours to the southern end of the site.

Vegetation: The site has significant vegetation along the western boundary in the form of mature trees on a raised embankment. There are mature woodland trees on the adjoining site to the south of the site. The northern boundary of the subject site is located in the middle of the open field while the northern boundary of the field itself is defined by an embankment and a 12-15m wide band of native trees and understorey shrubs. To the east of the site the site boundaries are characterised by a mixture of ornamental garden hedges and fences as well as some native hedgerows species.

The subject site boundary trees are the subject of a separate arborists report which accompanies this application.

Access: Site access is off the R617 via the adjacent Sunberry Heights housing estate.

Local Area Context:-

Built environment: The site is located to the north-west of Blarney town centre and abuts the existing housing development at Sunberry Heights. The site is located approximately 0.45km from Blarney village green.

Road Hierarchy: The R617 bypass of Blarney town centre provides access to the subject site as well as connectivity with the historical road hierarchy leading to and from the village centre.

Cultural Heritage: Blarney is a renowned tourist destination with Blarney Castle estate, Blarney Woollen Mills and the scenic setting of Blarney Town Centre at the heart of the offer. The quality of the built and natural environments are valued assets for the town. Key contributors to this profile and offer include:-

- The Architectural Conservation Area designation which was applied to Blarney Castle estate and Blarney Town Centre in 2014.
- The presence of four structures which are on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) within the development area of the town and four additional ones on Blarney Castle Estate.
- The existence of two scenic routes in close proximity of the town (S39: Road between Clogheen, Tower and Blarney and the road to Blarney Lake and S40: Road between Blarney and Grenagh)
- The existence of pNHAs located in the vicinity of Blarney town.



Photograph 1 View north-westward from south-eastern corner of the site



Photograph 2 View south-westward from north-eastern part of the site



Photograph 3 View south-eastward from northern boundary of the site



Photograph 3 View eastward along northern boundary of the site



Photograph 4 View southward along the western boundary of the site



Photograph 5 View eastward along the southern boundary of the site



Photograph 6 View northward from the site entrance



Photograph 6 Existing access road to Sunberry Road and the subject site



Photograph 7 View south westward across the central public open space in Sunberry Drive



Photograph 8 Castleowen housing estate located to the east of Sunberry Drive



Photograph 9 Blarney Village Green and Protected Structure Church of the Ressurrection



Photograph 10 View eastward along The Square, Blarney.



Photograph 11 Protected Structure Church of the Immaculate Conception



Photograph 10 Protected Structure, Blarney Woollen Mills

1.5.2 Summary of Landscape Character and Values

Landscape Values

The landscape values of a site can be identified through formal designations which infer landscape value, as well as values which are not enshrined in policy but are evident on the site. These values are

listed below, and further be categorised in two ways – values which should be conserved, and those that provide opportunity for enhancement.

There are no landscape designations on the site of the proposed development.

However, in addition to formal designations at international, nation and local level, the GLVIA 3rd edition (2013) recommend the use of a number of criteria which can help to describe landscape values. These are listed below and include:

- *Landscape Quality/Condition*
- *Heritage/Conservation interests*
- *Scenic Quality*
- *Rarity*
- *Perceptual aspects:*
- *Recreation Value*

The site is considered of good condition and is privately owned. The site is part of a prominent landscape ridge and the upper part of the site commands pleasant panoramic views across the landscape to the south. Mature woodland immediately to the south of the site restricts views southward from the lower half of the site.

Conservation values

The conservation values indicate those aspects of the receiving environment which are sensitive and could be negatively impacted on by the proposed development. These values form the potential landscape and visual constraints to the proposed development. These include:

- Potential impact on sensitive receptors such as local residents and visitors to Blarney Castle and village centre.
- Potential impact on existing site boundary trees
- Potential impact on views and vistas

Enhancement Values

The enhancement values reflect change that is occurring in the landscape and its inherent robustness, and identify elements which could be enhanced.

- Opportunity to demonstrate best practice in minimising landscape and visual impacts for developments of this nature.
- Opportunity for innovative and sensitive design to meet the recognised need for additional housing provision in Blarney while avoiding adverse landscape and visual impacts.
- Potential to contribute towards the provision of sustainable housing in close proximity to local services and amenities.

1.5.3 Zone of Visual Influence and Potential Visual Receptors

A thorough assessment of potential views of the proposed development was carried out during the site visit. The surrounding vicinity was walked and driven, and the areas with likely views were identified.

Views from adjoining areas are limited by a combination of tree cover, topography and existing development to the east of the subject site. The most prominent view is from Blarney Castle to the south of the site.

Locations for viewpoints identified include:

Views from the south –

- View from Blarney Castle and view for Blarney town centre.
- Distant views from the road network to the south-west.

Views from the east

- View from adjoining Sunberry housing estate and limited views from the road network further east

Views from the north

- Views are heavily constrained by the hillside topography

Views from the west–

- Limited views from the local road network

A list of the 9 viewpoints taken to represent a variety of visual receptors in the vicinity is included in Table 1.5 below and an accompanying map showing the viewpoint locations is included in Figure 1.7, below and also in the Photomontage Booklet.

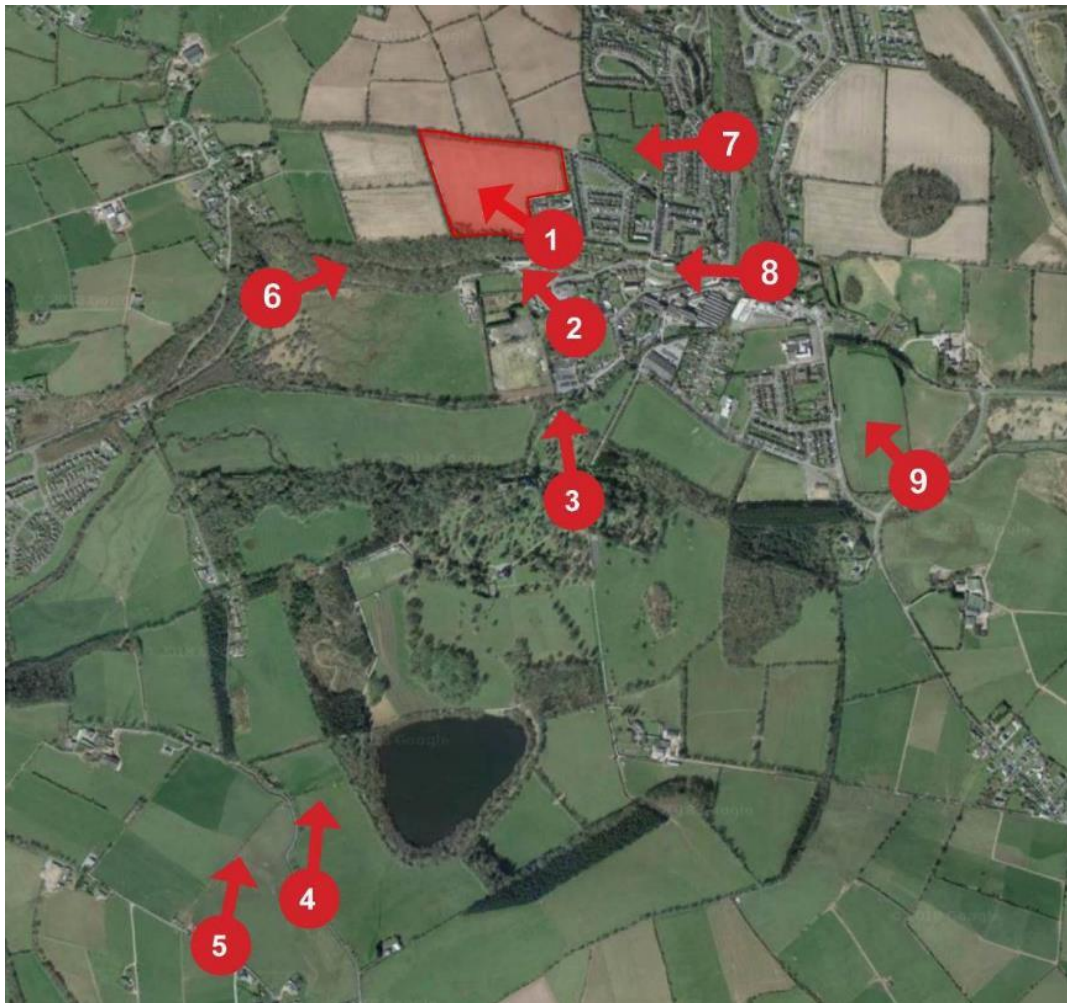


Figure 1.7: Viewpoint Location Map

(Source: Google Maps)

Viewpoint	Description
1	View from Sunberry Drive
2	View from St. Ann's Road
3	View from Blarney Castle
4	View from Bawnannafinny
5	View from Bawnannafinny
6	View from Local Road West of Site
7	View from Waterloo Road
8	View from Station Road
9	View from Clogheenmilcon

Table 1.5: Viewpoints contained in Photomontage booklet.

1.6 Landscape and Visual Appraisal

1.6.1 Landscape Effects

The site consists of a single parcel of land currently zoned for residential development as follows:

Objective BL R-03 – Medium B Density Residential Development including detached dwellings, limited to the lower portion of the site. The upper part of the site, closer to the ridge, is generally unsuitable for development and should be retained as open land uses with long term strategic planting as part of the overall scheme.

Landscape Sensitivity

Landscape sensitivity is considered to be Medium. Medium is described in Table 1.1 as:

Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features, or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong. The character of the landscape is such that there is some capacity for change in the form of development. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principal management objective may be to consolidate landscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change

Magnitude of Change

The proposed development will result in change which will transform the greenfield site into a residential development. The nature of the development is not uncharacteristic in the locality, being consistent with residential developments to the east of the site and in the locality but less prominent in the hillside setting. The magnitude of change is considered Medium:

Medium – Change that is moderate in extent, resulting in the introduction of elements that may be prominent but not necessarily substantially uncharacteristic in the context.

Level of Landscape Effect

The landscape effect resulting from a Medium landscape sensitivity, and a Medium magnitude of change, is **Moderate**. Qualitatively the landscape effect is **Neutral**.

The conversion of the greenfield site to residential development is in line with zoning for the site.

Site topography presents a design challenge as does the sensitivity of the landscape in respect of potential impacts on the wider landscape including Blarney Castle estate. In this regard, Development Plan policy stipulates that the upper portion of the subject site be excluded from development.

In response to these constraints and challenges the design strategy for the site is based on: -

- Exclusion of development from the upper part of the site
- Retention of site boundary vegetation and avoidance of impacts on trees along site boundaries
- Cut and fill operations to optimise integration of the proposed development in the hillside setting
- Prioritisation of 'place making' as the key driver for the evolution of site layout to deliver a high quality residential environment. Key features arising from this approach are: -
 - Legible hierarchy of access road and streets
 - Dedicated pedestrian and cycling route through the site.
 - Sequence of high quality public open spaces throughout the development with passive supervision from adjoining houses.
- Provision of short, medium and long-term remedial mitigation measures in the form of tree planting across the site, on open spaces, along streets, within gardens and along embankments arising from cut and fill operations. The planting will supplement existing green infrastructure in providing a natural framework within which the development will be integrated as it matures.
- Provision of pedestrian and cyclist connectivity to local services and amenities in Blarney.

These core design principles play an important role in defining the character of the new residential neighbourhood, the nature of its relationship with the surrounding landscape and how it will be experienced by visitors as well as by local residents on a daily basis.

1.6.2 Visual Effects

Photomontages

Based on the desk study, review of the proposed development, site characteristics and sensitivity, as well as and visibility of the site, nine representative viewpoints (listed in Table 1.6) were selected to assist in the appraisal of visual effects. Photomontages were prepared by Gnet 3D Visualisation. These are described below, and existing photographs and proposed photomontages are provided in a separate booklet.

Each viewpoint is described below in two parts, firstly its existing (baseline) condition, and secondly to describe the predicted effects or change brought about by the proposed development. The views are described below.

Viewpoint 1 - View from Sunberry Drive

Existing View

The view from this location shows the nature of the adjacent Sunberry estate defined by detached houses, access road infrastructure and centralised public open space. The trees on the open space are well established and the sloping nature of the local hillside site is evident.

Visual Receptor sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily residents who live in the neighbourhood who are considered to be of High sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed development will be partially visible from this location, in particular the upper portion of some of the housing units along the southern boundary and most notably the first unit in the row nearest to the entrance. The side elevation of this unit is enhanced by the inclusion of additional windows which provides passive supervision onto the adjoining open space and access road. The entrance is otherwise enhanced by the stone walls and piers and tree and shrub planting.

The magnitude of change is considered Low. Low is defined as:

Change that is moderate or limited in scale, resulting in minor alteration of landscape receptors, and/or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in minor change to the character of the landscape and no reduction in landscape quality and perceived value.

Visual Effect

The effect is considered **Moderate**, and the quality of the effect is **Neutral**. While the proposed development will be partially visible from this location it will not be an intrusive element and overall landscape quality is maintained.

Viewpoint 2 - View from St. Ann's Road

Existing View

This view shows part of the local road network and shops associated with the village centre in the foreground while the local school and the high ground to the north of the village forms the background to the view. The subject site is located on the high ground behind the trees on the ridge.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily residents who live locally and visitors to Blarney who are considered to be of High sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed development will be substantially screened from view by the existing woodland tree screen to the south of the site. The screening effect will be accentuated during a substantial part of the year when the trees are in leaf.

The magnitude of change is considered Low. Low is defined as:

Change that is moderate or limited in scale, resulting in minor alteration of landscape receptors, and/or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in minor change to the character of the landscape and no reduction in landscape quality and perceived value.

Visual Effect

The effect is considered **Moderate**, and the quality of the effect is **Neutral**. While the proposed development will be partially visible it will not be an intrusive element, and overall landscape quality is maintained.

Viewpoint 3 - View from Blarney Castle

Existing View

The view from this location reveals the ridge landform to the north of Blarney Castle and the interface between housing development areas and the rural hinterland. There is significant tree cover evident in the locality

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily visitors to the Blarney Castle, one of the principal tourist destinations in the country, who are considered to be of High sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed view shows that elements of the proposed development will be visible from this location. Visual effect, however, is limited as only the upper portions of the proposed houses are visible and the dark roof structures helps to integrate the development against the backdrop of the hillside. Remedial mitigation is provided in the form of tree planting within the site and along the northern edge of the proposed development footprint which will further soften the profile of the houses.

The magnitude of change is considered Low. Low is defined as:

Change that is moderate or limited in scale, resulting in minor alteration of landscape receptors, and/or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in minor change to the character of the landscape and no reduction in landscape quality and perceived value.

Visual Effect

The effect is considered **Moderate**, and the quality of the effect is **Neutral**. While the upper part of some of the proposed house elevations and some roof structures will be visible, the development will be well integrated in the hillside setting. Integration will be enhanced as the proposed tree planting programme for the site matures. This includes tree planting along the northern edge of the proposed development footprint.

Viewpoint 4 – View from Bawnannafinny

Existing View

This elevated location provides a scenic panoramic view north-eastward across the local rural landscape towards Blarney. Blarney Lake is visible in the foreground. The landscape is characterised by a combination of rolling topography, significant tree cover and open fields.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily regular users of the local road network and those exploring Scenic Routes S39 and S40 who are considered to be of High sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed view shows that while elements of the proposed development will be visible from this location visual impact will be significantly limited by distance. In addition, the dark roof structures on the houses further mitigates visual impact. In the context of existing housing on the hillside, the proposed development will not incur visual intrusion along the scenic route.

The magnitude of change is considered Negligible. Negligible is defined as:

Barely discernible intrusion of the development into the view, or introduction of elements that are characteristic in the context, resulting in slight change to the composition of the view and no change in visual amenity.

Visual Effect

The effect is considered **Moderate**, and the quality of the effect is **Neutral**. While elements of the proposed development will be visible from this location visual effects will be significantly limited by distance. In addition, the dark roof structures on the houses further mitigates visual effect. In the context of existing housing on the hillside, the proposed development will not incur visual intrusion along the scenic route.

Viewpoint 5 - View from Bawnanafinny

Existing View

This elevated location provides a scenic panoramic view north-eastward across the local rural landscape towards Blarney. The landscape is characterised by a combination of rolling topography, significant tree cover and open fields.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily regular users of the local road network and those exploring Scenic Routes S39 and S40 who are considered to be of High sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed view shows that while elements of the proposed development will be visible from this location visual impact will be significantly limited by distance. In addition, the dark roof structures on the houses further mitigates visual impact. In the context of existing housing on the hillside, the proposed development will not incur visual intrusion along the scenic route.

The magnitude of change is considered Negligible. Negligible is defined as:

Barely discernible intrusion of the development into the view, or introduction of elements that are characteristic in the context, resulting in slight change to the composition of the view and no change in visual amenity.

Visual Effect

The effect is considered **Moderate**, and the quality of the effect is **Neutral**. While elements of the proposed development will be visible from this location visual effects will be significantly limited by distance. In addition, the dark roof structures on the houses further mitigates visual effect. In the context of existing housing on the hillside, the proposed development will not incur visual intrusion along the scenic route.

Viewpoint 6 - View from Local Road West of Site

Existing View

The view shows the sloping wooded ridge landscape which restricts the view eastward along Kilowen Road.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily regular users through an attractive rural landscape of the local road network who are considered to be of Medium sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed development will be fully screened from view from this location by a combination of topography and tree cover in the local landscape.

The magnitude of change is No Change

Visual Effect

There will be no visual effects experienced from this location.

Viewpoint 7 - View from Waterloo Road

Existing View

The view shows the Monacnappa housing estate and the nature of the steeply sloping local landscape which restricts views of the subject site from this location.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily users of the local road network who are considered to be of Low sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed development will not be visible from this location given its relative location on the far side of the hill and Monacnappa estate

The magnitude of change is No Change

Visual Effect

There will be no visual effects experienced from this location.

Viewpoint 8 - View from Station Road

Existing View

The view towards the proposed development site reveals the variable topography across Blarney and the ridge landform which dominates the view to the north of the town. The view along the inner relief road of the town is urban in character.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily users of the local road network focused on negotiating traffic and junctions who are considered to be of Low sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed development will not be visible from this location given its relative location on the far side of the hill and Monacnappa estate

The magnitude of change is No Change

Visual Effect

There will be no visual effects experienced from this location.

Viewpoint 9 - View from Station Road

Existing View

The view towards the proposed development site reveals the variable topography across Blarney and the ridge landform which dominates the view to the north of the town. The view along the inner relief road of the town is urban in character.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Viewers will be primarily users of the local road network focused on negotiating traffic and junctions who are considered to be of Low sensitivity.

Proposed View - Magnitude of Change

The proposed development will not be visible from this location given its relative location on the far side of the hill and Monacnappa estate

The magnitude of change is No Change

Visual Effect

There will be no visual effects experienced from this location.

Summary of Visual Effects

The viewpoints described above are summarised below:

Viewpoint	Description	Level of Visual Effect and Quality
1	View from Sunberry Drive	Moderate (neutral)
2	View from St. Ann’s Road	Moderate (neutral)
3	View from Blarney Castle	Moderate (neutral)
4	View from Bawnannafinny	Moderate (neutral)
5	View from Bawnannafinny	Low (neutral)
6	View from Local Road West of Site	No Change
7	View from Waterloo Road	No Change
8	View from Station Road	No Change
9	View from Clogheenmilcon	No Change

Table 1.6: Summary of Visual Effects at Viewpoints

Of the nine viewpoints assessed there will be **Moderate Neutral** effects associated with five viewpoints and **No Change** for the remaining four viewpoints.

At the micro (local) landscape level (Views 1 & 2), views of the proposed development site are constrained by a combination of topography, vegetation and adjoining residential development. As a result, visual effects are limited.

At the macro (wider) landscape level, View 3 deals with the view from Blarney Castle which is located within the Architectural Conservation Area which includes the centre of Blarney town. View 3 from Blarney Castle shows that while upper portions of the proposed development will be visible, visual effect is mitigated by the selection of traditional dark coloured slate materials for roof finishes. The cut and fill strategy for the site also means that only a small proportion of house elevations will appear in the view. The development is otherwise screened by existing tree cover which will be augmented by tree planting measures throughout the site and along site boundaries thus ensuring the longevity of the local green infrastructure.

In views 4 & 5 from scenic route S39 visual effects associated are limited and distance also has a significant diminishing effect. In View 6 from scenic route S39 the subject site is fully screened from view by a combination of existing topography and vegetation. In view 7 from scenic route S40 the site is not visible given the nature of the local topography and in views 8 and 9 there are no visual effects arising.

With regard to Objective GO-06 of the Blarney Macroom Municipal District Local Area Plan Jan 2015 Volume 1 which states '*Ensure adequate regard is given to assessing the visual impacts of new developments in close proximity to Blarney Castle and Estate so as to ensure that such developments do not compromise the landscape heritage character of the area*', the design strategy for the site includes the following key elements:

- Exclusion of development from the upper part of the site.
- Retention of site boundary vegetation and avoidance of impacts on trees along site boundaries.
- Cut and fill operations to optimise integration of the proposed development in the hillside setting.
- Provision of short, medium and long-term remedial mitigation measures in the form of tree planting across the site, on open spaces, along streets, within gardens and along embankments arising from cut and fill operations. The planting will supplement existing green infrastructure in providing a natural framework within which the development will be integrated as it matures.

In this respect the proposed development is consistent with objective GO-06 of the LAP.

It is also noted that in determining applications for the primary care centre and a mixed use development described in section 1.6.3 Cumulative Effects, An Bord Pleanála specifically determined that they would not compromise the landscape and heritage character of the area in respect of objective GO-06.

1.6.3 Cumulative Effects

Cumulative impact considerations include:-

- Cork County Council planning ref. 196/7122 for the construction of 88 no. residential units, a creche and all ancillary site works approved in May 2017.
- Permitted Planning Application 2039597 & ABP Case Reference: PL28.309152 for the construction of a mixed use development at the former Blarney Park Hotel and Leisure Centre complex. The development will consist of (1) An 80-bedroom Hotel, (2) A licensed supermarket, (3) A cafe/coffee shop, (4) An office building, (5) A Commercial Building, (6) A total of 70 no. residential units, public realm, hard and soft landscaping, roads and pedestrian walkways, services, site and public lighting, and all other ancillary and associated site development works.'
- Permitted Planning Application 2039502 & ABP Case Reference PL28.308670 for construction of a 3-storey primary care centre with 5 no. ground floor retail units and café at St. Ann's Road, Monacnappa, Blarney, Cork. The proposed primary care centre will comprise reception/waiting areas and associated offices. The proposed development makes provision for the upgrade of the junction of the R617 and St. Ann's Road to provide for a roundabout and access to the proposed primary care centre, and includes revisions to an existing surface car park to facilitate the proposed access to the scheme.

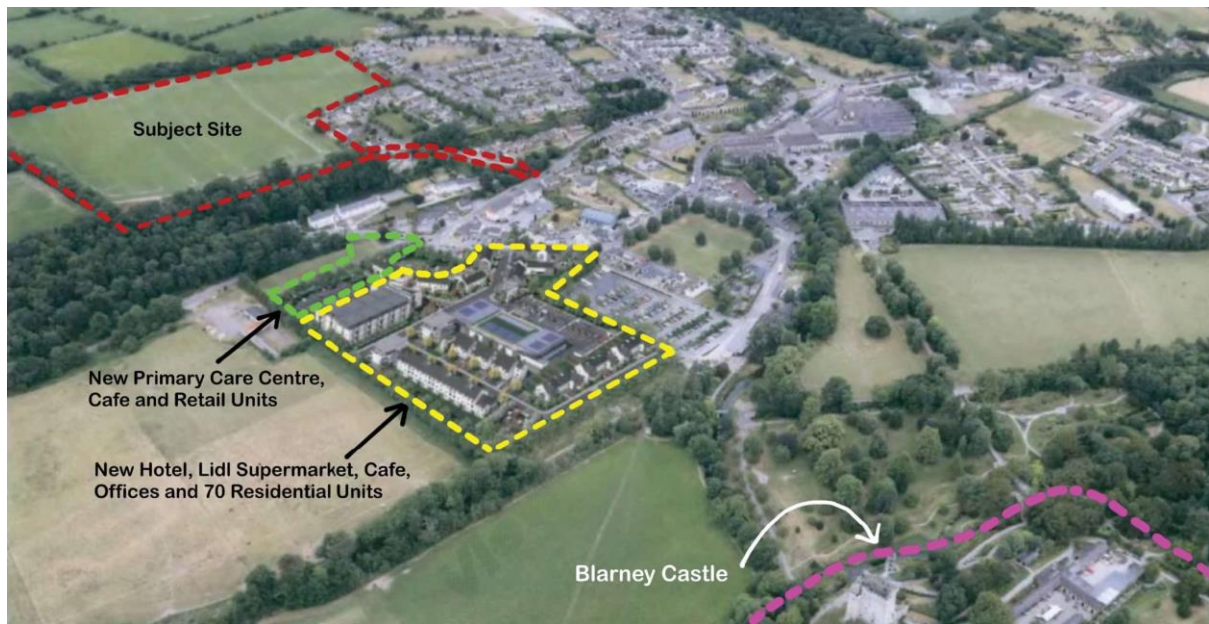


Figure 1.6.3 Context Aerial View of Permitted Developments Ref: 203950 & 2039597

1.6.4 Mitigation and Enhancement

Reductive and avoidance mitigation measures are integral to the design strategy of the site and include omission of development from the upper part of the site, cut and fill measures to integrate the development in the hillside setting and the selection of dark roofing materials for the houses. The site also has a natural capacity to absorb development of this scale by virtue of the significant tree screen which already exist in respect of the southern and western boundaries of the site.

Remedial mitigation measures are provided in the form of tree planting throughout the site along the northern edge of the proposed housing footprint which will provide a backdrop to the houses as it develops and matures thus extending the natural landscape framework of the site into which the development will sit.

1.6.5 Conclusion.

Landscape Effects

Landscape sensitivity is considered to be Medium. Medium is described in Table 1.1 as:

Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features, or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong. The character of the landscape is such that there is some capacity for change in the form of development. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principal management objective may be to consolidate landscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change

The proposed development will result in change which will transform the greenfield site into a residential development. The nature of the development is not uncharacteristic in the locality, being consistent with residential developments to the east of the site and in the locality but less prominent in the hillside setting. The magnitude of change is considered Medium:

Medium – Change that is moderate in extent, resulting in the introduction of elements that may be prominent but not necessarily substantially uncharacteristic in the context.

The landscape effect resulting from a Medium landscape sensitivity, and a Medium magnitude of change, is **Moderate**. Qualitatively the landscape effect is **Neutral**.

The conversion of the greenfield site to residential development is in line with zoning for the site.

Visual Effects

Of the nine viewpoints assessed there will be **Moderate Neutral** effects associated with five viewpoints and **No Change** for the remaining four viewpoints.

At the micro (local) landscape level (Views 1 & 2), views of the proposed development site are significantly constrained by a combination of topography, vegetation and adjoining residential development. As a result, there are no significant visual effects arising from the development.

At the macro (wider) landscape level, View 3 deals with the view from Blarney Castle which is located within the Architectural Conservation Area which also includes the centre of Blarney Village. View 3 from Blarney Castle shows that while upper portions of the proposed development will be visible, visual effect is mitigated by the selection of traditional dark coloured slate materials for roof finishes. The cut and fill strategy for the site also means that only a small proportion of house elevations will appear in the view. The development is otherwise screened by existing tree cover which will be augmented by tree planting measures throughout the site and along site boundaries thus ensuring the longevity of the local green infrastructure.

In views 4 & 5 from scenic route S39 visual effects are limited and distance also has a significant diminishing effect. In View 6 from scenic route S39 the subject site is fully screened from view by a combination of existing topography and vegetation. In view 7 from scenic route S40 the site is not visible given the nature of the local topography and in views 8 and 9 there are no visual effects arising.

With regard to Objective GO-06 of the Blarney Macro Municipal District Local Area Plan Jan 2015 Volume 1 which states '*Ensure adequate regard is given to assessing the visual impacts of new developments in close proximity to Blarney Castle and Estate so as to ensure that such developments do not compromise the landscape heritage character of the area*', the design strategy for the site includes the following key elements:

- Exclusion of development from the upper part of the site.
- Retention of site boundary vegetation and avoidance of impacts on trees along site boundaries.
- Cut and fill operations to optimise integration of the proposed development in the hillside setting.
- Provision of short, medium and long-term remedial mitigation measures in the form of tree planting across the site, on open spaces, along streets, within gardens and along embankments arising from cut and fill operations. The planting will supplement existing green infrastructure in providing a natural framework within which the development will be integrated as it matures.

In this respect the proposed development is consistent with objective GO-06 of the LAP.

It is also noted that in determining applications for the primary care centre and a mixed use development described in section 1.6.3 Cumulative Effects, An Bord Pleanála specifically determined that they would not compromise the landscape and heritage character of the area in respect of objective GO-06.