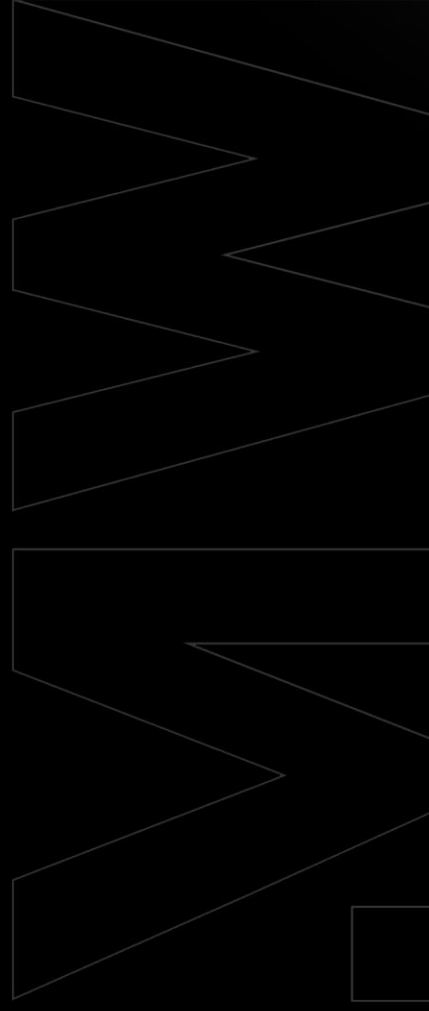


Townscape and Visual Appraisal

Proposed Hotel Development in Briarhill Business Park, Bóthar na dTreabh, Galway

Prepared by Model Works Ltd for
Parosi Developments Ltd

July 2021



**.MODEL
WORKS**

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1.0 Introduction

This report discusses the potential landscape/townscape and visual effects of a proposed hotel development on a site in Briarhill Business Park, Bóthar na dTreabh, Galway.

A planning application for the development was made in August 2020 (Reg. Ref. 20/218) and Galway City Council (GCC) issued a request for further information (RFI) in October 2020. This report has been prepared to accompany the response to the RFI, principally to address Item 1 of the RFI, which states:

“The applicant is advised that having regard to the prominent location of the proposed hotel development at a key junction on the N6 Bóthar na dTreabh, and having regard to Policy 8.7 Urban Design of the City Development Plan 2017-2023 to encourage high quality urban design in all development, it is considered that the proposed hotel by reason of its height, architectural design, scale, bulk, massing, facing materials and expanse of surface car parking and resultant poor layout and interface with adjacent development and public realm would result in an unacceptable design resolution at this location in conflict with policies in the City Development Plan.

The Applicant is requested to examine how the proposal can be modified to render it acceptable through revisions to scale, design, layout, and specification and general hard and soft landscaping. It is advisable to liaise with the Planning Department in advance of any revised submission.” (emphasis added)

As suggested by the RFI, due to its scale, design, and degree of contrast with the existing context, the proposed development has the potential to change the townscape character and views in Briarhill and along the N6/Bóthar na dTreabh. This report assesses the significance and quality of those potential changes (i.e. whether they would be negative as suggested in the RFI, or neutral or positive).

1.1 Methodology

The appraisal was carried out with reference to the Landscape Institute *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* 2013 (GLVIA), the Institute’s Information Note *Townscape Character Assessment* 2017, and the EPA draft *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports* 2017. The assessment methodology including explanation of the criteria and terms used is provided in Appendix 1. The appraisal was carried out by Richard Butler MILI MIPI of Model Works Ltd.

The report (particularly Section 5.0, the Visual Effects Assessment) should be read in conjunction with the photomontages prepared for a selection of representative views in the receiving environment. The photomontages are provided in Appendix 2 under separate cover.

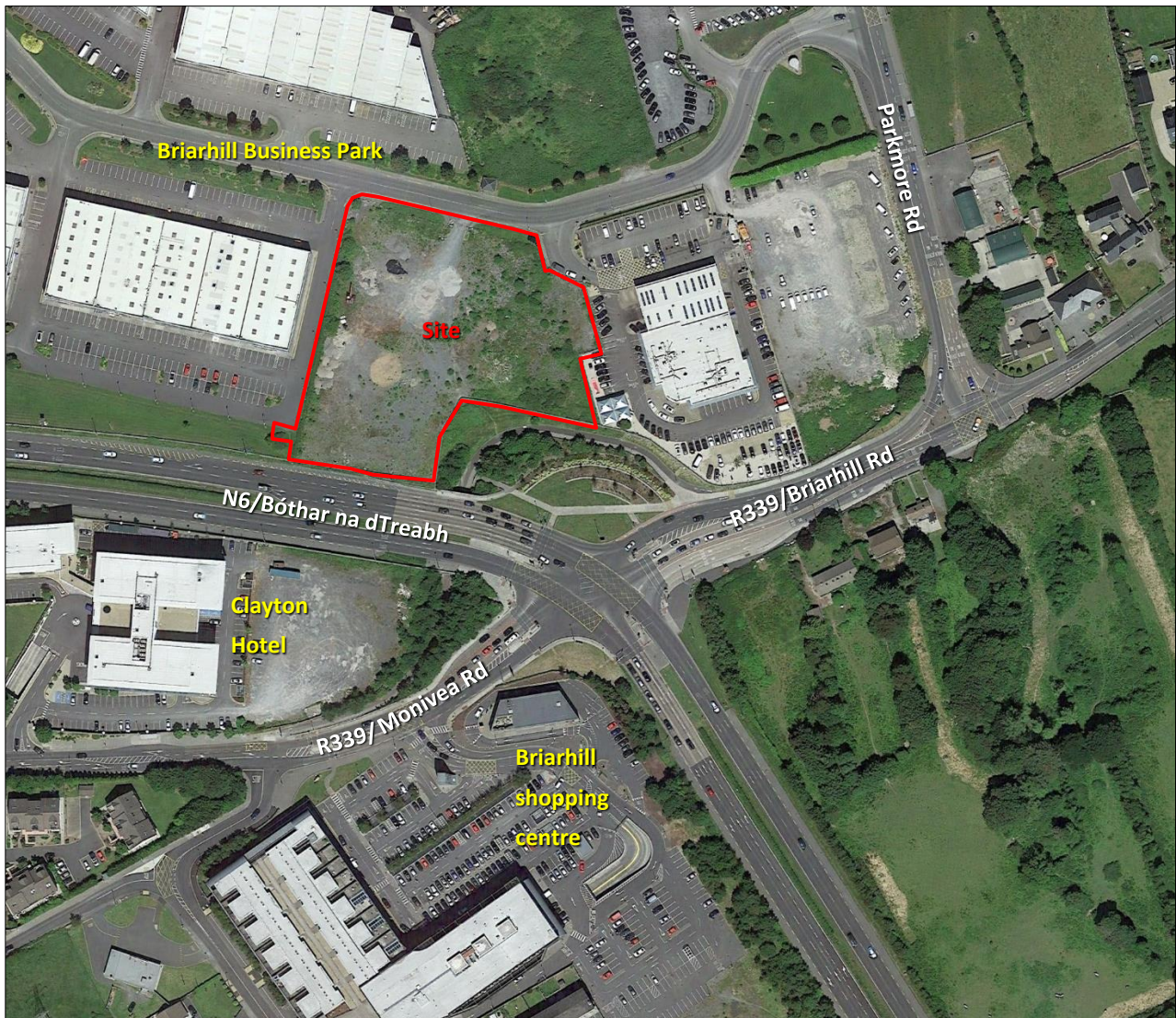
The GLVIA recommends that the word ‘townscape’ be used (instead of landscape) where a proposed development’s receiving environment is dominated by built elements. The GLVIA defines townscape as: *“the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings, the relationships between them, the different types of urban spaces, including green spaces and the relationship between buildings and open spaces”*. Since the subject site is located in the urban environment, the word townscape is used in this report.

2.0 The Receiving Environment

The site is a vacant land parcel in the Briarhill Business Park, adjacent to the junction of the N6/Bóthar na dTreabh and the R339/Monivea Road at the centre of the Briarhill.

The Briarhill Business Park extends to the west, north and east of the site. It is characterised by showroom and retail warehouse-type buildings. To the south west across the N6 is the Clayton Hotel, and to the south beyond the N6-Monivea Road junction is the Briarhill shopping centre.

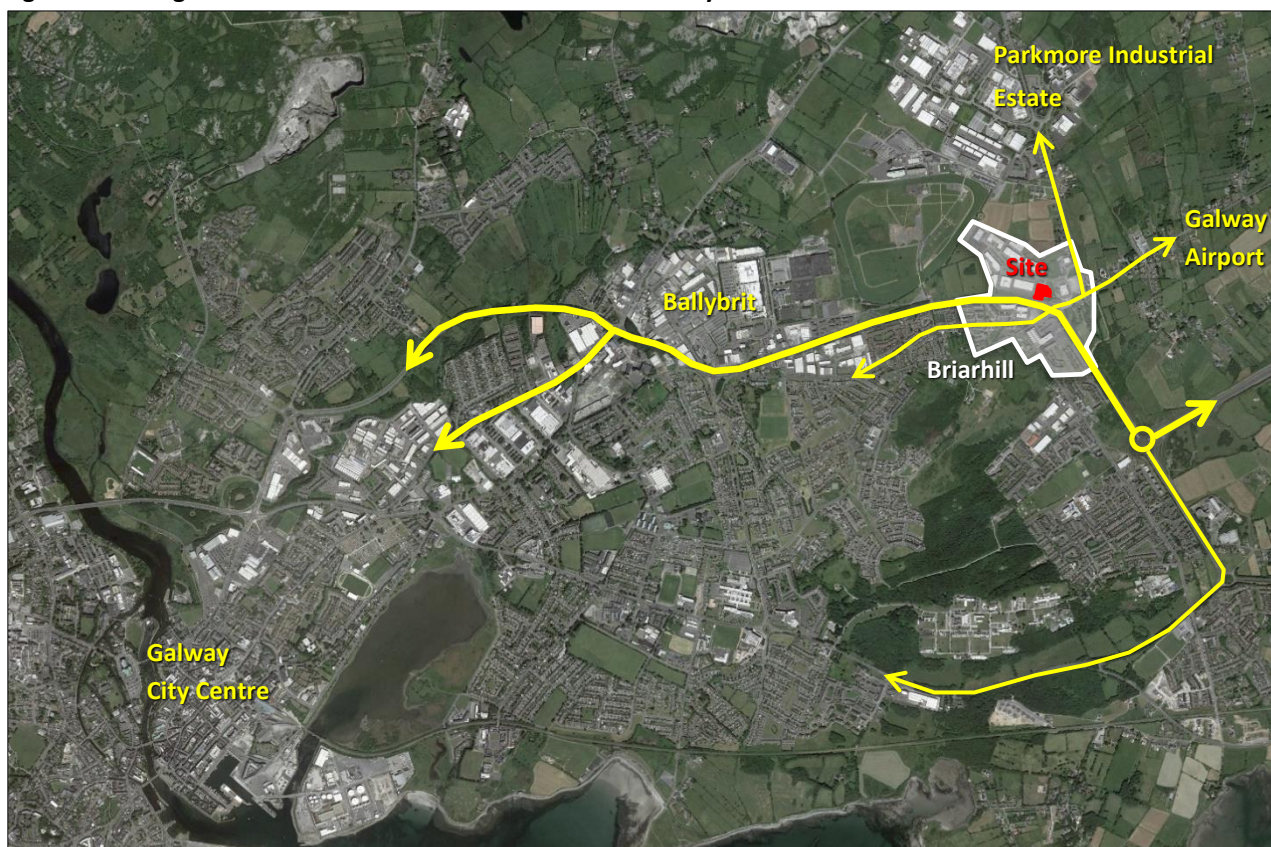
Figure 1: Site location adjacent to the junction of the N6/Bóthar na dTreabh and the R339/Monivea Road



2.1 Gateway Location

Briarhill occupies a strategic position in Galway's urban structure. It is the first 'urban core' or 'district centre' encountered on entering the city by the N6, and for many people arriving in Galway, Briarhill provides the first impression of the city. (Being the first signalised junction on the route, it is the first place where road users stop and have the opportunity to observe their surroundings.) The Briarhill junction also channels traffic between the city centre and Galway Airport and the extensive industrial/ enterprise zone just north of Briarhill at Parkmore.

Figure 2: Strategic location of Briarhill and the site in the Galway urban structure



Briarhill is thus a key junction, 'place' and satellite urban core in the urban structure of Galway, and the site's prominent position beside the junction makes it a gateway site of city-wide importance.

2.2 Townscape Character

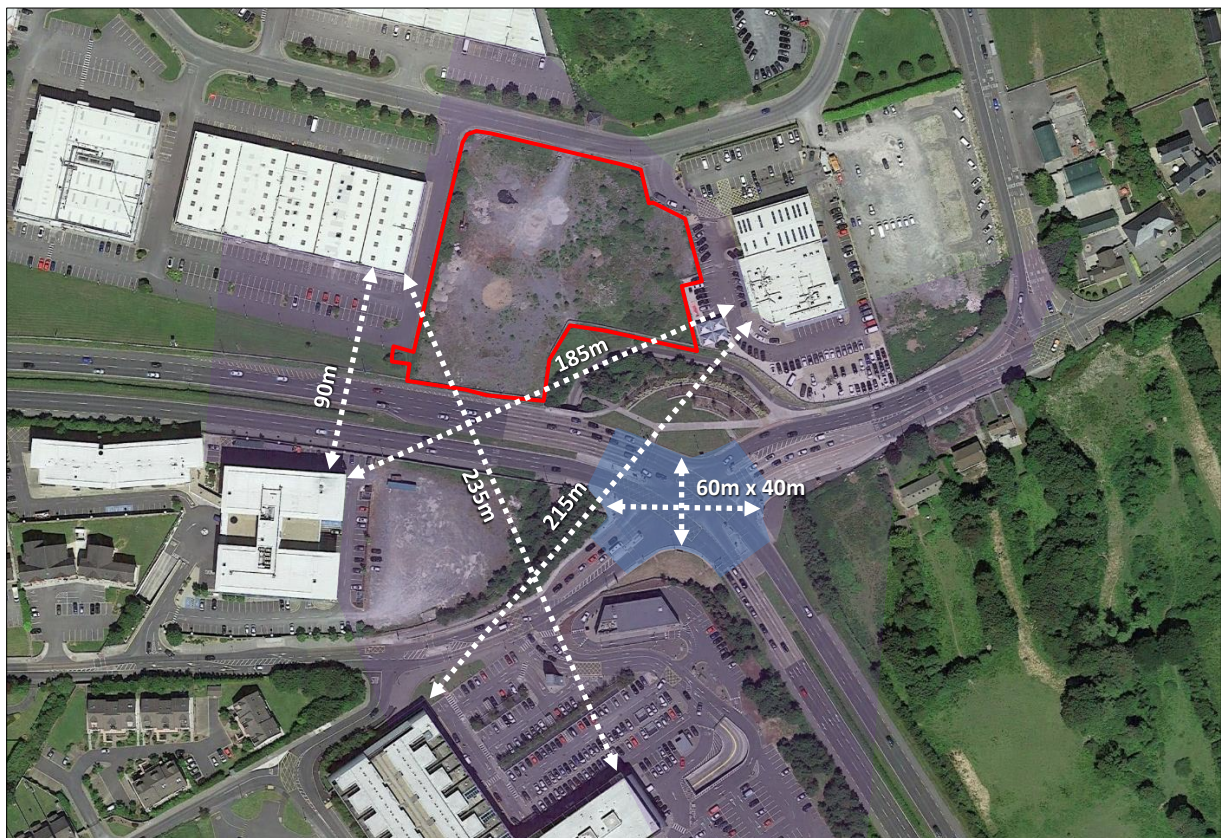
Townscape character is the product of a number of elements/factors, including topography, the land use mix, urban grain (the pattern of streets and blocks), plot and building typologies, scale and architecture, green infrastructure, etc. The greater the degree of uniformity in one or more of these aspects, the stronger the townscape character is likely to be (although an absence of uniformity is also a form of character). The presence of cultural and natural heritage features adds value - and sensitivity - to a townscape.

The townscape character of Briarhill can be summarised as follows:

- **Topography.** The area is relatively flat and low-lying, with little variety and no features of note (e.g. hills or streams, etc.).
- **Urban grain and streetscapes/public realm.**
 - There is no formality of pattern to the urban grain (e.g. a grid). It effectively comprises the crossroads of the N6/Bóthar na dTreabh and the R339/Monivea Road. Outside of this junction (and Parkmore Road) the urban grain is particular to each development – determined by its land use and the shape and size of the site. For example, the Briarhill Business Park in which the site is located has its own urban grain and this is unconnected to that of the shopping centre and Clayton Hotel across the N6.

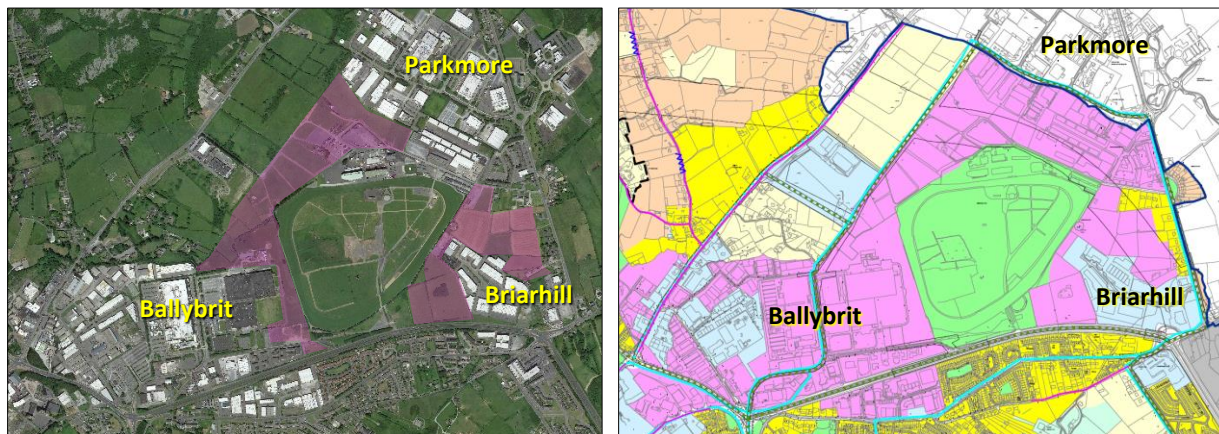
- The urban grain (and the townscape as a whole) is dominated by the N6/Bóthar na dTreabh and particularly its junction with the R339/Monivea Road/Briarhill Road. As they approach the junction the roads are 5-6 lanes (c. 35m) wide. As a result, the junction itself is a vast expanse of tarmac some 60m by 40m across.
- Except at the junction itself the roads are designed/configured as national roads as opposed to urban streets. Therefore there is no direct interface between the roads and the adjacent plots/buildings. In most cases there is a strip of unused land and/or parking between the road and the buildings. This disconnectedness between the street/public realm and the buildings is a key characteristic of the area and a major obstacle to the realisation of a proper urban townscape character. The Clayton Hotel has attempted to overcome this by positioning the building more closely to the road, scaling the building in response to the road, and using the 1st floor (as opposed to the ground floor) as the main interface with the N6.
- The central junction was originally a roundabout and was changed to a crossroads in 2012, in part to give some urban structure/character to the area. However, the adjacent plots are still shaped in response to the former national road roundabout junction and have not been redeveloped. Therefore, the legacy of very widely spaced buildings failing to address the junction remains. Apart from the drive-through restaurant in the shopping centre car park, the buildings facing the junction are hundreds of meters apart – see Figure 3. The closest buildings facing each other across the main roads (the Clayton Hotel and the retail warehouse building beside the site) are 90m apart. There is thus an absence of built enclosure to the streets/public realm including the central junction and as a result the urban structure is weak and illegible. Despite the high volume of road traffic and the pedestrian activity in the shopping centre the townscape has a desolate feel.

Figure 3: Aerial photograph showing the disconnected urban grain and the wide spacing of the buildings at the centre of Briarhill, contributing to a weak urban structure (there are no buildings in the purple shaded area apart from a drive-through restaurant)



- As a result of the dominance of road infrastructure and traffic, and the land ownership and development history, pedestrian and cycle permeability in the area is limited.
- **Land use mix.** The land use mix includes motor dealerships, bulky goods retailing and offices, shopping centre, mixed density residential (houses, duplex and apartment buildings up to four storeys) and hotel.
- **Plot and building typologies.** The plot and building typologies and architecture reflect the land use mix.
 - Only two buildings have been designed with the specific objective of making a positive contribution to the quality of the townscape, namely the Clayton Hotel and Briarhill shopping centre. Both of these are on the south side of the N6.
 - North of the N6 the buildings in the Briarhill Business Park are of retail warehouse type, i.e. large-footprint, low (equivalent to 3 storeys), mostly grey buildings. Although low, these buildings are not small. The two buildings nearest to the site are both over 100m long. This typology, i.e. large-footprint, low, warehouse or factory-type buildings is prevalent in Briarhill and the industrial areas of Parkmore to the north and Ballybrit to the west of the racecourse. Together, these areas, in which this unsustainable, unsightly development type is prevalent, form a significant part of the urban area of Galway (refer to figure 4 a and b below and Figure 2 above).

Figure 4 a & b: Lands zoned for ‘enterprise, industry and related’ in Briarhill Parkmore and Ballybrit, surrounding the racecourse



- Large areas zoned “I” (Enterprise, Industry and Related) surrounding the racecourse remain undeveloped (shaded pink in Figure 4a). It is worthy of consideration what would be the more appropriate development/building typology on these lands, surrounding one of the largest green spaces in the urban area of Galway, when they are developed in future. GCC has deemed the proposed development to be too large (tall) and the architecture and materials inappropriate for the site, but has permitted the warehouse typology to dominate the area. Permitting a more distinctly urban typology on the site may initiate an important, positive change in this part of the city.
- The shopping centre, although an attractive building for its type, is unfortunately positioned behind its surface car park (as opposed to addressing the streets/public realm). The Clayton Hotel is the only building in the area that successfully addresses the N6 and the central junction.

- **Green infrastructure.**

- The most notable element of green infrastructure in the area is the small parkland space created on the north side of the central junction at the time of its conversion from roundabout to crossroads. This is a high quality pocket of green space/public realm in a key location. It incorporates lawn, ornamental planting, trees and a small woodland strip, as well as footpaths and a cycle path which cross the N6 via an underpass. Along with the Clayton Hotel, this park can be considered one of Briarhill's townscape assets.
- There are also roadside belts of trees to the west of the central junction and on the west side of the N6 to the south of the junction. These provide welcome greenery and habitat, but being woodland belts (as opposed to clear-stemmed urban trees) they do not facilitate visual permeability and rather contribute to the disconnectedness of the townscape.
- There are green strips in front of and internal to the larger development sites (e.g. Briarhill Business Park) and these mostly take the form of lawn areas with occasional tree lines.

In summary, the urban structure of Briarhill is weak and in character the area is caught between a peri-urban retail warehouse environment, a motorway corridor and a suburban district centre. Certain elements, notably the wide, signalised central junction, the Clayton Hotel and the small public park beside the junction, have initiated a shift towards a more urban condition, but this is not fully realised.

There are significant obstacles to the achievement of a coherent urban structure and townscape character commensurate with Briarhill's strategic gateway location in Galway's urban structure. These include:

- a) the piecemeal, disconnected urban grain,
- b) the spatial extent and dominance of road infrastructure,
- c) the wide spacing of the buildings which results in limited built enclosure,
- d) the building typologies, scale (including an appreciable lack of height in relation to the roads and spaces between the buildings) and poor quality architecture of a large proportion of the building stock (except for the Clayton Hotel and the shopping centre),
- e) the lack of pedestrian and cycle permeability, and
- f) the lack of quality and coherence in the green infrastructure.

There are few opportunities remaining to address these weaknesses, change the character of Briarhill and make of it a more recognisable 'place' in the urban structure of Galway. It should also be recognised that (1) many of the issues cannot be overcome by individual, site specific developments, and (2) in this environment of diverse character and quality, the ideal nature and 'design resolution' of any new development is not immediately obvious.

The selection of photographs on the following pages illustrates the townscape analysis above.

Plate 1: Approaching Briarhill along the N6 from the south east. This shows the motorway-like character of the road, the excessive screening of the roadside planting (more like motorway planting than urban streetscape planting) and the lack of built form or features to generate urban character or legibility



Plate 2: Arriving at the junction at the 'centre' of Briarhill. This shows vast area of the junction itself and the lack of built form or features to generate a perceptible urban structure or townscape character



Plate 3: A view towards the site from the central junction. This shows the small public park in the foreground and the Clayton Hotel on the south side of the N6. The park and the hotel are the only assets in the Briarhill townscape. The five storey hotel may be considered under-scaled in relation to the wide N6 corridor, but its design does successfully address the road, and the central junction



Plate 4: A view from the R339/Briarhill Road approaching the central junction. The horizontal and vertical scale of the Clayton Hotel contribute to its positive contribution to the townscape, but the separation distance from other buildings, and the character of those buildings, counteracts its urbanising effect



Plate 5: A view from the shopping centre car park. The shopping centre is the only other building (in addition to the Clayton Hotel) designed for a positive effect on the townscape and it succeeds to an extent in that the building itself is attractive for its type. One unfortunate characteristic is the building's positioning behind the surface car park; therefore it has limited presence in the wider townscape. In a small area, where the shopping centre and the hotel are seen together (as in this view) there is a semblance of urban character



Plate 6: A view into Briarhill Business Park from Parkmore Road. This shows the typology and architecture of the buildings, and the extensive spaces between the buildings, which are characteristic of Briarhill generally



Plate 7: Approaching Briarhill along the N6 from the west. To the left is Briarhill Business Park and to the right is the Clayton Hotel. Note how the hotel uses (a) position (fronting the road), (b) scale and (c) design to respond to the N6-dominated context

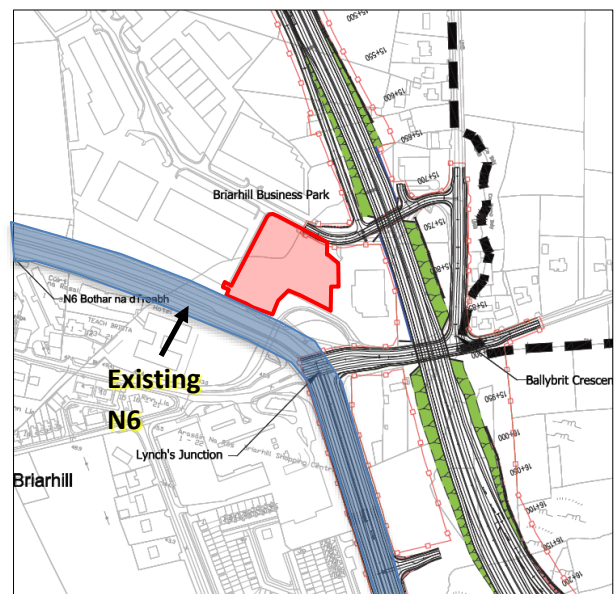


2.3 Future Developments in the Area

A significant and potentially detrimental change to the townscape Briarhill will occur if the Galway Ring Road as currently proposed is implemented. The current proposal would see the road passing through the area just to the east of the existing central junction (75m east of the site), elevated several meters above ground level to bridge the R339/Briarhill Road.

The development would add not only to the spatial extent of road infrastructure in the area, it would also introduce a large, linear vertical structure to the townscape. This would add to the complexity of the townscape, increasing the dominance of road infrastructure, and - critically - it would dilute the emerging and vulnerable urban character of Briarhill.

Figure 5: Current N6 Ring Road proposal for Briarhill



In this future scenario, buildings of distinctly urban typology, scale (including taller), architecture and materials will be needed to counteract the *further* dominance of road infrastructure and strengthen Briarhill as an urban district centre and 'place' in the Galway cityscape. In views from the east, including the approach to the city on the R339 from the airport, a taller building would protrude above the elevated road, thereby overcoming the new road's severing/obstructing effect and retaining some legibility.

3.0 Relevant Policy

3.1 Galway City Development Plan 2017-2023

3.1.1 Neighbourhood Concept

Although not prominent in the townscape, Briarhill does have a residential element, with estates to the south of the shopping centre and west of the Clayton Hotel. (Planning permission has also been sought for an apartment development adjacent to the shopping centre.) Along with the shopping centre and the hotel these estates form a 'neighbourhood'. In Section 2.4, regarding neighbourhoods, the Galway City Development Plan 2017-2023 (CDP) states:

"An essential element of urban sustainability is the development of a compact city, which is characterised by the consolidation of existing neighbourhoods and the establishment of new neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are areas where an efficient use of land, effective integration in the provision of physical and social infrastructure and high quality design are combined to create places where people wish to live, have a sense of belonging and feel socially inclusive... It is the policy of the Council to promote this neighbourhood concept in existing residential areas and in new developments..."

3.1.2 Principles of Good Urban Design

In the RFI GCC specifically cites Policy 8.7 'Urban Design' of the CDP, which states:

"The following principles are critical in the consideration of good urban design and will be promoted in new development :

- **Character:** *The promotion of character by reinforcing local distinctiveness, identity and sense of place. The typology of streets, layout of parks, open spaces, the natural heritage and the urban morphology contributes to character which evolves over time. New development should enhance this character.*
- **Legibility:** *The creation of places that are easily recognisable, and while part of the overall city, they have their own identity through recognisable landmarks and/or streets. New development should enhance the legibility of the surrounding place.*
- **Ease of movement and connectivity:** *The promotion of accessibility, permeability and universal access making places easy to get to and move within. Ease of movement within a city centre may be through pedestrianisation schemes, creation of new streets, permeability through shops... New development should ensure maximum permeability and accessibility for all.*
- **Quality of the public realm:** *The promotion of streets and public spaces that are attractive and safe and that allow for social interaction. The design of the public realm in any new development requires careful consideration in terms of its layout, function and use of materials such as surfaces and street furniture.*
- **Continuity and enclosure:** *The promotion of the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of spaces by clearly defined edges which distinguish public and private areas.*
- **Diversity and adaptability:** *The creation of places that have variety and choice through a mix of uses which are compatible and viable, and which can adapt to changing socio-economic conditions.*

- **Environmental Responsibility:** *The creation of places which foster sustainable energy consumption and reduced carbon footprint through enhancing sustainable transportation, utilising renewable energy technologies and SUDS, enhancing biodiversity and climate adaptation measures...*

“Good architecture is essential in creating a good image of the city with a strong identity. The detailed design of a building and use of materials are important considerations. High quality architectural design is also important in the context of urban design having regard to the layout and intensity of blocks, plots and buildings. The density of development and the mix, type and location of uses are also key considerations...”

3.1.3 Building Height

In Section 8.7 the CDP states:

“The scale of development in terms of height and massing can have a considerable impact on other buildings and spaces as well as views and skylines. Additional building height over and above the prevailing height can usefully mark points of major activity such as business districts, civic functions and transport interchanges. They can also however, have a considerable impact in the context of historic buildings, conservation areas, areas of natural heritage importance and can detract from a city’s skyline and impinge upon strategic views...”

In the context of the city which is predominantly low rise with its sensitive historic core and unique natural amenity setting, there is little capacity for dramatic increases in height. However, it is recognised that modest increases at appropriate locations, can help use land efficiently and provide for sustainable high densities.

In the assessment of development proposals, the following principles will be considered when assessing capacity for height:

- *Protection of existing built and natural heritage and residential amenity.*
- *Creation of landmarks that enhance the city’s legibility without eroding its innate character.*
- *Retention of existing benchmark heights so as to retain strategic views and to protect and enhance the general character of sensitive locations.*
- *Promotion of higher density at centres/nodes of activity, on large scale infill sites and along public transport corridors.”*

3.2 National Planning Framework

Compact growth is one of the main principles and intended outcomes of the NPF. This encourages higher density - and therefore taller - development in urban areas where supporting infrastructure and services, particularly public transport, are available. In order to achieve compact growth the NPF sets the following objectives:

- *“Making better use of under-utilised land and buildings, including ‘infill’, ‘brownfield’ and publicly owned sites and vacant and under-occupied buildings, with higher housing and jobs densities, better serviced by existing facilities and public transport.”*

National Policy Objective 11 states:

“In meeting urban development requirements, there will be a presumption in favour of development that can encourage more people and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities... subject to development meeting appropriate planning standards and achieving targeted growth.”

3.3 Urban Development & Building Height Guidelines (2018, updated 2020)

The Guidelines state:

“Reflecting the National Planning Framework strategic outcomes in relation to compact urban growth, the Government considers that there is significant scope to accommodate anticipated population growth and development needs, whether for housing, employment or other purposes, by building up and consolidating the development of our existing urban areas...

Therefore, these guidelines require that the scope to consider general building heights of at least three to four storeys, coupled with appropriate density, in locations outside what would be defined as city and town centre areas, and which would include suburban areas, must be supported in principle at development plan and development management levels...

“A key objective of the NPF is therefore to see that greatly increased levels of residential development in our urban centres and significant increases in the building heights and overall density of development is not only facilitated but actively sought out and brought forward by our planning processes and particularly so at local authority and An Bord Pleanála levels.”

In Section 3.2 of the Guidelines, ‘development management criteria’ are set out to guide the evaluation of development proposals for buildings taller than the prevailing heights in the area:

“In the event of making a planning application, the applicant shall demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority/ An Bord Pleanála, that the proposed development satisfies the following criteria:

At the scale of the relevant city/town:

- *“The site is well served by public transport with high capacity, frequent service and good links to other modes of public transport.*
- *Development proposals incorporating increased building height, including proposals within architecturally sensitive areas, should successfully integrate into/ enhance the character and public realm of the area, having regard to topography, its cultural context, setting of key landmarks, protection of key views. Such development proposals shall undertake a landscape and visual assessment, by a suitably qualified practitioner such as a chartered landscape architect.*
- *On larger urban redevelopment sites, proposed developments should make a positive contribution to place-making, incorporating new streets and public spaces, using massing and height to achieve the required densities but with sufficient variety in scale and form to respond to the scale of adjoining developments and create visual interest in the streetscape.”*

At the scale of district/neighbourhood/street:

- *The proposal responds to its overall natural and built environment and makes a positive contribution to the urban neighbourhood and streetscape.*
- *The proposal is not monolithic and avoids long, uninterrupted walls of building in the form of slab blocks with materials / building fabric well considered.*
- *The proposal enhances the urban design context for public spaces and key thoroughfares and inland waterway/ marine frontage, thereby enabling additional height in development form to be favourably considered in terms of enhancing a sense of scale and enclosure...*
- *The proposal makes a positive contribution to the improvement of legibility through the site or wider urban area within which the development is situated and integrates in a cohesive manner.*
- *The proposal positively contributes to the mix of uses and/ or building/ dwelling typologies available in the neighbourhood.*

4.0 Proposed Development

4.1 Layout

The proposed layout of the development is a response to both the context and the desired internal environment of the hotel:

- Conceptually, the footprint/floor plan of the building has the form of an 'H', created by two parallel linear volumes connected by a central perpendicular element. This creates two courtyard spaces which can be used to generate internal amenity (with the site environs dominated by the unsightly N6 and the business park). The two parallel volumes are offset, which opens the courtyards to the external landscape/ townscape. The H plan also disaggregates the massing, giving the building a three-dimensional quality (see photomontage for Viewpoint 3). Finally, the H plan is similar in concept to that of the Clayton Hotel across the N6 from the site. This generates a 'dialogue' between the two buildings across the road.
- The building is positioned perpendicular to the N6, with the front corner close to the road (while allowing for access and parking requirements) so that the building responds visibly to the road (i.e. it is intended to be perceived as a 'road-front' building in views from the N6 to the west and south east). The building is similarly positioned with respect to the internal business park road to the north, so that it would have a similar effect in defining/enclosing that street (see photomontage for Viewpoint 7).

Figure 6: The concept behind the position and plan form of proposed development



The eastern part of the site and also small areas to the north and south of the building are occupied by parking areas (see Figure 7). The position and layout of the parking are determined largely by the shape of the site and the availability of points of access, with the key objectives of (a) making the most efficient use

of the site, and (b) allowing sufficient space for landscaping around the site boundaries and around the building itself – to soften and green the site and the wider townscape.

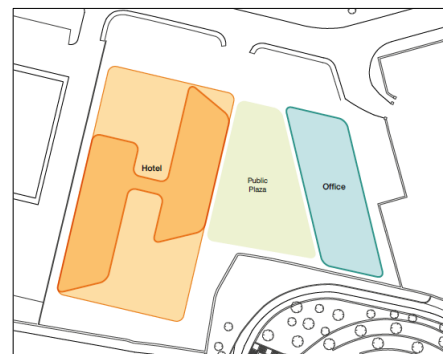
Figure 7: Proposed landscape masterplan



A key element of the FI-stage proposal (as requested in the RFI) are the pedestrian and cycle links between the site and the underpass. This not only creates pedestrian and cycle access from the centre of Briarhill's public realm *to* the site, but also *across* the site into the wider business park.

The proposed site layout allows for the prospect of a future office building on the eastern part of the site (see Figure 8). This further densification and urbanisation of the business park would amplify the proposed development's character-changing effect on the townscape of Briarhill.

Figure 8: Layout of site with potential future office building



4.2 Architecture and Façade Treatments

The following are some of the key architectural features/characteristics of the proposed building:

- Using vertical setbacks and associated variations in the façade design and the roofline, the two main volumes are each divided into two smaller, slender volumes – when seen from the north and south (see Figure 9). This is intended to combine with the H-plan format and the highly articulated facades to reduce apparent massing of the building.
- The parapets of the north and south facades (of both volumes) are angled to create sail or wing-like corners. These give the building a distinctive roofline, which changes depending on the angle from which it is seen. This is also a characteristic of the Clayton Hotel across the N6 from the site.
- The principle façade material of the external facades is brick. This was selected for its urban associations, to strengthen the urban character of the development, and for its quality and durability. The windows are arranged in a strong grid pattern, with angled reveals featuring zinc metal panels – also selected for quality and durability. The materials of the ‘internal’ courtyard facades differ from the external facades. These are clad in light coloured render, with the central connecting element of glazed curtain walling – for maximum solar gain.
- The ground and first floor levels around all four sides of the building are differentiated from the upper floors by variations in façade design and materials. This horizontal band/base references (approximately) the height of the neighbouring retail warehouse buildings, so that the upper, brick-clad floors read as a distinct vertical projection from this base (i.e. an intentional landmark). On the east and west facades this lower level is clad in a green tile, strengthening the building’s identity (and also referencing the colourful signage typical of the shopfronts of the retail warehouses).
- At the south east corner of the building there is a projecting volume at ground and first floor levels, containing part of the leisure centre. This has a sail or wing-like roof which complements the roofline of the main body of the building, and adds visual interest to the overall built form.

Figure 9: Proposed south elevation



Figure 10: Proposed east elevation



4.3 Landscape Proposals

The main elements of the landscape proposals (see Figure 7 above) include the following:

- **Central courtyards and doorstep spaces.** The central courtyards and the spaces in front of the main north and south entrances feature 'patio' areas providing seating and informal gathering space, ornamental planting and small clusters of trees. These are intended to be active amenity spaces for the hotel and leisure centre.
- **Parking areas.** The parking bays are surfaced in permeable green paving, to both soften the appearance of the parking areas and contribute to sustainable drainage. The parking areas feature lines of trees between the rows of bays and islands of low planting for additional greenery.
- **North-south link.** A wide pedestrian and cycle path is proposed along the eastern side of the building, providing a direct route across the site between the underpass (connected to the public realm of Briarhill centre) to the south, and the business park to the north and west. This simple, wide pavement is intended to facilitate unimpeded movement across the site, and also to be legible as an element of the public realm. A line of trees along the east side of the path (between the path and the parking area) is intended to reinforce the legibility of this north-south link.
- **Boundary planting.** Around the northern, eastern and southern boundaries of the site it is proposed to plant closely spaced lines of trees in belts of low planting or grasses. This vegetation is intended to screen the parking areas and soften the building when seen from the wider townscape.

Overall, the proposed development would make a significant positive contribution to the green infrastructure of the business park and Briarhill, maintaining large areas of permeable surface, substantially increasing the number and variety of trees, and improving pedestrian and cycle permeability.

5.0 Assessment of Visual Effects

Nine viewpoints were selected for visual effects assessment informed by verified photomontages. The viewpoints were selected to represent the main elements/areas and groups of visual receptors in the proposed development's receiving environment (described in Section 2 above).

Figure 11: Viewpoints for visual effects assessment



The viewpoints are individually assessed below. For the methodology, terms and criteria used in the assessment refer to Appendix 1.

The assessment should be read in conjunction with the baseline photographs and verified photomontages provided in A3 format in Appendix 2 under separate cover.

5.1 Viewpoint 1 – N6 to South East of Site

Existing View: The N6 arrives at the edge of Galway at a large roundabout at Doughiska, then turns north to approach the city centre via Briarhill. This view is taken from the stretch between Doughiska and Briarhill. The road has a motorway character, with two lanes in each direction, a planted central median, wide verges and dense belts of roadside vegetation. The vegetation restricts lateral views and frames the view along the road towards Briarhill. The signalised junction is visible in the middle distance and beyond that a large retail warehouse building can be seen – wide, low and mostly grey, partially screened by the trees in park beside the junction. A car showroom is just visible through the vegetation to the right. It is an underwhelming view considering the location.

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low-Medium.

Proposed Change: The hotel would be a prominent addition to the view. The building stands at an angle to the axis of the road, so that the south east corner with projecting leisure centre at ground and first floors presents to the viewer and two elevations are revealed. The rhythm of the fenestration and the brick cladding give the building a distinctly urban character, while features such as the green tiling to the lower floors and the distinctively angled parapets lend distinction to the building.

Magnitude of change: Medium.

Significance of Effects: Measuring the magnitude of change against the viewpoint sensitivity, the visual effect is predicted to be moderate and positive. The building would introduce a much needed focal point to the view (a beacon on the route into the city centre), its scale and distinctive design indicating a place of significance in the townscape and strengthening the urban character. While the building would contrast with the retail warehouse and showroom in typology and scale, (a) these are not sensitive features, and (b) given the gateway/urban district location the proposed development is the more appropriate form. The development would add character, architectural and material quality, visual interest and legibility to the townscape and would cause no harm to any sensitive feature or characteristic of the view.



Plate 8: Photomontage for Viewpoint 1
Refer to Appendix 2 for baseline photograph
and photomontage in A3 format

5.2 Viewpoint 2 – N6 Entering Briarhill from the South East

Existing View: The N6 arrives in Briarhill at the signalised junction with the R339/Monivea Road. The width of the roads, the expanse of the junction, the wide spaces between the surrounding buildings (with a resulting lack of built enclosure and legible urban structure) and the utilitarian architecture of the buildings in Briarhill Business Park are all evident in this view. The shopping centre is to the left (out of view in this photograph) behind its surface parking area. The Clayton Hotel is the only building that seeks to address the public realm and contribute positively to the townscape. The trees in the small park across the junction are another asset, whereas the tree belt to the left in front of the hotel detracts somewhat from the building's urbanising effect.

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low-Medium. Due to the existing composition and quality of the view there is a high capacity for change. The sensitivity classification is raised to low-*medium* in recognition of the requirement for improvement in the view at this gateway location.

Proposed Change: The hotel would be a prominent addition to the view, transforming the townscape. The scale of the building is commensurate with the width of the roads and in the wide space there is no sense of excessive height or enclosure. Due to the separation distance from the other buildings the scale and form of the building can be judged on its own merits. The angle of the building in this key view is fortuitous, revealing (a) the two off-set wings enclosing a courtyard, giving the building three dimensional depth; (b) the distinctively shaped roofline; (c) the complementary form of the roof of the projecting leisure centre at the near corner; (d) the variations in façade treatments and materials; (e) the quality of the materials (particularly the brick, tiles and metal detailing). The built frontage would also be softened by the rows of new trees in front of the building.

Magnitude of change: High.

Significance of Effects: The visual effect would be significant and positive. The development would introduce a building of landmark character and appreciable architectural quality to the townscape/view. The scale is appropriate to its location. The building would improve the balance between built form and road infrastructure/ public realm, elevate the overall quality of the built environment and strengthen the urban character. No sensitive feature or characteristic of the townscape or view would be compromised.



Plate 9: Photomontage for Viewpoint 2
Refer to Appendix 2 for baseline photograph
and photomontage in A3 format

5.3 Viewpoint 3 – Public Open Space Beside Briarhill Central Junction

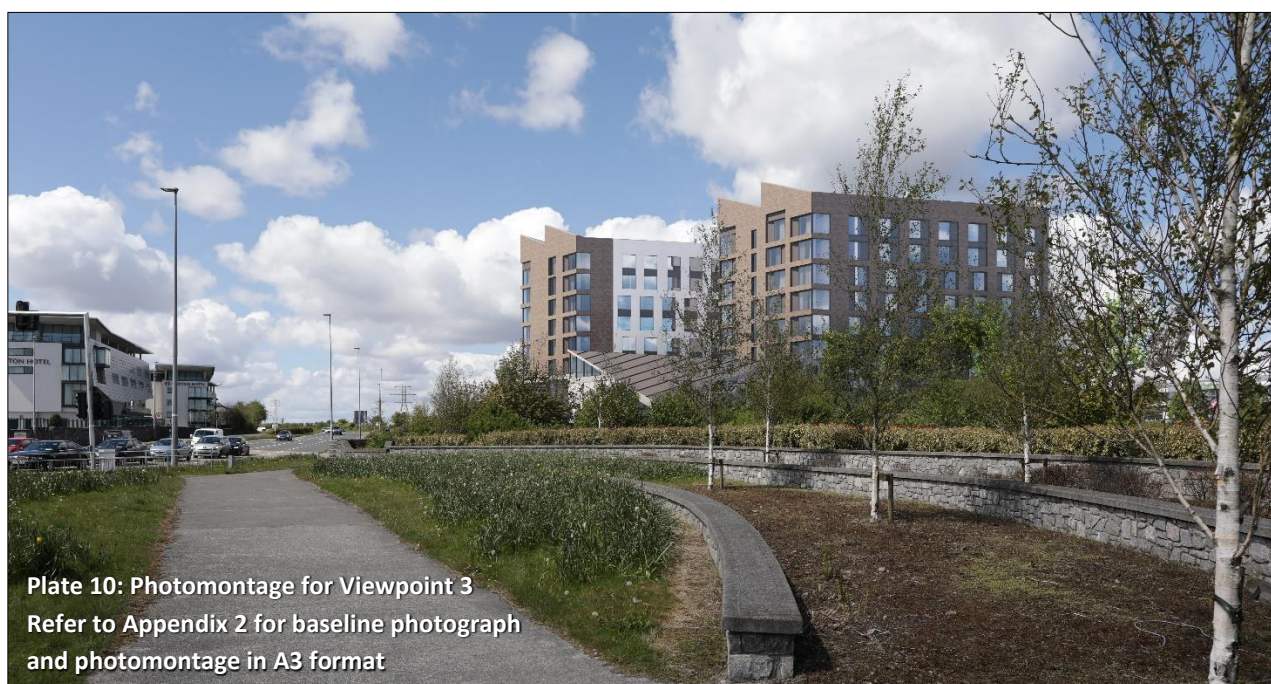
Existing View: The small park beside the junction, occupying part of the former roundabout, was a successful intervention in the townscape but its amenity value is undermined by much of the context. This view reveals some of the park's qualities, and also the architectural qualities of the Clayton Hotel (located diagonally across the N6 from the site). The building successfully addresses the national road and can be considered under-scaled in relation to the very wide road corridor (if the location is to be considered 'urban', as it should). The retail warehouse buildings in Briarhill Business Park on the opposite side of the road make no contribution to the townscape or visual amenity (and in the urban environment this might be considered a negative contribution).

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low-Medium.

Proposed Change: The hotel would be a prominent addition to the view, transforming the townscape. The scale (including the height) of the building is appropriate to its position beside the national road corridor. It would act in concert with the Clayton Hotel to generate a degree of built enclosure and urban character in the townscape. The proposed development itself is of high architectural and material quality – and is attractive and distinctive in its own right – but there are also similarities with the Clayton Hotel that would ensure the buildings are complementary. These include the twin volume typology, the distinctive rooflines and certain shared materials (e.g. metal with standing seams).

Magnitude of change: High.

Significance of Effects: The visual effect would be significant and positive. The development would introduce a building of landmark character and appreciable architectural quality to the townscape. With the proposed building replacing the retail warehouses, the composition, character and quality of the view would be substantially improved. The three assets (the park, the Clayton Hotel and the proposed hotel) would combine to outweigh the detracting effect of the N6 and form a pleasing visual composition.



5.4 Viewpoint 4 – Briarhill Shopping Centre

Existing View: This view is taken from the shopping centre at the main entrance to Dunnes Stores. The view is dominated by the unsightly car park but the Clayton Hotel provides an architectural feature of some quality and visual interest, and this complements the shopping centre, which is also an attractive building for its type. Despite these two buildings the relative absence of built form and enclosure in the wider townscape (as a result of the limited height and wide spacing of the buildings around the extensive road infrastructure) makes the urban structure weak and illegible.

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low.

Proposed Change: The hotel would be a prominent addition to the view, its height, twin-volume format (giving the building substance and three dimensional depth) and distinctive roofline contributing to its strong visual presence. The building would complement the Clayton Hotel in format and architectural quality, and combine with the existing hotel to generate some built enclosure, strengthening the urban structure and townscape character.

Magnitude of change: Medium-High.

Significance of Effects: The visual effect would be of moderate significance and positive. The development would introduce a building of appreciable architectural quality to the townscape. It would have the effect of bridging the N6 which currently divides Briarhill into a more attractive southern part and a somewhat desolate, unsightly northern part. While the building would contrast with the retail warehouse beside it in the view, (a) that building is not a valuable or sensitive element, and (b) the proposed development is the more appropriate form for the urban district centre environment.



5.5 Viewpoint 5 – R339/Briarhill Road approaching the junction with the N6

Existing View: This viewpoint represents both the R339/Briarhill Road and three houses* located beside the road. These are the nearest residential visual receptors to the site. The R339 widens to five lanes as it approaches the junction. The three houses are in the foreground to the left out of the frame of view. To the right, across the road from the houses, is a motor showroom surrounded by hard standing areas used for the storage of vehicles. Further retail warehouse buildings can be seen behind the showroom. In the middle distance beyond the junction is the distinctive form of the Clayton Hotel and the roofs of a residential estate protruding above the treeline beside the hotel.

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low-Medium. Due to the existing composition and quality of the view there is a high capacity for change. The sensitivity classification is raised to low-*medium* in recognition of the requirement for improvement in the view at this gateway location (this is the route into the city centre from the airport).

Proposed Change: The hotel would be a prominent addition to the view. The scale of the building is in proportion to the road infrastructure in the townscape, and there is no sense of excessive height or enclosure. From this angle the appearance of the building is markedly different to the more southerly viewpoints (e.g. Viewpoints 2, 3, 4). The rhythm and symmetry of the east facade are clearly revealed and the angled parapets create a wing-like form at roof level (continuing the dialogue with the Clayton Hotel).

Magnitude of change: High.

Significance of Effects: The visual effect would be significant and positive. The development would introduce a building of appreciable architectural quality to the townscape, the building complementing the one existing positive element in the view. The scale of the building is appropriate to its location, and it would improve the balance between built form and road infrastructure, strengthen the urban character. No sensitive feature or characteristic of the view would be compromised.



* The proposed N6 Ring Road would cross the R339 directly in front of this viewpoint (requiring the removal of the three houses), screening the centre of Briarhill from view. In that context the building's height would be an asset, the distinctive roofline protruding above the Ring Road bridge/embankments (in views from further back along the R339), marking the urban centre and improving legibility along the airport road.

5.6 Viewpoint 6 – Parkmore Road at Entrance to Briarhill Business Park

Existing View: This view is experienced by a large number of people accessing the Parkmore enterprise and industrial zone north of Briarhill, and those visiting Briarhill Business Park itself. The business park, which is the site's immediate receiving environment, is comprised of large-footprint, low buildings clad in grey curtain walling, separated by extensive parking areas, some ornamental landscaping and several vacant plots. The Clayton Hotel and the shopping centre are visible in the distance beyond the N6.

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low. The landscape to the west of Parkmore Road (including Briarhill Business Park and a more extensive area to the north) is characterised by industrial and enterprise development, and zoned for further development. Visual amenity is generally limited.

Proposed Change: The hotel would be a prominent addition to the view, and from this angle its height is emphasised. In use, typology, height, architecture and materials the building contrasts strongly with the context. It would shift the character of the business park towards a more urban condition, becoming the focal point of the townscape locally.

Magnitude of change: Medium.

Significance of Effects: The visual effect would be of moderate significance and neutral. The development would introduce a building of architectural and material quality but starkly different character to the townscape in view. Apart from improving legibility (by providing a landmark visible from the road to the north), from this position its positive effects on the urban structure and townscape character of Briarhill would not be immediately obvious. However, the affected context is not a valued area of townscape, and no sensitive feature or characteristic would be compromised by the development; it would simply cause change (and that change represents a shift towards a more sustainable urban neighbourhood).



The N6 Ring Road (see Figure 5 above) would cut across the landscape left to right (parallel with Parkmore Road), bridging the business park access road, just behind the Mercedes showroom. It would screen the majority of the business park (and the Clayton Hotel in the distance) from view. Any perceived negative impact of the *subject development* would be negated by that change brought about by the Ring Road. In that scenario the proposed building's height would be an asset to the business park, functioning as a beacon.

5.7 Viewpoint 7 – Briarhill Business Park

Existing View: The internal landscape of the business park, and the employees and visitors to the park, are key receptors of change - although they are not sensitive. In this view from the spine road in the park the wide green verges featuring box hedging and maturing trees lend some visual amenity, providing greenery but also screening the unsightly buildings and parking areas from view.

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low.

Proposed Change: The hotel would be a prominent addition to the view. The building format, with two volumes divided by a courtyard, is beneficial in that the visual impact is dispersed along the streetscape (as opposed to concentrated as it is for example in View 6). This effect is emphasised by the different rooflines and façade treatments of the two volumes. Although considerably taller than the existing buildings in the view, the wide road, wide green verges and trees and the parking areas in front of the buildings combine to create a favourable context, so that there would be no sense of excessive enclosure.

Magnitude of change: Medium-High.

Significance of Effects: The visual effect would be of moderate significance and positive. The development would introduce a building of architectural and material quality to the business park. The change can be comfortably accommodated and the view composition, character and quality would be improved.



5.8 Viewpoints 8 & 9 – N6 to West of Site

Existing View: Two views are provided from the N6 approaching Briarhill from the west:

- In **View 8** a line of long, low, grey warehouse-type buildings (Briarhill Business Park) are visible ahead to the left of the motorway-like road, extending to the north. To the right behind the roadside vegetation is a residential neighbourhood with houses in the foreground, stepping up to a three storey duplex terrace further along the road. Due to the nature of the road and the absence of road-front buildings of height there is no indication of the urban district centre ahead. Other than the road, a pylon, the road signs and the duplex block gable are the main features of the view. Legibility is poor. This could be a motorway passing a peri-urban retail park anywhere in Ireland. It is notable that from this position less than 350m away, the five storey Clayton Hotel is not yet visible.
- In **View 9** the landscape character shifts towards a more urban condition due to (a) the Clayton Hotel, which addresses the road with its design, (b) the retail frontage and parking of the business park building beside the site, and (c) the signalised junction ahead along the road. However, the landscape character remains mixed/indistinct and legibility is poor. Again, it is notable that the shopping centre has no presence in the view.

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low-Medium. Due to the existing composition and quality of the views there is a high capacity for change. The sensitivity classification is raised to low-*medium* in recognition of the requirement for improvement in the view at this gateway location.

Proposed Change: The building would be a prominent addition to both views, becoming the focal point of the views. With its distinctly urban characteristics (e.g. its position fronting the road, its height, façade design and materials it would (a) shift the townscape character towards a more urban condition, and (b) signal a place of significance in the townscape *and* along the main route out of the city (functioning as a beacon). The closer the viewer gets to the building, the more appreciable the design refinement and material quality would be. Notable design features include (a) the tile-clad lower floors being distinct from the upper floors – referencing the height of the surrounding lower buildings and the design approach of the Clayton Hotel; (b) the wing-tip roofline at the near corner responding to that of the Clayton Hotel across the road. A key design change for the RFI response is the refinement of the fenestration which considerably improves the west façade of the building.

Magnitude of change: Medium-High.

Significance of Effects: The visual effects would be of moderate significance and positive. The building would introduce a much needed focal point to the view (a beacon on the route out of the city centre) and strengthen the townscape character. While the building would contrast with the retail warehouse buildings in typology, height and architecture, (a) these buildings are themselves large (not as tall but nonetheless prominent), (b) they are not sensitive features (and nor is the wider townscape), and (c) given the gateway/urban district location the proposed development is the more appropriate form. The development would add character, visual interest and legibility and would cause no harm to any sensitive feature or characteristic of the view.



6.0 Conclusions

The Proposed development would be a significant intervention in the townscape of Briarhill, changing the character of the district centre and the composition of views in the area. Such change is the intention of the proposed development. The applicant and design team recognise the ‘prominent location of the site’ (as identified by GCC in the RFI) and the proposed design seeks to take advantage of this – to (a) deliver a development of sustainable land use, density and economic viability, and *also* (b) to improve the currently weak urban structure, mixed townscape character and limited visual amenity of Briarhill.

The potential visual effects are summarised below.

Table 1 Summary of visual effects assessment

No.	Location	Viewpoint Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effects
1	N6 to south east of the site	Low-Medium	Medium	Moderate positive
2	N6 entering Briarhill from the south east	Low-Medium	High	Significant positive
3	Public open space Beside Briarhill central junction	Low-Medium	High	Significant positive
4	Briarhill shopping centre	Low	Medium-High	Moderate positive
5	R339/Briarhill Road approaching the junction with the N6 (and houses beside road)	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Moderate positive
6	Parkmore Road at Entrance to Briarhill Business Park	Low	Medium	Moderate neutral
7	Briarhill Business Park	Low	Medium-High	Moderate positive
8	N6 to west of Site – A (distant)	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Moderate positive
9	N6 to west of site – B (close-up_	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Moderate positive

The RFI (Item 1) specifically requested that the proposed development be reconsidered in light of Policy 8.7 of the CDP. Informed by the townscape analysis (Section 2 above) and the assessment of visual effects (Section 5), the proposal is considered against the Principles of Good Urban Design as stated in Section 8.7 of the CDP below.

Principles of Good Urban Design (Galway City Development Plan Section 8.7)	Assessment of Proposed Development's Compliance
Character: <i>The promotion of character by reinforcing local distinctiveness, identity and sense of place. The typology of streets, layout of parks, open spaces, the natural heritage and the urban morphology contributes to character which evolves over time. New development should enhance this character.</i>	The proposed development would strengthen the character of Briarhill as a mixed use urban district centre. The building is itself distinctive and of appreciable design and material quality, and being prominently positioned and of substantial scale, it would make a significant contribution to the identity and sense of place of Briarhill. There are several key similarities between the proposed building and the Clayton Hotel (the existing building with the most positive townscape impact in Briarhill). These include the buildings’ positioning to address the N6, the twin-volume building format, the distinctive wing-tip rooflines, and certain shared materials. There would thus be a ‘dialogue’ between the two buildings (refer to Viewpoints 3, 4, 5, 9)

	<p>so that together they would generate/ reinforce a local distinctiveness.</p> <p>The morphology of the proposed development (i.e. a hotel with surface parking area, pedestrian and cycle circulation and landscaping) - and its design and material quality - would represent a positive evolution of the Briarhill Business Park landscape. It would initiate the bridging of the N6 by 'urban-quality' development, enhancing the business park itself but also strengthening and improving the quality of the Briarhill townscape overall.</p>
<p>Legibility: <i>The creation of places that are easily recognisable, and while part of the overall city, they have their own identity through recognisable landmarks and/or streets. New development should enhance the legibility of the surrounding place.</i></p>	<p>The proposed development would enhance legibility by introducing a new, easily recognisable landmark to both (a) the N6 corridor (the main road into and from the city), and (b) the townscape of Briarhill.</p> <p>Briarhill is a key junction or 'place' along the N6 corridor, and an important satellite urban centre in the structure of Galway, but this is <u>not</u> currently reflected in the character and quality of the townscape. The proposed development would enhance the urban structure locally, and - due to its position on the N6 (at the first signalised junction on entering the city) - the improvement in legibility would have city-wide significance.</p>
<p>Ease of movement and connectivity: <i>The promotion of accessibility, permeability and universal access making places easy to get to and move within. Ease of movement within a city centre may be through pedestrianisation schemes, creation of new streets, permeability through shops... New development should ensure maximum permeability and accessibility for all.</i></p>	<p>The proposed development would improve pedestrian and cycle permeability and connectivity, overcoming the disconnectedness of the existing urban grain. The RFI design amendments include pedestrian and cycle connections from the site to the existing circulation network (the underpass and the park beside the central junction), thereby providing access to Briarhill Business Park across the site.</p>
<p>Quality of the public realm: <i>The promotion of streets and public spaces that are attractive and safe and that allow for social interaction. The design of the public realm in any new development requires careful consideration in terms of its layout, function and use of materials such as surfaces and street furniture.</i></p>	<p>There is limited potential for development on the site to contribute to the provision or quality of public realm/streetscape (being separated from the public realm due to the configuration of land ownership). However, since (a) public access to and across the hotel site will be facilitated/promoted, and (b) the landscape design (including hard and soft materials) is of high quality, there would be an indirect improvement in the quality of the public realm.</p> <p>The proposed land use and building typology/scale would also contribute to the safety and levels of activity in the public realm, by generating pedestrian movement and providing passive surveillance from the building.</p>
<p>Continuity and enclosure: <i>The promotion of the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of spaces by clearly defined edges which distinguish public and private areas.</i></p>	<p>The proposed development would improve the definition and enclosure of the adjacent roads/streets. The site requires that the building design respond to a range of different townscape elements and conditions, including the very wide, anti-urban N6 national road to the south and the internal business park access road to the north. The photomontages (e.g. Viewpoints 3 and 7 respectively) show that the development would succeed in strengthening the definition and enclosure of both roads, and thereby improve the townscape character and visual amenity of both road corridors.</p>

<p>Diversity and adaptability: <i>The creation of places that have variety and choice through a mix of uses which are compatible and viable, and which can adapt to changing socio-economic conditions.</i></p>	<p>Land use mix is a contributing factor to townscape character, as it affects plot and building typologies and architecture. The proposed development would increase the diversity of land use – and thereby increase the diversity and quality of the building stock and architecture – in the business park and in Briarhill as a whole.</p>
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The above analysis, supported by the visual effects assessment in Section 5, indicates that the proposed development can be considered an exemplar of good urban design in a challenging townscape context.

Regarding the proposed building's height, the CDP states in Section 8.7:

“Additional building height over and above the prevailing height can usefully mark points of major activity such as business districts, civic functions and transport interchanges...

“In the assessment of development proposals, the following principles will be considered when assessing capacity for height:

- *Protection of existing built and natural heritage and residential amenity.*
- *Creation of landmarks that enhance the city's legibility without eroding its innate character.*
- *Retention of existing benchmark heights so as to retain strategic views and to protect and enhance the general character of sensitive locations.*
- *Promotion of higher density at centres/nodes of activity, on large scale infill sites and along public transport corridors.”*

Briarhill warrants a 'marker' in the townscape, both as a key junction/place on the main route to and from the city centre, and as an emerging district centre in its own right.

There is no element or aspect of the receiving environment (e.g. cultural/built or natural heritage features, residential neighbourhoods or valued strategic views) that demands protection from sustainable, tall development; restraint is not needed in this environment. In fact, there are characteristics of the area (e.g. the spatial extent and dominance of existing and future road infrastructure, the wide spacing of the buildings and their failure to generate a legible urban structure, the utilitarian architecture of the commercial and industrial buildings, etc.) that suggest a development of urban scale and architecture is most appropriate on the site.

In conclusion, based on (a) the analysis of the townscape context, (b) consideration of relevant policy, and (c) the assessment of the potential visual effects on a selection of representative viewpoints in the receiving environment, the proposed development can be considered an appropriate intervention in the townscape of Briarhill.

APPENDIX 1 LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The TVIA methodology is informed by the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 3rd edition 2013 (hereafter referred to as the GLVIA) and the EPA draft *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports*, 2017.

The European Landscape Convention 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 expands beyond the idea that landscape is only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity. It recognises landscape as a resource in its own right, providing a complex range of cultural, environmental and economic benefits to individuals and society.

The word ‘townscape’ is used to describe the landscape in urban areas. The GLVIA defines townscape as “*the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings, the relationships between them, the different types of urban spaces, including green spaces and the relationship between buildings and open space*”.

1.0 Key Principles of the GLVIA

1.1 Use of the Term ‘Effect’ vs ‘Impact’

The GLVIA requires that the terms ‘impact’ and ‘effect’ be clearly distinguished and consistently used. ‘Impact’ is defined as the action being taken, e.g. the introduction to the landscape of buildings, infrastructure or landscaping. ‘Effect’ is defined as the change resulting from those actions, e.g. change in landscape character or in the composition of views.

1.2 Assessment of Both ‘Landscape’ and ‘Visual’ Effects

The GLVIA prescribes that effects on views and visual amenity should be assessed separately from the effects on landscape/townscape, although the two topics are inherently linked.

‘Landscape/townscape’ results from the interplay between the physical, natural and cultural components of our surroundings. Different combinations and spatial distribution of these elements create variations in landscape/townscape character. ‘Landscape/townscape character assessment’ is the method used in LVIA to describe landscape/townscape and by which to understand the effects of development on the landscape/townscape as a resource.

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.

2.0 Townscape Effects Assessment

Assessment of potential landscape/townscape effects involves (a) classifying the sensitivity of the receiving environment, and (b) identifying and classifying the magnitude of landscape/townscape change which would result from the development. These factors are combined to arrive at a classification of significance of the landscape/townscape effects.

2.1 Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscape/townscape is a function of its land use, landscape patterns and scale, visual enclosure and the distribution of visual receptors, and the value placed on the landscape/townscape. The nature and scale of the development in question is also taken into account, as are any trends of change, and relevant policy. Five categories are used to classify sensitivity (Table 1).

Table 1 Categories of Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Description
Very High	Areas where the landscape exhibits very strong, positive character with valued elements, features and characteristics that combine to give an experience of unity, richness and harmony. The landscape character is such that its capacity to accommodate change in the form of development is very low. These attributes are recognised in landscape policy or designations as being of national or international value and the principle management objective for the area is protection of the existing character from change.
High	Areas where the landscape exhibits strong, positive character with valued elements, features and characteristics. The landscape character is such that it has limited/low capacity to accommodate 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 principle management objective for the area is the conservation of existing character.
Medium	Areas where the landscape has certain valued elements, features or characteristics but where the character is mixed or not particularly strong, or has evidence of alteration, degradation or erosion of elements and characteristics. The landscape character is such that there is some capacity for change. These areas may be recognised in landscape policy at local or county level and the principle 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 is such that it has capacity for change; where development would make no significant change or could make a positive change. Such landscapes are generally unrecognised in policy and the principle management objective may be to facilitate change through development, repair, restoration or enhancement.
Negligible	Areas where the landscape exhibits negative character, with no valued elements, features or characteristics. The landscape character is such that its capacity to accommodate change is high; where development would make no significant change or would make a positive change. Such landscapes include derelict industrial lands or extraction sites, as well as sites or areas that are designated for a particular type of development. The principle management objective for the area is to facilitate change in the landscape through development, repair or restoration.

2.2 Magnitude of Landscape/Townscape Change

Magnitude of change is a factor of the scale, extent and degree of change imposed on the landscape/townscape with reference to its key elements, features and characteristics (also known as 'landscape receptors'). Five categories are used to classify magnitude of change (Table 2).

Table 2 Categories of Landscape/Townscape Change

Magnitude of Change	Description
Very High	Change that is large in extent, resulting in the loss of or major alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the landscape and/or introduction of large elements considered totally uncharacteristic in the context. Such development results in fundamental change in the character of the landscape.
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, and/or introduction of elements that are characteristic of the context. Such development results in no change to the landscape character.

2.3 Significance of Landscape/Townscape Effects

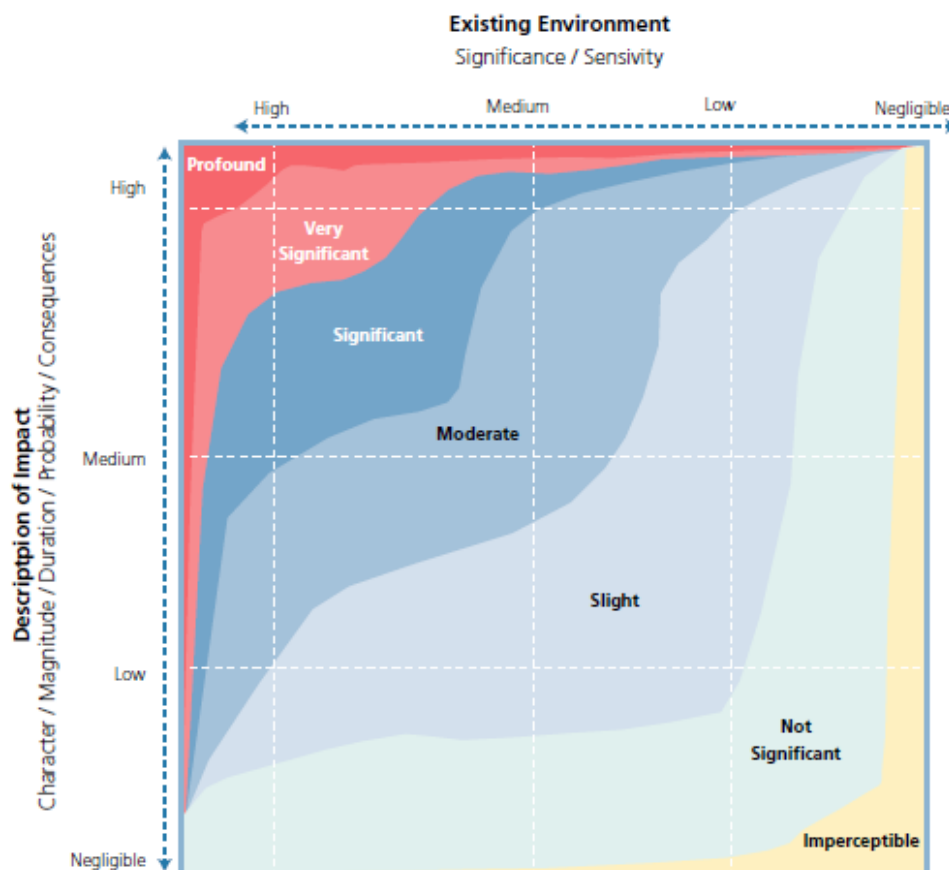
To classify the significance of effects the magnitude of change is measured against the sensitivity of the landscape/townscape using Table 3 and Figure 1 as a guide. The significance classification matrix (Table 3) is derived from the EPA's *Draft Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports*, 2017 (specifically Figure 3.5 of the Guidelines – see Figure 1 below). In addition to this guidance the assessor uses professional judgement informed by their expertise, experience and common sense to arrive at a classification of significance that is reasonable and justifiable.

There are seven classifications of significance, namely: (1) imperceptible, (2) not significant, (3) slight, (4) moderate, (5) significant, (6) very significant, (7) profound.

Table 3 Guide to Classification of Significance of Landscape/Townscape and Visual Effects

		<i>Sensitivity of the Landscape Resource/View</i>				
		Very High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
<i>Magnitude of Change</i>	Very High	<i>Profound</i>	<i>Profound to Very Significant</i>	<i>Very Significant to Significant</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Slight</i>
	High	<i>Profound to Very Significant</i>	<i>Very Significant</i>	<i>Significant</i>	<i>Moderate to Slight</i>	<i>Slight to Not Significant</i>
	Medium	<i>Very Significant to Significant</i>	<i>Significant</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Not Significant</i>
	Low	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Moderate to Slight</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Not significant</i>	<i>Imperceptible</i>
	Negligible	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Slight to Not Significant</i>	<i>Not significant</i>	<i>Imperceptible</i>	<i>Imperceptible</i>

Figure 1: 'Chart showing typical classifications of the significance of impacts' (Source: Figure 3.5 of the EPA's Draft Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, 2017)



The impact significance classifications are taken from the EPA Draft Guidelines, which define the classifications as follows (Table 4):

Table 4 EPA definitions of environmental impact classifications

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

3.0 Visual Effects Assessment

Assessment of visual effects involves identifying a number of key/representative viewpoints in the site's receiving environment, and for each of these: (a) classifying the viewpoint sensitivity, and (b) classifying the magnitude of change which would result in the view. These factors are combined to arrive at a classification of significance of the effects on each viewpoint.

3.1 Sensitivity of the Viewpoint/Visual Receptor

Viewpoint 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 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 sensitive to change include travellers on road, rail and other transport routes (unless on recognised scenic routes), 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).

Five categories are used to classify viewpoint sensitivity (Table 5).

Table 5 Categories of Viewpoint Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Description
Very High	Iconic viewpoints (views towards or from a landscape feature or area) that are recognised in policy or otherwise designated as being of national value. The composition, character and quality of the view are such that its capacity for change in the form of development is very low. The principle management objective for the view is its protection from change.
High	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 focused on the landscape). The composition, character and quality of the view may be such that its capacity for accommodating change in the form of development may or may not be low. The principle management objective for the view is its protection from change that reduces visual amenity.
Medium	Views that may not have features or characteristics that are of particular value, but have no major detracting elements, and which thus provide some visual amenity. These views may have capacity for appropriate change and the principle management objective is to facilitate change to the composition that does not detract from visual amenity, or which enhances it.
Low	Views that have no valued feature or characteristic, and where the composition and character are such that there is capacity for change. This category also includes views experienced by people involved in activities with no particular focus on the landscape. For such views the principle management objective is to facilitate change that does not detract from visual amenity, or enhances it.
Negligible	Views that have no valued feature or characteristic, or in which the composition may be unsightly (e.g. in derelict landscapes). For such views the principle management objective is to facilitate change that repairs, restores or enhances visual amenity.

3.2 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 view, or in glimpses). It also takes into account the geographical extent of the change, as well as the duration and reversibility of the visual effects. Five categories are used to classify magnitude of change to a view (Table 6).

Table 6 Categories of Visual Change

Magnitude of Change	Description
Very High	Full or extensive intrusion of the development in the view, or partial intrusion that obstructs valued features or characteristics, or introduction of elements that are completely out of character in the context, to the extent that the development becomes dominant in the composition and defines the character of the view and the visual amenity.
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/or 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.

3.3 Significance of Visual Effects

To classify the significance of visual effects, the magnitude of change to the view is measured against the sensitivity of the viewpoint, using the guidance in Table 3 and Figure 1 above.

4.0 Quality of Effects

In addition to predicting the significance of the effects on the landscape and views, EIA methodology requires that the quality of the effects be classified as positive/beneficial, neutral, or negative/adverse.

For landscape effects to a degree, but particularly for visual effects, this is an inherently subjective exercise since landscape and views are *perceived* and therefore subject to variations in the attitude and values of the receptor. One person's attitude to a development may differ from another person's, and thus their response to the effects of a development on a landscape or view may vary. Additionally, there might be policy encouraging a particular development in an area, in which case the policy is effectively *prescribing* landscape change. If a development achieves the objective of the policy the resulting effect might be considered positive, even if the landscape character is profoundly changed. The classification of quality of landscape and visual effects should seek to take these variables into account and provide a reasonable and robust assessment.

