



APPENDIX 13-1

LVIA METHODOLOGY

1. LVIA METHODOLOGY

1.1 Scope and Definition of Landscape and Visual Impact (LVIA) Study Area

Chapter 13 follows the naming conventions and definitions detailed in Section 1.1.1 of Chapter 1 of this EIAR. Where the ‘Proposed Development site’ or ‘the site’ is referred to, this relates to a study area defined by the ‘Wind Farm Site Boundary’ which incorporates the immediate landscape setting where all infrastructure of the Proposed Development is sited, as shown delineated in red on the LVIA Baseline map (Appendix 13-5) and the ZTV Map (Figure 13-1 within Chapter 13) as the ‘EIAR Site Boundary’.

The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition - GLVIA3 (LI & IEMA, 2013) guidance refers to the identification of the area of landscape that is to be covered while assessing landscape and visual effects. The guidelines state:

“The study areas should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around it which the Proposed Development may influence in a significant manner.”

Landscape and visual baseline mapping and viewpoint selection are based on a wider study area referred to as the ‘LVIA Study Area’. As detailed in the LVIA Methodology - *Appendix 12-1* (and below), the geographical parameters for this LVIA include an LVIA Study Area of 25km for landscape and visual effects and a LVIA Study Area of 15km for effects on landscape character.

The distance at which a ZTV is set from a proposed wind farm development usually defines the parameters of the LVIA Study Area. In most cases, ZTV mapping will be produced within a radius of 20 km from the proposed turbines, however, the 2006 DoEHLG WEDG’s for Planning Authorities require that:

“in areas where landscapes of national or international renown are located within 25 km of a proposed wind energy development, the Zone of Theoretical Visibility should be extended as far (and in the direction of) that landscape”.

The archaeological complex known as The Hill of Tara (approx. 26.1 km from the proposed turbines) is a candidate on the World UNESCO Tentative list for Ireland, it is a National Monument in State Care and therefore is deemed to be a landscape of national and international renown. As reported previously in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**, Meath County Council requested an impact assessment be conducted from The Hill of Tara. Therefore, the ZTV shown in Figure 13-1 (Section 13.3 within Chapter 13) has been extended to 26.1 km to include the most elevated location at The Hill of Tara heritage landscape. The ZTV was extended to other landscape areas to 25km. Consequently, the LVIA Study Area has been established as 25km from the proposed turbines in all directions and to 26.1 km from the proposed turbines in the direction of The Hill of Tara (as requested by the Planning Authority). Through experience conducting LVIA for other wind energy development projects, the assessment team determined that no significant effects on landscape character are likely to arise beyond distances of 15km from the proposed turbines. Therefore, a LVIA Study Area of 15km is deemed appropriate for effects on landscape character in relation to the assessment of effects upon designated Landscape Character Areas (A comprehensive assessment of LCAs are included in Appendix 13-2).

Furthermore, as prescribed by best practice guidance and professional experience of the assessment team, the following topic areas have been scoped out of the assessment:

- Effects on landscape and visual receptors that have minimal or no theoretical visibility (as predicted by the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)) and/or very distant visibility, and are therefore unlikely to be subject to significant effects;

- Notwithstanding the Hill of Tara (As noted above impacts requested by Meath County Council), effects on designated landscapes beyond a 25km radius from the Proposed Development, from where it is judged that potential significant effects on key characteristics and/or special qualities, or views are judged unlikely to occur;
- Effects on landscape character beyond a 15km radius from the Proposed Development, where it is judged that potential significant effects on landscape character are unlikely to occur;
- Effects on visual receptors beyond a 25km radius from the Proposed Development, where it is judged that potential significant effects are unlikely to occur;
- Cumulative landscape and visual effects beyond a 25 km radius from the proposed turbines, where it is judged that potential significant effects are unlikely to occur;
- Receptors in County Offaly due to distance from the Proposed Development and the lack of prominent sensitive visual or landscape receptors within the small area of the county located within the LVIA Study Area;
- Effects on receptors in County Cavan due to the lack of theoretical visibility indicated by the ZTV from any sensitive receptors located in the LVIA Study Area.

1.2

Guidelines

While the legislation and general guidance on Environmental Impact Assessment is set out in Chapter 1 of this EIAR only guidance specifically pertaining to the Landscape and Visual Impact are outlined below.

Ireland signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2002, which introduces a pan-European concept which centres on the quality of landscape protection, management and planning. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has published a National Landscape Strategy for Ireland in 2015. The Strategy aims to ensure compliance with the ELC and contains six main objectives, which include developing a national Landscape Character Assessment and Developing Landscape Policies.

In 2000, the Department of the Environment and Local Government published ‘Landscape and Landscape Assessment: Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities’, which recommended that all Local Authorities adopt a standardised approach to landscape assessment for incorporation into Development Plans and consideration as part of the planning process. However, this DoEHLG 2000 guidance remains in draft form.

The landscape and visual impact assessment was primarily based on the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition or GLVIA3 (The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, UK, 2013). A range of other guidelines also inform the preparation of this landscape and visual impact assessment, which include:

- The Guidelines for Planning Authorities (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2006)
- Review of the draft Guidelines (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2019)
- Visual Assessment of Wind Farms: Best Practice (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002)
- Visual Representation of Wind Farms: Version 2.2 (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017)
- Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape, Version 3a (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017)
- Assessing the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments. (Nature Scot, 2012)
- Photography and photomontage in landscape and visual impact assessment (Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/11, 2011)
- Visual Representation of Development Proposals (Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19, 2019)

- Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – natural heritage considerations (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2015)

1.3 Zone of Theoretical Visibility Mapping

The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) represents the area over which a development can theoretically be seen and is based on a Digital Terrain Model (DTM), overlaid on a map base. A DTM refers to the way in which a computer represents a piece of topography in three dimensions as a digital model. ZTV maps provide the following information:

- Indicates broad geographic areas where visibility of a wind energy development is most likely to occur and areas where it no visibility is likely to occur;
- How much of the wind energy development is likely to be potentially visible (using different coloured bands for different numbers of turbines);
- The extent and pattern of visibility.

Production of ZTV maps is usually one of the first steps of Visual Impact Assessment, helping to inform the selection of the Study Area in which impacts will be considered in more detail and the identification of sensitive vantage points (Visual Representation of Wind Farms, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017).

1.3.1 Limitations of ZTV Mapping

The Scottish Natural Heritage guidelines referred to above acknowledge the following limitations inherent to the use of theoretical visibility mapping:

- The ZTV presents a ‘bare ground’ scenario, i.e., visibility of the proposed turbines in a landscape without screening structures or vegetation. This includes trees, hedgerows, buildings and small-scale landform or ground surface features. The ZTV also does not take into account the effects of weather and atmospheric conditions, and therefore can be said to represent a ‘worst-case’ scenario, that is where the wind farm could potentially be seen given no intervening obstructions and favourable weather conditions.
- The ZTV indicates areas from where a wind farm may be visible, but cannot show how it will look, nor indicate the nature or magnitude of visual impacts. The visibility of the turbines will decrease with the distance from which they are viewed, but this is not accounted for in the ZTV. Figure 1-1 below provides an illustration of the differences in view relative to the distance from a turbine.



Figure 1-1 The effect of distance on visibility of wind turbines (Illustrative Purposes Only)

- A ZTV is only as accurate as the data on which it is based. It is not easy to test the accuracy of a ZTV in the field, although some verification will occur during the assessment of viewpoints.
- In order to handle large areas of terrain, the DTM data is based on information that does not allow detail to be distinguished below a certain level. There are also

differences in the way that the software package ‘interpolates’ between heights in the calculations made.

1.3.2 ZTV Methodology

The ZTV maps presented in the EIAR show theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines using the half blade height of the wind turbines as points of reference. The area covered by the ZTV maps in Chapter 13 have a radius of 25 kilometres from the outer-most proposed turbines.

ZTV maps assume a worst-case or ‘bare ground’ scenario, i.e., no land-cover. They represent theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines in the absence of all natural and manmade features from the landscape, including vegetation, houses and other buildings. In reality, such features will restrict or limit visibility of the proposed turbines, due to the screening effects of vegetation, for example forestry and road-side hedgerows and trees, and buildings, particularly within towns and villages.

Separate colour bands are used on each ZTV map to indicate the number of turbines which will be theoretically visible to half blade i.e., only part of a turbine might be visible over the topography as opposed to seeing a full turbine. The legend on each map shows the number of visible turbines for each corresponding colour, which are as follows:

- Orange: 1-6 turbines theoretically visible
- Teal: 7-13 turbines theoretically visible
- Yellow: 14-20 turbines theoretically visible
- Navy: 21-26 turbines theoretically visible

1.3.3 Route Screening Methodology - Roads

In order to comprehensively demonstrate the varying characteristics of the screening existent on roads proximate to the Wind Farm Site and to record the actual visibility in comparison to the theoretical visibility, a methodology was developed. This is termed Route Screening Analysis and it was undertaken from all public roads within a three-kilometre radius of the proposed turbines that have theoretical visibility indicated by the ZTV map. The Route Screening Analysis assessed the roadside screening along the R390 Regional Road to a distance of 5km from the nearest proposed turbines considering its prominence as a well trafficked transport route in the local area.

Route Screening Analysis as its name suggests considers the actual visibility of the proposed wind farm from surrounding roads. The landscape surrounding the Wind Farm Site comprises rolling agricultural land, a network of trees and hedgerows, as well as settlements. In order to get a clearer understanding of visibility and screening, and to bridge the gap for the assessor between the computer-generated ZTV maps and the actual nature of visibility in the study area, Route Screening Analysis was undertaken.

Every public road was driven within 3 km radius and the R390 Regional Road was driven within a 5km radius of the proposed turbines. The extent of roadside screening was recorded digitally on a tablet/GPS device as the route is driven. In addition, dashcam video footage was recorded along the routes to allow later confirmation of mapping, and to methodically record the views along the route. All routes were driven slowly. Using the GPS within the tablet device and custom-built data collection application, screening was geographically logged as one of three categories:

- Little/No Screening – mainly open and with some very light vegetation.
- Intermittent/Partial Screening – light deciduous roadside vegetation and vegetation with short gaps which would allow intermittent or partial views.
- Full Screening – vegetation which is dense enough to block views e.g., coniferous forestry.

The Route Screening Analysis surveys were conducted in April 2022. Screening between the Wind Farm Site and the relevant side of the road was recorded. In cases where the road travels directly in the direction of the proposed wind farm, screening of the lowest classification was recorded (least amount of screening). Care was taken to ensure recording of screening accounted for seasonal variation, particularly the condition of deciduous vegetation (lack of leaves and growth) in winter months. The mapped screening data provides an accurate representation of areas where open views of the proposed turbines will be either fully or partially screened.

1.4 Photomontage Viewpoints

1.4.1 Viewpoint Identification

The viewpoints or photo locations were selected following guidance contained in the DoEHLG ‘*Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities*’ (2006), the ‘*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*’ (2013) and in the ‘*Visual Representation of Wind Farms*’ (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017). The selection of photo locations is designed to give a representative range of views of the proposed turbines.

Viewpoints, the photo locations from which the photomontages are produced, were chosen after compiling the Visual Baseline. The main purpose of establishing the visual baseline is to identify the key visual receptors that should be considered for viewpoint selection. To this end the following have been identified in order of priority:

- Designated Scenic Routes and Scenic Views
- Settlements
- Recreational Routes and Tourist Destinations
 - Waymarked Walking Routes
 - Cycle Routes
 - Scenic Drives
 - Tourist Routes
- Viewing Points (e.g., marked on OSi Maps)
- Transport Routes
- Residential Amenity
- Cultural Heritage Sites

These visual receptors are listed in tables under the sections identified above along with theoretical visibility at those locations indicated by the ZTV maps. After all key visual receptors are identified, a Visual Receptor Preliminary Assessment is carried out to eliminate the visual receptors for the following reasons:

- No or very limited theoretical visibility indicated on the ZTV map for the visual receptor.
- Designated views and scenic routes as well as OSi Viewing Points that are not directed towards the proposed turbines.
- Visual receptors visited on site, where views towards the turbines were either entirely screened or substantially screened in combination with distance from the proposed turbines would mitigate any visual effects.

All other key visual receptors screened in for assessment were selected as viewpoint locations. Viewpoints were chosen having regard to the SNH Guidance (2017) which advises that a range of views should be shown at a range of distances and aspects, as well as at varying elevations and showing both where the development will be completely visible as well as partially visible.

1.4.2 Photomontages

Photomontages are visualisations that superimpose an image of a proposed development upon a photograph or series of photographs. They are intended as graphical representations of how a proposed development will appear in the existing landscape and are used as a tool in the LVIA process. A series of photomontages has been prepared as part of this assessment and are presented in Appendix 13-4: *Photomontage Booklet* submitted as part of this EIAR.

1.4.2.1 Photomontage Limitations

Photographs, and therefore photomontages, are subject to a range of limitations, as stated in ‘*Visual Assessment of Wind Farms*’ (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2014):

- Visualisations provide a tool for assessment that can be compared with an actual view in the field; they should never be considered as a substitute to visiting a viewpoint in the field.
- Neither photographs nor visualisations can replicate a view as seen in reality by the human eye.
- Visualisations are only as accurate as the data used to construct them.
- Visualisations can only represent the view from a single location at a particular time and in particular weather conditions.
- Static visualisations cannot convey the effect of turbine blade movement.

Although the scale, siting and geometry of photomontages are based on technical data, the other qualities of the image are open to judgments. The guidance also notes that interpretation of visualisations also needs to take into account additional information including variable lighting, movement of turbine blades, seasonal differences and the movement of the viewer through the landscape. However, accepting these limitations, the SNH guidelines state that photomontages are useful tools in the Visual Impact Assessment of wind turbines.

Furthermore, with regard to the representation of cumulative visual effects, it is intended to present existing, permitted and proposed turbines in the photomontages. No other existing or permitted turbines are located in the LVIA Study Area and were not included in the Photomontage Booklet, however, turbines of other wind farm proposals were identified and are included in the photomontages.

Photomontages are 2D representations of 3D views and thus cannot convey the perspective and depth of view of seeing the actual objects with the naked eye. One of the areas that this limitation affects cumulative visual effects is where proposed turbines are proposed to be located in front or behind existing or permitted turbines. In the field this physical separation may be obvious, while on the photomontage the turbines may appear as one wind farm.

1.4.2.2 Photomontage Presentations

The photomontage visuals contained in the Appendix 13-4: Photomontage Booklet are devised to be viewed at arm’s length. The viewpoints presented in the photomontage booklet show several views from each viewpoint location. These include:

1. **Overview Sheet** - Viewpoint details include location description, grid reference distance from nearest turbine and technical data in relation to photography. Three maps at various scales show the viewpoint location. A 120-degree baseline image (‘Key Image’ – an existing view) without any proposed and permitted turbines. Existing turbines visible in the landscape may appear within the image and the horizontal extent of the 90-degree and 53.5-degree image to be presented in subsequent images is also framed.
2. **Baseline at 90°** - 90-degree existing view image without any proposed or permitted turbines and a matching wireframe image of the same view which includes any existing turbines visible in the landscape. If turbines are already existing in the landscape, these are visible on the photograph and are rendered in the wireframe.
3. **Proposed Photomontage with Cumulative at 90°** – Showing a 90-degree photomontage image with the proposed wind farm and all other existing, permitted and proposed wind farms within the view. A matching wireframe image shows the turbines of all proposed, permitted and existing wind farms individually coloured and labelled for ease of identification.

4. **Proposed Photomontage with Cumulative at 53.5°** – Showing a photomontage image of the proposed turbines and any existing, permitted and proposed turbines in a 53.5-degree horizontal field of view.
5. **Proposed Wireframe with Cumulative at 53.5°** - Showing a wireframe image of the proposed turbines and any existing, permitted and proposed turbines in a 53.5-degree horizontal field of view. The proposed turbines and any other existing wind farms are individually coloured and labelled for ease of identification.

1.5 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

1.5.1 Identification of Landscape Receptors

The Landscape Baseline reports relevant policy pertinent to the LVIA and a description of the receiving landscape of the Proposed Development Site and its wider setting. As well as establishing the key sensitivities and key characteristics of the baseline landscape, this part of the LVIA focusses on identifying the key sensitive landscape receptors that are assessed later in this Chapter. The Landscape Baseline is broken down into the following sections:

- > **Landscape Designations and Policy Context** - *Policy setting pertaining to the location and nature of the Proposed Development Site from a landscape perspective based on:*
 - Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (WCDP)
 - Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (MCDP);
 - Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 (KCDP)
 - Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 (OCDP)
 - *The Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2022 (Meath County Council, 2016) - As requested by the planning authority*
- > **Landscape Character of the Proposed Development Site** – *A description of the physical landscape and characteristics of the Proposed Development Site and its immediate setting, this includes the following considerations:*
 - Landscape characteristics based upon findings from site visits conducted in 2020 and 2021;
 - An appraisal of landscape value and the susceptibility of the landscape to change, and a determination of landscape sensitivity;
- > **Landscape Characterisation in The WEDG's for Planning Authorities** – A review of the WEDG's (DoEHLG, 2006) and siting guidance relating to the landscape characteristics of the Proposed Development Site.

After all landscape receptors are identified, a Landscape Receptor Preliminary Assessment is carried out to eliminate the landscape receptors, where no or very limited theoretical visibility has been indicated on the ZTV map. All other landscape receptors were selected for further assessment of landscape effects.

1.5.2 Assessing Landscape Effects

The methodology uses qualitative methods in order to arrive at an assessment, which is based on the Landscape and Landscape Assessment (2000) Guidelines as well as the GLVIA (2013), and the Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2006) were also taken into account.

Landscape effects can be described as changes which affect the landscape as a resource. This includes how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects and its landscape character. Landscape effects also relate to changes in the structure of the landscape. Under the GLVIA (2013), the assessment of likely significant effects on landscape receptors includes a judgement on both the sensitivity of the receptor as well as magnitude of the change.

1.5.2.1 Assessing Landscape Sensitivity

Landscape Sensitivity is described in the GLVIA (2013) as a combination of the landscape’s susceptibility to change as well as the value attached to the landscape.

Susceptibility to change can be described as the ability of the landscape receptor (either the overall character, quality of the landscape or a particular landscape feature) to accommodate the proposed turbines without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline (existing) landscape and/or the aims of landscape planning policies and strategies.

Determination of landscape value considers scenic amenity designations, sensitivity and value designations found in local landscape policy, as well as other indications of landscape value attached to undesignated landscapes (Page 84, GLVIA, 2013).

Section 13.4 - *Landscape Baseline* of Chapter 13 describes and determines the Landscape Values of the Wind Farm Site and its wider landscape setting in order to establish the capacity of the immediate landscape in which the proposed turbines will be built, as is prescribed by best practice guidance: “*as part of the baseline description the value of the potentially affected landscape should be established*” (Page 80, GLVIA, 2013). Comprehension of landscape value and its susceptibility to change enables determination of the sensitivity of the landscape at a micro level (the Wind Farm Site) and its capacity to absorb the infrastructure of the Wind Farm Site.

Determination of Sensitivity of Designated Landscape Character Areas

Designated Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are comprehensively assessed in Appendix 13-2. Ireland does not currently have a standardised nationwide Landscape Character Assessment. The LCAs screened in for assessment in Chapter 13 are located in differing counties and each county uses a differing method and scale to represent sensitivity of its individual LCAs. For the purposes of the LVIA and to provide consistency across the assessment of LCAs (Appendix 13-2), a rating of sensitivity was assigned to each LCA within the following classification scale:

- > Very High
- > High
- > Medium
- > Low

The sensitivity classification assigned to each LCA takes into account key characteristic and sensitivity descriptions (and where applicable sensitivity ratings) in the respective county development plans, as well as any relevant wind energy capacity designations and policy. A rationale for the sensitivity classification of each LCA is provided in the assessment tables included in Appendix 13-2. LCAs at the ‘Very High’ end of the scale would include very sensitive landscapes of national importance, whilst LCAs at the ‘Low’ end of the scale might be locally important landscapes, but which do not comprise receptors or characteristics of unique or national value.

1.5.2.2 Assessing Magnitude of Change in the Landscape

The magnitude of change in each landscape character area is a combination of the visual presence - size and scale - of the change, the extent of the area to be affected, and the duration and reversibility of the effect. The magnitude of change for each landscape character area was assessed using the definitions outlined in Table 1-1 below.

Table 1-1 Magnitude of Landscape Change Assessment Criteria

Magnitude of Change	Description
Substantial	Where a landscape will experience the loss of key landscape features or the introduction of uncharacteristic additions over a large area. The changes to the landscape are prominent and large in scale. The level of change has an effect on the overall landscape character. The effects are likely long term and may be irreversible.
Moderate	A more limited loss of or change to landscape features over a medium extent which will result in some change to landscape features and aesthetics. Could include the addition of some new uncharacteristic features or elements that would lead to the potential for change in landscape character in a localised area or part of a landscape character area. Would include moderate effects on the overall landscape character that do not affect key characteristics. The effects could be long to medium term and/or partially reversible.
Slight	The loss of or change to landscape features of limited extent, or changes to landscape character in smaller areas. Changes would not affect key characteristics. The addition of any new features or elements to the landscape would only result in low-level changes to the overall aesthetics of the landscapes. Changes to the landscape are more evident at a local level and not over a wide geographical area. The effects could potentially be medium to short term and/or reversible.
Negligible	A change affecting smaller areas of landscape character including the loss of some landscape elements or the addition of features or elements which are either of low value or hardly noticeable. The effects could be short term and/or reversible.

1.5.2.3 Landscape Effects Assessment Matrix

Table 1-2 below shows the significance of landscape effects, arrived at by combining the landscape receptor sensitivity and the magnitude of change classifications. Landscape receptor sensitivity is shown in the left-hand first column and magnitude of landscape change is shown in the first row at the top of the table. This table is used as an indicative tool to assist in determining the significance of landscape effects. In different circumstances differing levels of mitigating factors may ultimately result in a different determination of the level of significance. The significance of a landscape effect is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of effect. The significance of landscape effect is arrived at using a combination of the matrix shown in Table 1-2

Table 1-2 and Table 1-3 below.

Table 1-2 Landscape effects significance assessment matrix

	Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Very High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor
High	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor
Medium	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible
Low	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible	Negligible

The determination of significance uses a seven-point scale, ranging from Major to Negligible. This seven-point scale is translated to the EPA impact assessment classifications of significance, as outlined in Table 1-3 below.

Table 1-3 EPA Impact Assessment Significance Classification for Landscape Effects

Matrix Classification Significance	EPA Significance Classification	EPA (2022) Definition of Significance
Major	Profound	An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics
Major/Moderate	Very significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters most of a sensitive aspect of the environment
Moderate	Significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment.
Moderate/Minor	Moderate	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends
Minor	Slight	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities
Minor/Negligible	Not Significant	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.
Negligible	Imperceptible	An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences

1.5.3 Assessing Visual Effects

Visual effects relate to changes in views and visual amenity of the surroundings of individuals or groups of people. These may result from changes in content and character of views as a result in changes to the landscape. The assessment of visual effects is based on views shown in photomontages and the potential visibility indicated by the ZTV maps as well as actual visibility on the ground.

It should be noted that in assessing visual effects, there are different types of visual effects:

- **Visual obstruction:** This occurs when there is an impact on a view which blocks the view.
- **Visual intrusion:** This occurs when there is an impact on a view, but which does not block the view.

Due to the nature of the development and the appearance of wind turbines, visual intrusion occurs more frequently than obstruction.

The likely significant effects of the proposed turbines in terms of visual and landscape effects are informed by the ZTV and photomontages. Visual effects relate to changes in views and visual amenity of the surroundings of individuals or groups of people. These may result from changes in content and character of views because of changes to the landscape. The significance of the effect on visual receptors is a combination of the sensitivity of the receptor as well as the magnitude of the change.

1.5.3.1 Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Visual Receptor Sensitivity depends on the occupation or activity of the people, as well the extent to which the attention is focused on views and visual amenity, according to the GLVIA Guidelines (2013). Visual receptor sensitivity is assessed as either being Very High, High, Medium, or Low, based on the definition of descriptions and examples set out in Table 1-4 below.

Table 1-4 Visual Receptor Sensitivity Assessment Criteria

Sensitivity of Visual Receptor(s)	Description
Very High	Included in this category are viewers that are primarily focused on views from this particular location, such as visitors to popular destinations identified for their outstanding views. Residents in close proximity who have primary views of a scenic quality in the direction of the proposed turbines.
High	Includes viewers at designated views or landscapes. Viewers such as residents in close proximity to the viewpoint who have primary views that will be in the direction of the proposed turbines that may not necessarily be of a particularly scenic quality; viewers at well-known heritage or popular tourist or recreational areas, viewers along scenic or tourist routes.
Medium	Includes viewers who may have some susceptibility to a change in view. Viewers such as residents in medium proximity but who do not have views focused on the direction of the proposed turbines or whose views are not of a particularly scenic quality; those from views which are not designated but may have local recreational uses or those travelling along routes or at view which are considered moderately scenic.
Low	Includes viewers engaged in activities where the focus is not on the landscape or view. These including those travelling along a busy route, viewers at work or engaged in sport not related to views or experience of the landscape.

Photomontage viewpoints are specific locations which are representative of key visual receptors. The viewpoint assessment tables in Appendix 13-3 consider all receptors represented in the determination of the visual receptor sensitivity rating for each viewpoint. This determination takes a balanced approach considering the types, sensitivities, and quantities of visual receptors represented. The sensitivity rating given to each photomontage viewpoint in Appendix 13-3 considers both the susceptibility of the visual receptors represented as well as the value attached to the available views at that particular location.

1.5.3.2 Magnitude of Visual Change

The magnitude of the visual change resulting at each viewpoint is a combination of scale of the change, the extent of the area to be affected and the duration and reversibility of the effect, determined by reviewing the photomontage and wireframe images for each viewpoint. The magnitude of change is determined in accordance with the definitions and descriptions included in Table 1-5 below.

Table 1-5 Magnitude of Visual Change Assessment Criteria

Magnitude of Change	Description
Substantial	Substantial change, where the proposals would result in large-scale, prominent or very prominent change, leading to substantial obstruction of existing view or complete change in character and composition of the baseline through removal of key elements or addition of uncharacteristic elements which may or may not be visually discordant. This includes viewpoints where the proposed turbines are fully or almost fully visible over a wide extent, at close proximity to the viewer. This change could be long term or of a long duration.
Moderate	The change in the view may involve partial obstruction of existing view or partial change in character and composition of the baseline through the introduction of new elements or removal of existing elements. Likely to occur at locations where the proposed turbines are partially visible over a moderate or medium extent, and which are not in close proximity to the Wind Farm Site. Change may be readily noticeable but not substantially different in scale and character from the surroundings and wider setting.
Slight	The proposals would be partially visible or visible at sufficient distance to be perceptible and result in a low level of change in the view and its composition and a low degree of contrast. The character of the view may be altered but will remain similar to the baseline existing situation. This change could be short term or of a short duration.
Negligible	Any change would only be barely distinguishable from the status quo “do-nothing scenario” in the surroundings. The composition and character of the view would be substantially unaltered, approximating to little or no change.

1.5.3.3 Visual Effects Assessment Matrix

Table 1-6 below shows the significance of visual effects, arrived at by combining the visual receptor sensitivity and the magnitude of change classifications. Visual receptor sensitivity is shown in the left-hand first column and magnitude of visual change is shown in the first row at the top of the table. This table is used as an indicative tool to assist in determining the significance of visual effects. In different circumstances differing levels of mitigating factors may ultimately result in a different determination of the level of significance (see below). The significance of a visual effect is based on a balance between the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of effect. The significance of visual effect is arrived at using a combination of the matrix shown in Table 1-6 and Figure 1-2 below.

Table 1-6 Visual Effects Significance Assessment Matrix

	Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Very High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor
High	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor
Medium	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible
Low	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible	Negligible

The determination of significance uses a seven-point scale, ranging from Major to Negligible. This seven-point scale is translated to the EPA impact assessment classifications of significance, as outlined in Table 1-7 below.

Table 1-7 EPA Impact Assessment Significance Classification for Visual Effects

Matrix Classification Significance	EPA Significance Classification	EPA (2017) Definition of Significance
Major	Profound	An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics
Major/Moderate	Very significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters most of a sensitive aspect of the environment
Moderate	Significant	An effect, which by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment.
Moderate/Minor	Moderate	An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends
Minor	Slight	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities
Minor/Negligible	Not Significant	An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.
Negligible	Imperceptible	An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences

1.5.3.4 Residual Visual Effect

After determining the significance of the visual effect using the above visual effects assessment matrix and significance graph, mitigating factors are taken into consideration to arrive at the final residual effect. In some cases, mitigating factors merit a reduction in classification.

1.5.4 Determination of Residual Landscape and Visual Effects

The matrices and tables above are excellent tools to aid professional judgement in the determination of the significance of an effect. They are useful in that they provide a transparent, objective, structure to the process of balancing sensitivity and magnitude of change. In the context of the determination of visual effects, the formulaic process created by the use of the matrix above provides an indicative initial assessment, which can be seen clearly in the photomontage assessment tables in Appendix 13-3.

However, over-reliance on the formulaic process, which is heavily influenced by the definitions of sensitivity and magnitude of change contained in Table 1-4 and Table 1-5 above, can lead to a failure to properly account for the full range of circumstances and factors at play in the determination of the significance of a visual effect (see section 3.35, GLVIA3, 2013). A wide range of factors, mitigating or otherwise, can factor into such a determination, and it is not possible to capture the complexity involved in balancing all considerations within the necessarily limited definitions contained in these tables. This then naturally results in circumstances whereby the process of the determination of significance using the formulaic method involved with the matrix shown in Table 1-6 can result in misrepresentations of the significance of visual effects. It is only with professional judgement, and narrative descriptions of effect, that such complexity can be integrated into the determination of significance. Therefore, the formulaic methods based upon the matrix presented above is combined with professional judgement in the determination of significance. This is illustrated in Figure 1-2 below where the professional judgment of the competent expert is used to properly determine the significance of an effect taking all considerations into account.

A focus is placed upon the narrative description of effects (see section 3.36, GLVIA3, 2013) given the naturally subjective nature of the significance determination process, particularly in relation to visual effects, ensuring that the rationale for the overall judgement is clear (see sections 3.28-3.29, GLVIA3, 2013). The comprehensive assessment of photomontages included in Appendix 13-3 aims to provide a transparent and robust determination of residual visual effects utilising the graph in Figure 1-2 below in combination with a clear and logical narrative.

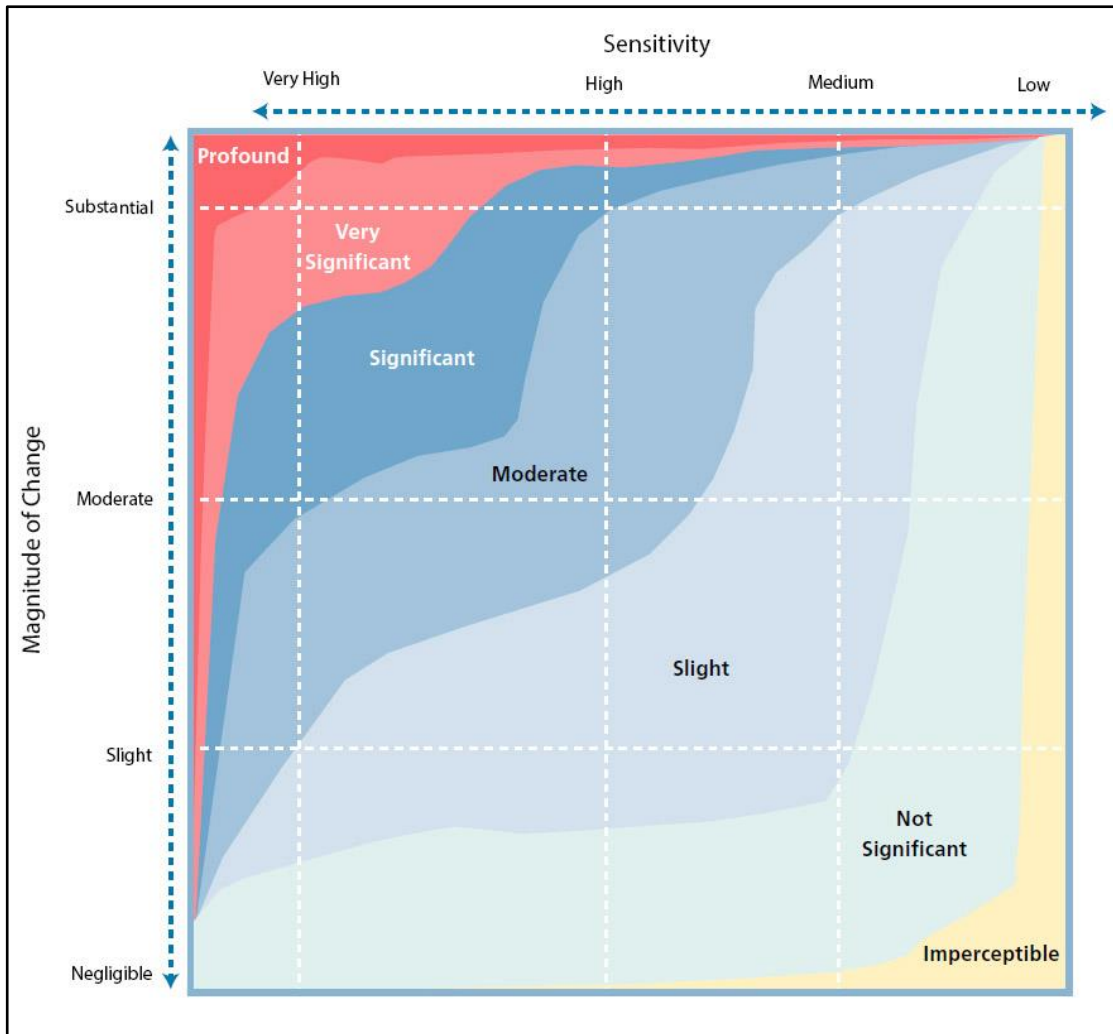


Figure 1-2 Visual Effect Significance Graph (adapted from EPA Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, 2022)

1.5.5 Assessing Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

1.5.5.1 Cumulative Landscape Effects

The Nature Scot 2021 publication *Assessing the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments* identifies two principal areas of cumulative landscape effects, on the physical fabric of the landscape and on the landscape character, which state:

- Cumulative effects on the **physical fabric** of the landscape arise when two or more developments affect landscape components such as woodland, dykes, rural roads or hedgerows. Although this may not significantly affect the landscape character, the cumulative effect on these components may be significant – for example, where the last remnants of former shelterbelts are completely removed by two or more developments.
- Cumulative effects on **landscape character** arise when two or more developments introduce new features into the landscape. In this way, they can change the landscape character to such an extent that they create a different landscape character type, in a similar way to large scale afforestation. That change need not be adverse; some derelict or degraded landscapes may be enhanced as a result of such a change in landscape character.

Potential changes to the physical fabric outlined above are predominantly restricted to the Wind Farm Site and the LCAs in which the site is located. Therefore, these landscape receptors will be assessed for cumulative landscape effects on the physical fabric of the landscape arising from the proposed turbines.

Cumulative effects on the landscape character will be assessed in the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) that have theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines with particular emphasis on the LCA in which the proposed turbines will be located.

Cumulative landscape effects are included in LCA Assessment Tables in Appendix 13-2 and summarised in the LVIA Chapter of the EIAR.

1.5.5.2 Cumulative Visual Effects

For this assessment, the Nature Scot (2021) definition of cumulative effects as additional changes caused by a proposed development in conjunction with other similar developments, is used, however, this assessment also considers other types of developments. The definition in the Guidelines DoEHLG (2006) defines cumulative impacts in terms of wind farms, as the perceived effect on the landscape of two or more wind energy developments visible from any one place.

The GLVIA (2013) and Nature Scot (2021) guidance also note that cumulative visual effects can be experienced **in combination**, where two or more developments are visible from one viewpoint, either **simultaneously** or **in succession** and these are considered in the assessment of visual effects from photomontage viewpoints in Appendix 13-3.

Another type of cumulative visual effect includes where two or more developments are seen **sequentially**, where a viewer moves to another viewpoint or along a transport or recreational route and sees the same or different developments. The photomontage viewpoints illustrate combined visibility and analysis of the photomontages, route screening, as well as site visits and field work undertaken allows sequential visibility to be assessed.

The guidance on cumulative effects given in the Guidelines (DoEHLG, 2006) relating to the Wind Farm Site is as follows:

- *“Similarity in the siting and design approach is preferred where a number of wind energy developments are located in the same landscape character area, particularly within the same viewshed. However, an alternative approach where a particular aesthetic effect is sought may be acceptable.*
- *Different wind energy developments can appear as a single collective unit if located near each other.*
- *It is preferable to avoid locating turbines where they can be seen one behind another, when viewed from highly sensitive key viewpoints (for example, viewing points along walking or scenic routes, or from designated views or prospects), as this results in visual stacking and, thus, confusion. This may not be critical, however, where the wind energy development to the rear is in the distant background.*
- *Wind energy developments within relatively close proximity to one another, while in different landscape character contexts, may be so close as to be within the same visual unit and, therefore, should involve the same siting and design approach.”*

The SNH 2017 publication *Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape* states that ‘introducing turbines that are not similar in form, design, colour and scale may increase visual complexity and clutter’.

Therefore, the cumulative assessment will concentrate on the following issues:

- > Whether the proposed turbines increase the spatial extent of turbines in the view
- > Whether the different wind energy developments can appear as a single collective unit or there is separation
- > Whether ‘visual stacking’ occurs
- > Whether the contrast of different size and design between different wind developments creates visual clutter.

As cumulative visual effects depend on the aspect from which the turbines will be seen various viewpoints were selected to give a thorough overview of the how the proposed turbines will appear in conjunction to turbines already present, permitted or proposed.

The assessment of cumulative effects is included in the viewpoint assessment tables in Appendix 13-3 and are summarised in the LVIA Chapter of the EIAR – Chapter 13.