Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment

# Proposed Development of Social Housing Units, Jamestown Court Phase 2, Inchicore, Dublin 8

**Prepared by Model Works Ltd for ALONE**

**September 2022**

.MODEL WORKS

# Contents

# 1.0 Introduction

This report discusses the potential townscape and visual impacts of the proposed development of social housing units at Jamestown Court, Inchicore, Dublin 8.

The proposed development involves the demolition of two existing two storey apartment buildings on site and the construction of two new buildings - one of three storeys and one four storeys tall - along with a new site entrance, parking area and landscaping. The proposal is described in more detail in Section 3 of this report, and in the architectural and landscape design statements submitted with the planning application.

## 1.1 Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

The assessment 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 *Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports* 2022.

The assessment methodology including explanation of the criteria and terms used is provided in Appendix 1. The assessment was carried out by Richard Butler MILI MIPI of Model Works Ltd.

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"*. 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 spaces"*. Since the subject site is within the urban area the word townscape is used in this report.

The GLVIA requires that the effects on views and visual amenity be assessed separately from the effects on landscape/townscape, although the topics are linked:

- Visual impact assessment is concerned with changes that arise in the composition of available views, the response of people to those changes and the overall effects on the area's visual amenity. The potential effects on 7 no. representative viewpoints in the receiving environment are assessed in Chapter 5, informed by verified photomontages (provided under separate cover).
- Townscape results from the interplay between the physical, natural and cultural components of our environment. Different combinations of these elements create variations in townscape character. Townscape impact assessment is concerned with the effects of a proposed development on the character and value of the townscape as an environmental, cultural and economic resource. The potential effects on the townscape of the receiving environment are discussed in Chapter 6.

# 2.0 Receiving Environment

## 2.1 The Site

The site is a 0.5 ha brownfield land parcel located between Jamestown Road and the Grand Canal in Inchicore (see Figure 1). It is roughly triangular in shape, with a long frontage (c.150m) to the Grand Canal to the south. To the north it fronts a rear access lane that runs parallel to Jamestown Road behind a row of terraced houses fronting Jamestown Road. These houses, which present their rear facades to the site, are key potential receptors of change. The west boundary is shared with a small residential estate, Jamestown Square. To the east is an area of open space between the site and Blackhorse Bridge, where the Naas Road crosses the Grand Canal to enter Inchicore and Dublin's central urban area.

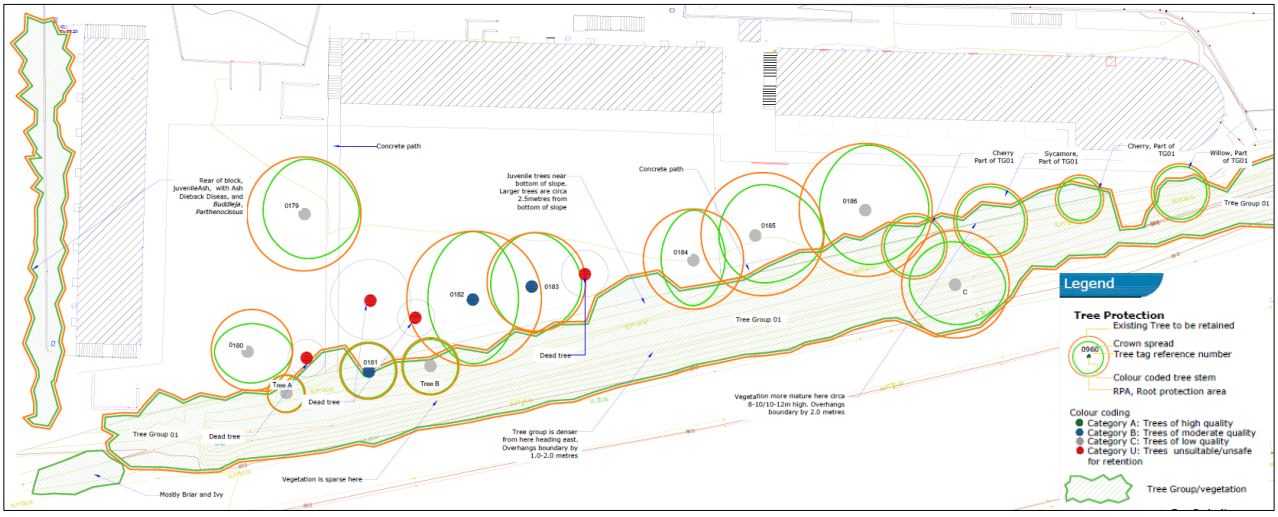
The site has been in use for social housing for some time, and is occupied by three two-storey apartment buildings. Two of the buildings front the lane to the north and one is positioned inside the west boundary, back-to-back with the neighbouring terrace of houses in Jamestown Square.

The three buildings had fallen into disrepair and in the last number of years the first phase of redevelopment took place with the refurbishment of the easternmost building, Block A. The proposed development would see the other two buildings demolished and replaced.

***Figure 1: The site and immediate environs***


A key characteristic of the site is the presence of a dense belt of vegetation along its southern boundary beside the canal. This is identified as 'Tree Group 1' in the *Tree and Vegetation Survey* by Austen Associates (see excerpt of Tree Survey Plan, Figure 2 below). Tree Group 1 is described by Austen Associates as 'a dense thicket of mixed woodland planting' forming a 'buffer between the proposed development site and the Grand Canal pNHA'. The trees are rooted outside of the proposed development site.

***Figure 2: Tree Survey Plan (Source: Austen Associates, August 2022)***




There are also several trees within the site, in a row parallel to the canal boundary. These are mostly older specimens of ornamental Cherry (*Prunus spp*.). Austen Associates states: *"For the most part they are poor quality and nearing the end of their lives, a number have already died"*. These are of less landscape value than Tree Group 1, being (a) internal to the site, therefore less exposed to view from the surroundings, and (b) of lesser quality and nearing the end of their lives.

***Photo 1: The existing building fronting the lane, proposed for demolition to facilitate the site's redevelopment***


***Photo 2: The existing building inside the site's west boundary, proposed for demolition***


***Photo 3: The two existing buildings proposed for demolition seen from the green space within the site***

***Photo 4: The recently refurbished Block A fronting the lane in the eastern part of the site***

***Photo 5: A view towards the site from the south side of the Grand Canal. The belt of vegetation between the canal and the site (Tree Group 1) hides the site from view***

Due to their derelict condition the two un-refurbished buildings on the site make a negative contribution to the townscape character, quality and visual amenity in their immediate environs. The site also makes no positive contribution to the Grand Canal corridor, which – in the area of the site – does not realise its potential as a recreation and visual amenity resource.

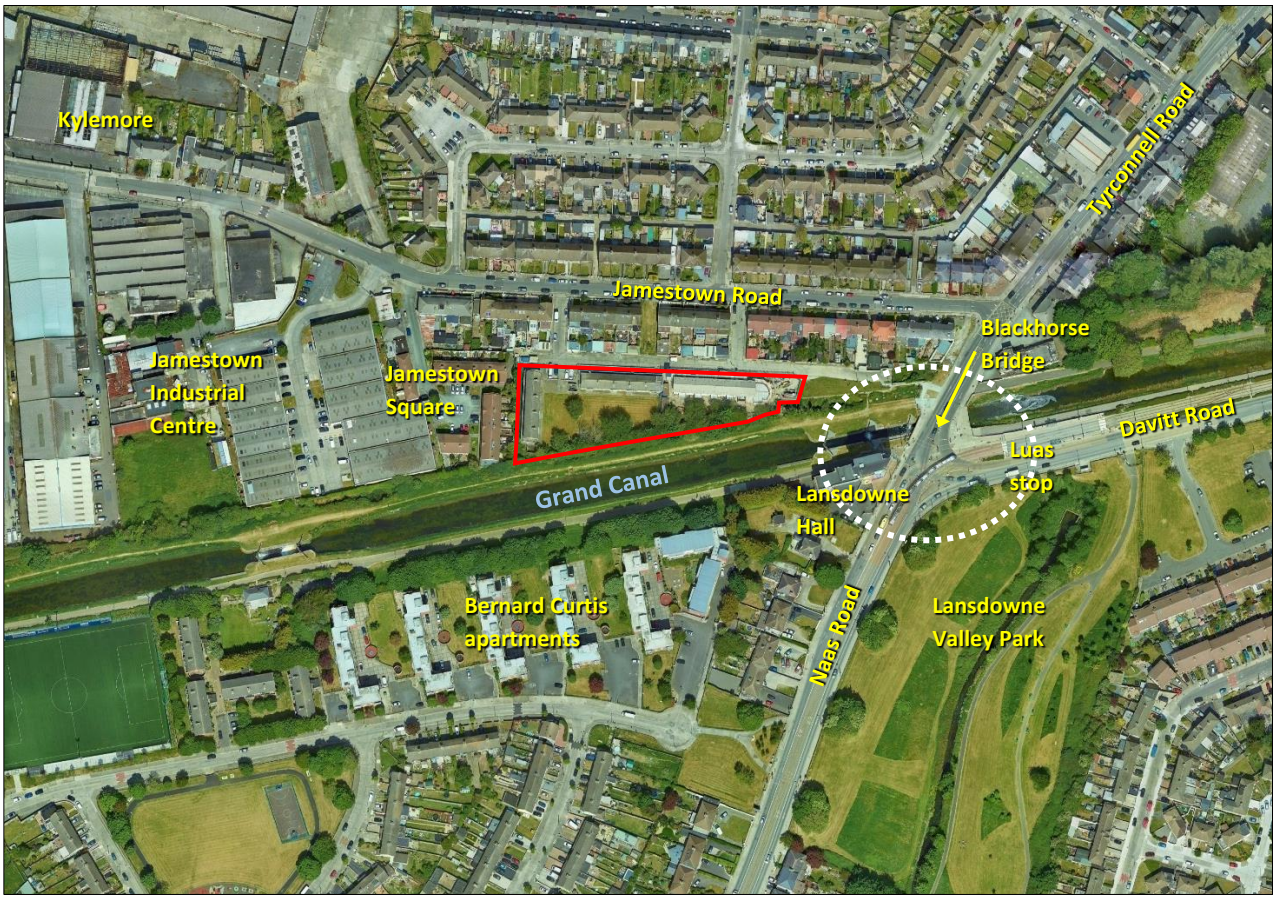
## 2.2 Surrounding Townscape Character

The site is located in an urban area of mixed use and character (see Figure 3). The townscape includes:

- Areas of lower density suburban-type housing such as Jamestown Road and Jamestown Square;
- Medium density housing such as Jamestown Court itself and the Bernard Curtis apartments in Bluebell across the canal to the south;
- Contemporary high density housing such as Lansdowne Hall (diagonally across the canal beside Blackhorse Bridge);
- Industrial and commercial use to the west of the site (Jamestown Industrial Centre, Kylemore, etc.);
- Green/blue open space in the form of the Grand Canal corridor and Lansdowne Valley Park;

- A range of transport infrastructure including the Naas Road (a key urban thoroughfare and route of entry into the city), Tyrconnell Road leading to Inchicore neighbourhood centre, Davitt Road leading to the city centre, the Luas red line (with the Blackhorse stop 200m from the site), and the Grand Canal greenway (providing a direct, mostly off-road pedestrian and cycle route into the city centre).

***Figure 3: The sider townscape context of the proposed development***




The area is thus characterised by a wide range of plot and building typologies, scale and architecture. There is no norm with which new development can or should necessarily comply.

It can be seen from the aerial photo that there is a particular diversity of development along the Grand Canal. The lands along the canal were used for industrial development for much of the 20th century and there is now a trend of redevelopment of these lands to make more sustainable use of their favourable urban location.

Another notable development has been the elevation of Blackhorse as a 'place' in the urban structure (just to the east of the site, circled above). This is the junction of the Naas Road, Tyrconnell Road, Davitt Road, the Luas line and the Grand Canal greenway. Blackhorse Bridge is thus both a gateway to the city and a hub of transport modes, providing road, bus, tram, cycle and pedestrian access to the city centre.

This gateway status has been recognised and reinforced by the development of the Lansdowne Hall apartment building beside Blackhorse Bridge (see Photo 7). The nine storey building was located and designed to be visible and recognisable from the distance in order to function as a landmark.

***Photo 7: Lansdowne Hall as seen from Blackhorse Bridge looking west along the Grand Canal towards the site view. The refurbished Block A on the site can be seen to the right of the trees in the canal corridor.***


## 2.3 Potential Receptors of Townscape and Visual Change

At up to four storeys in height the proposed development is of relatively modest scale and therefore its area of potential visibility is limited to the local area. Additionally, with the Grand Canal adjacent to the south, characterised by belts of mature vegetation on both sides as it passes the site (see Figure 3 above), the potential for visibility in that direction is further reduced.

The key elements and areas surrounding the site, which might experience significant townscape and visual change as a result of the development, are as follows:

- The residential area to the north and west of the site, including Jamestown Road and Jamestown Square;
- The Grand Canal corridor;
- The Naas Road as it crosses Blackhorse Bridge.

### 2.3.1 Jamestown Road and Jamestown Square

Where is passes by the site Jamestown Road is a narrow, two-lane road lined by handsome mid-20$^{th}$ century terraced houses on both sides. This generates an attractive suburban character (see Photo 8). (The land use pattern changes further west along the road, to a mix of industrial and commercial, and in that area the streetscape and surrounding townscape are unsightly.)

An access lane runs parallel to Jamestown Road along the rear boundaries of the houses on the south side of the road. This lane gives access to the subject site (and to the rear gardens of the houses). The lane is accessed by spurs of Jamestown Road that pass through unusually wide gaps between the terraces of houses (some of which are paved and some grassed). **These gaps provide views of the site from Jamestown Road itself** (see Photos 9 and 10).

***Photo 8: A view along Jamestown Road in the vicinity of the site***

***Photo 9: A view between the Jamestown Road houses of the refurbished Block A on the site***

***Photo 10: A view between the Jamestown Road houses of the a building on the site proposed for demolition***

The rear lane behind the houses serves mainly as an access lane for the site and the houses. It is somewhat unsightly, being lined on one side by the rear property boundaries of the houses and on the other by the buildings on the site. The refurbishment of Block A has improved a stretch of the lane, but towards its western end the streetscape/environmental quality is limited (refer to Photo 1).

Since the construction of the Luas red line, with the Blackhorse stop only 200m from the site, the lane is also well used as a pedestrian route. As such it is a part of the public realm and it would benefit from environmental improvement.

The residents of the houses on the south side of Jamestown Road are the most important group of visual receptors of change on the site. In addition to seeing the site from the street, they have views of the site from their rear windows. Views from their rear gardens are limited as most of the houses have high boundary walls.

***Photo 11: A view along the lane showing the spatial and visual relationship between the Jamestown Road houses (right) and the site (the refurbished Block A to the left)***

***Photo 12: The view from a position in line with the rear facades of the Jamestown Road houses, showing parts of the two building proposed for demolition on the site***

Immediately to the west of the site is Jamestown Square. This is a small estate of terraced houses surrounding a central courtyard used for parking. Although located close to the site there is limited potential for significant landscape and visual impacts on most of the estate. This is due to the fact that there is an existing building inside

the site's west boundary, directly behind a row of houses in Jamestown Square, which is proposed to be demolished and not replaced (in the same position). The proposed relocation of that building to a position fronting the canal would locate the built form on site away from most of Jamestown Square.

***Photo 13: A view towards the site from Jamestown Square. The terrace to the right backs onto the site and the existing site building behind the terrace is proposed to be removed***


***Photo 14: A view from across the canal showing the relationship between the Jamesotwn Court terrace and the existing building inside the site's west boundary***


However, the proposed rearrangement of built form on the site would bring the canal-facing block relatively close to the houses towards the southern end of the Jamestown Court terrace. This is discussed further in Section 4 the visual effects assessment (Viewpoints 4-6).

### 2.3.2 The Grand Canal Corridor

The Grand Canal is an approximately 50m wide blue/green corridor immediately to the south of the site. It is a key element of the urban structure, the area's cultural and natural heritage resources, and the open space and pedestrian networks.

The canal itself is elevated as it passes by the site. There is a steep embankment down from the northern towpath to a deep ditch outside of the site boundary. The belt of vegetation along the boundary is mostly rooted along the banks of the ditch and on the canal embankment. This vegetation hides the site from view from the north

side of the canal (the site-side). There is no formal footpath along this northern towpath but there is a track for canal maintenance which accommodates pedestrians.

On the south side of the canal there is a paved pedestrians and cycle path, lighting and seating, encouraging recreational use of the corridor. A dense belt of mature trees screens the Bernard Curtis apartments from view and in turn prevents visibility of the canal from the apartments. As a result the space lacks any passive surveillance and this is a weakness of the canal, locally, as an open space asset.

***Photo 15: A view east from the northern towpath alongside the site, showing the densely vegetated embankment dropping down into a ditch outside the site boundary***

***Photo 16: A view west from the southern towpath, showing the path, lighting and seating to encourage recreational use of the corridor. However, the canal lacks passive surveillance along this stretch***

Along the stretch of the Grand Canal west of the city centre the canal has not been embraced by adjacent development as it has in places in the city. There is a lack of built frontage to the space, and the land use mix - which includes large industrial areas - does not activate the corridor to its full potential (see Photos 14, 15, 16).

Elsewhere along the canal this is changing, with development responding to the canal as a spatial element of the urban structure and a recreation and visual amenity resource. The canal corridor is of a scale that it can accommodate height in the adjacent built form, and it would benefit from the enclosure, overlooking and

activation of higher density development. Photo 18 below shows an emerging strip of high density development to the east of Blackhorse Bridge on Davitt Road.

***Photo 17: The Bernard Curtis apartments across the canal from the site are largely cut off from the canal by a dense belt of vegetation, resulting in a lack of passive surveillance of the open space***

***Photo 18: A view east along the Grand Canal, the Luas line and Davitt Road, with a high density residential development in the distance overlooking the canal***

### 2.3.3 The Naas Road/Blackhorse Bridge

The Naas Road crosses the Grand Canal over Blackhorse Bridge. The built topography of the canal is such that a view east towards the city centre is afforded from the bridge (Photo 18), but the canal level rises to the west. This limits the extent of the view towards the site (see Photos 7 and 19).

The combination of the Blackhorse Luas stop, Lansdowne Hall apartments, the historic bridge and canal lock and targeted open space/streetscape enhancements have created an attractive pocket of townscape character at Blackhorse. This is less than 150m from the site, with a direct pedestrian link along the lane to Jamestown Court.

***Photo 19: A view west from Blackhorse Bridge showing the pocket of high quality townscape with a direct connection to the site***

# 3.0 Relevant Policy

## 3.1 Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022

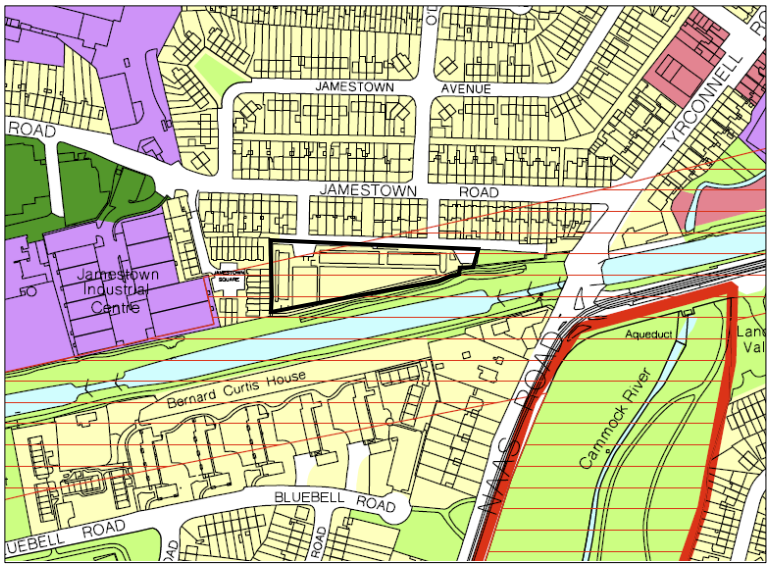
### 3.1.1 Land Use Zoning

The site is zoned Z1 (Residential) in the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022 (CDP), "*To protect, provide and improve residential amenities".*

(No change to the zoning is indicated on the Draft Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028 maps – although the Z1 zoning description is changed to 'Sustainable Residential Neighbourhoods', suggesting a higher tolerance/requirement for density.)

The site is also covered by Conservation Area designation, which extends along the Grand Canal and covers the adjacent lands. The canal corridor itself is zoned Open Space.

***Figure 4: CDP land use zoning map (Jamestown Court outlined in black)***



### 3.1.2 Urban Form and Architecture

*"Well-considered urban design and architecture, through its context to the public realm, use of materials and finishes, can make a positive contribution to the townscape and urban environment, and can improve the environmental performance, competitiveness and attractiveness of the city."* (4.5.9, p.69)

SC25*: "To promote development which incorporates exemplary standards of high-quality, sustainable and inclusive urban design, urban form and architecture befitting the city's environment and heritage and its diverse range of locally distinctive neighbourhoods, such that they positively contribute to the city's built and natural environments. This relates to the design quality of general development across the city, with the aim of achieving excellence in the ordinary, and which includes the creation of new landmarks and public spaces where appropriate."*

### 3.1.4 Conservation Areas

The subject site, as a canal-side land parcel, is covered by Conservation Area (CA) designation. The following policy is relevant to CAs

*"Dublin City Council will thus seek to ensure that development proposals within all Architectural Conservation Areas and Conservation Areas complement the character of the area, including the setting of protected structures, and comply with development standards."* (11.1.5.4, p.189, own emphasis)

Policy CHC4: *"Development within or affecting a conservation area must contribute positively to its character and distinctiveness, and take opportunities to protect and enhance the character and appearance of the area and its setting, wherever possible…"*

*Enhancement opportunities may include:*

1. *Replacement or improvement of any building, feature or element which detracts from the character of the area or its setting*
2. *Re-instatement of missing architectural detail or other important features*
3. *Improvement of open spaces and the wider public realm, and re-instatement of historic routes and characteristic plot patterns*
4. *Contemporary architecture of exceptional design quality, which is in harmony with the Conservation Area*
5. *The repair and retention of shop- and pub-fronts of architectural interest…"*

*Development will not:*

6. *Harm buildings, spaces, original street patterns or other features which contribute positively to the special interest of the Conservation Area*
7. *Involve the loss of traditional, historic or important building forms, features, and detailing including roof-scapes, shop-fronts, doors, windows and other decorative detail*
8. *Introduce design details and materials, such as uPVC, aluminium and inappropriately designed or dimensioned timber windows and doors*
9. *Harm the setting of a Conservation Area*
10. *Constitute a visually obtrusive or dominant form."*

*"All new development must have regard to the local context and distinctiveness and the contribution to the local scene of buildings, landmarks, views, open spaces and other features of architectural, historic or topographical interest… it is particularly important within Conservation Areas that design is appropriate to the context and based on an understanding of Dublin's distinctive character areas…*

*"New development should have a positive impact on local character. In seeking exemplary design standards, the planning authority will require development in Conservation Areas to take opportunities to enhance the area where they arise. Where a building has been identified as having a negative impact on an area, a pro-active approach to improvement will be sought. Where proposals involve demolition,*

*policy for demolition of protected structures and buildings in architectural Conservation Areas should be referred to…*

*"Development outside Conservation Areas can also have an impact on their setting. Where development affects the setting of a Conservation Area, an assessment of its impact on the character and appearance of the area will be required… Any development which adversely affects the setting of a Conservation Area will be refused planning permission and the City Council will encourage change which enhances the setting of Conservation Areas." (11.1.5.6, p.191)*

While the policy on CAs and ACAs is generally to preserve the existing character, the policy allows for new buildings of contemporary architecture if (a) the site/building currently has a negative impact on its setting, (b) the development takes account of and responds to its sensitive setting, and (c) the building is of exceptional design quality and in harmony with its setting. It is recognised that such buildings can have a positive effect on their historic setting. The site currently detracts from the character and quality of its townscape context.

### 3.1.5 Protected Views

There are no specifically protected views (as shown on Fig 4 Key Views and Prospects (Indicative) of the CDP), which could be affected by the proposed development. However, Section 16.7.1 of the CDP (regarding Building Height in a Sustainable City) states:

*"There is a recognised need to protect conservation areas and the architectural character of existing buildings, streets and spaces of artistic, civic or historic importance. In particular, any new proposal must be sensitive to the historic city centre, the river Liffey and quays, Trinity College, Dublin Castle, the historic squares and the canals…*

### 3.1.6 Urban Density and Building Height

*"Higher densities will be promoted in the city centre, within KDCs, SDRAs and within the catchment of high capacity public transport. The density standards set out in this plan will promote the development of high quality, sustainable densities and the consolidation of urban form…"*

The site is less than 200m from the Blackhorse Luas stop. Objective MTO1 states:

*"To encourage intensification and mixed-use development along existing and planned public transport corridors and at transport nodes where sufficient public transport capacity and accessibility exists to meet the sustainable transport requirements of the development, having regard to conservation policies... and the need to make best use of urban land."*

Policy SC13: *"To promote sustainable densities, particularly in public transport corridors, which will enhance the urban form and spatial structure of the city, which are appropriate to their context… having regard to the safeguarding criteria set out in Chapter 16 (development standards), including the criteria and standards for good neighbourhoods, quality urban design and excellence in architecture".*

## 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 are available.

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."*

*"The National Planning Framework targets a significant proportion of future urban development on infill/ brownfield development sites within the built footprint of existing urban areas…"*

## 3.3 Urban Development & Building Height Guidelines

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…*

*"to meet the needs of a growing population without growing our urban areas outwards requires more focus in planning policy and implementation terms on reusing previously developed 'brownfield' land, building up urban infill sites… and either reusing or redeveloping existing sites and buildings that may not be in the optimal usage or format taking into account contemporary and future requirements…"*

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… 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."*

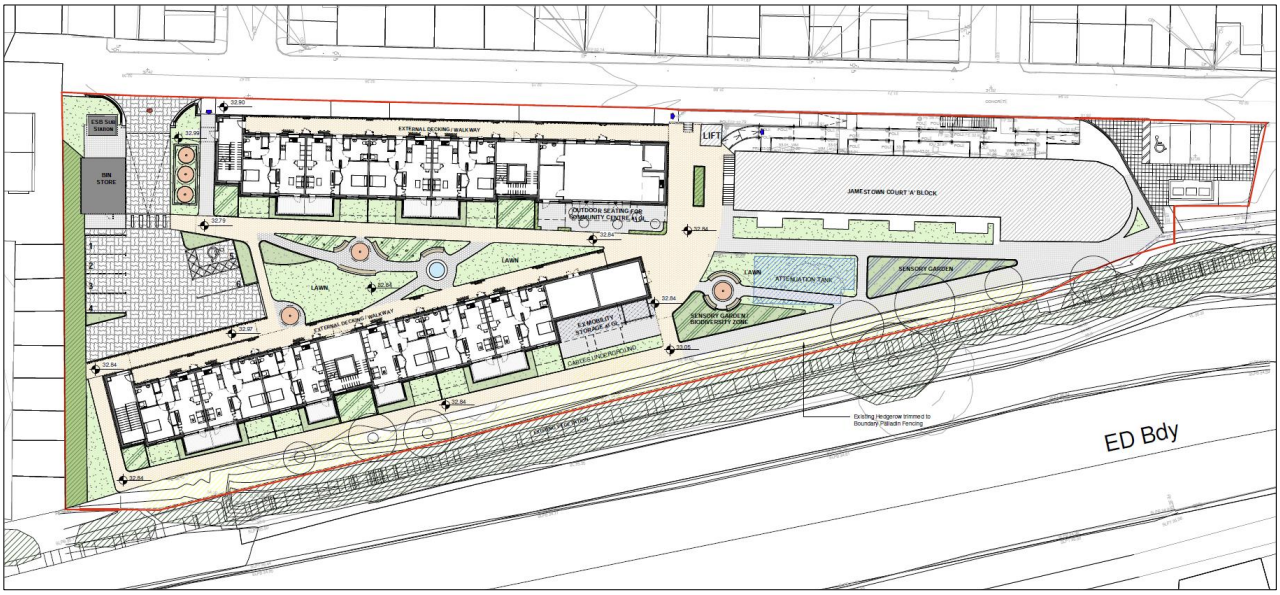
The Height Guidelines allow for 'significant increases in building height and overall development density' including in areas outside of city and town centres, such as suburban areas where 'heights of at least three to four storeys are to be supported in principle'. Taller development may also be supported in architecturally sensitive areas subject to the development responding appropriately to its context.

# 4.0 Proposed Development

## 4.1 Site Layout, Massing and Height

The proposed development includes the removal of the existing building fronting the lane in the western part of the site and the building inside the site's west boundary. These would be replaced by two new buildings of linear footprint, one fronting the lane and the other fronting the canal. The site entrance is moved to the western end of the lane, leading to a small parking area internal to the site, set against the west boundary. The remaining open space would be developed as two communal gardens, one between the two new buildings and one between the already refurbished Block A and the canal.

***Figure 5: Proposed layout***




The key characteristic of the proposal with regard to layout is the positioning of a building (and an open space) along the canal frontage, with the building facing the open space corridor. This fundamentally changes the site's relationship with the canal, 'borrowing' the open space amenity for the benefit of the development/residents. The building will in turn provide built frontage/enclosure and a degree of passive surveillance of the canal corridor, to the benefit of the open space.

The building fronting the canal is four storeys tall – two storeys taller than the existing buildings on site and the neighbouring houses on Jamestown Road and in Jamestown Square, but equal in height to the Bernard Curtis apartments across the canal. The four storey height responds to the breadth of the canal corridor. The building is intended to rise above the vegetation on the embankment, to provide a degree of enclosure and a visual presence in the canal corridor (and thereby, passive surveillance of the open space).

***Figure 6: Section through the proposed buildings, showing the four storey height of the canal-front building and the three storey height of the building fronting the lane***

The building fronting the lane is three storeys. This responds to the immediate context which includes the refurbished two storey Block A on the site, and the two storey houses fronting Jamestown Road to the north – while still achieving a more sustainable density as required by compact growth policy (see3 Sections 3.1.6, 3.2 and 3.3 above).

## 4.2 Architecture and Materials

The façade treatments of the two buildings differ slightly although they share the same materials, with brick the principal material. Brick is a high quality, durable material and is common in residential buildings – including in the site context (e.g. Jamestown Square and the Bernard Curtis apartments).

The 'external' facades, facing the lane and the canal, are clad in red brick. The three storey building, which faces the lane and the Jamestown Road houses, is divided into distinct volumes/bays by vertical recesses. This is in accordance with the *Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines*, which require taller buildings to be '*not monolithic and avoid long, uninterrupted walls of building'*.

***Figures 7, 8, 9: Proposed elevations***

In contrast, the canal-facing building, which is intended to have a stronger visual presence and which will be partly screened by the canal-side vegetation, is less disaggregated. The façade is nonetheless highly articulated by large windows and projecting balconies (which take advantage of the open space amenity of the canal corridor).

The 'rear' facades of both buildings, facing the internal open space, are clad in a light tan/brown brick. The lighter colour is intended to soften the buildings' presence when seen from the communal garden. Recessed elements in the facades are finished in white render.

The window frames, balcony railings and flashing are all dark grey metal.

***Figures 10 & 11: Photomontages showing the proposed development as seen from Jamestown Road and the Grand Canal***

## 4.3 Landscape Proposals

An important aspect of the proposed development is the retention of the canal-side vegetation, identified as Tree Group 1 in the *Tree and Vegetation Survey* by Austen Associates (see Figure 2, page 2 above). Austen Associates' Arboricultural Impact Statement states:

> *"There is an important band of mixed tree planting forming a buffer between the proposed development site and the Grand Canal pNHA. These are in neighbouring lands and are to be retained and protected."*
>
> *"The proposed four storey block to the south of the site will be located 3.5 m at the closest to the group and approximately 6.0 m at its furthest point from the group. It is expected that this will allow adequate room for construction access, machinery and scaffolding positions. No action needed."*

The individual trees within the site, mostly older ornamental Cherry trees would be removed. These are described by Austen Associates as being mostly of 'poor quality and nearing the end of their lives'. The removal of these trees therefore has no significant landscape or visual amenity impact.

Two elongated triangular open spaces within the site (see Figure 5 above) are designed as communal gardens, comprising amenity lawn areas, several seating areas and sensory gardens.

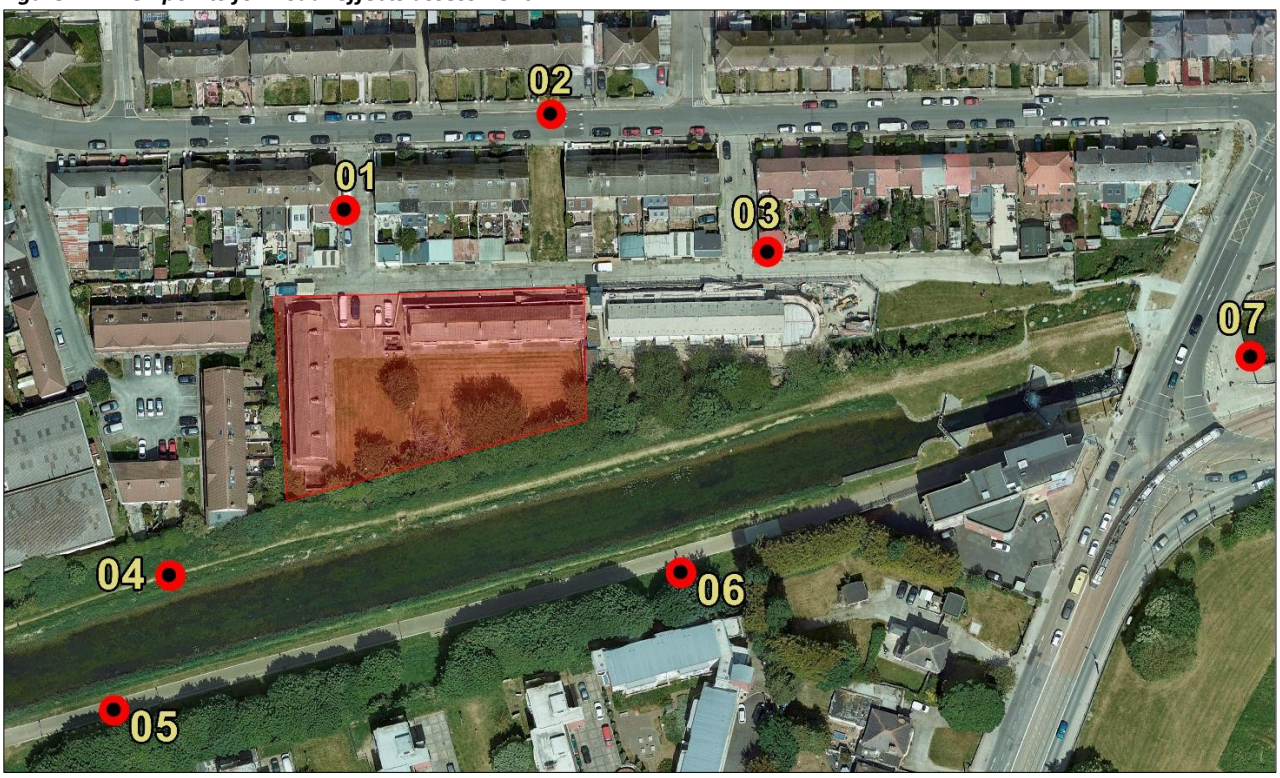
# 5.0 Assessment of Visual Effects

7 no. viewpoints (Figure 12) were selected for the assessment of visual effects informed by verified photomontages. The viewpoints represent the main elements, character areas and groups of visual receptors in the receiving environment (refer to Section 2.3).

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

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

***Figure 12: Viewpoints for visual effects assessment***




## Viewpoint 1: Lane Approaching Site Entrance from Jamestown Road

**Existing View**

- The view is taken from a position on the lane in line with the rear facades of the Jamestown Road houses to either side. The viewpoint represents both (a) people approaching the site by the main route of access, and (b) the neighbouring houses.
- The quality of the road surface, the boundary walls and the buildings on the site is poor. It is a somewhat untidy composition, although the canal-side vegetation on the far side of the site adds some greenery and visual amenity to the view.
- Viewpoint sensitivity: Medium. The foreground has the appearance of a back lane and for an urban location the built form lacks design and material quality. There is capacity for change in the view.

**Proposed View**

- The new building facing the lane is a prominent addition to the view. The building is of modest scale and the façade treatment (design and materials) is of high quality. The entrance to the site, leading into the internal open space can be seen to the right, with the taller canal-side building in the distance.

- There is an increase in built/visual enclosure but for an urban location it is not excessive, a large area of sky space remains in the view. The step down in height – from the four storey canal-side building to the three storey building fronting the lane, responding to the context, is appreciable.
- The loss of visibility of the canal-side vegetation - at this vantage point - is unfortunate. However, it should be noted that the view from the house to the right is directly into the site entrance and open space and in that view the canal-side vegetation would remain visible to the right of the distant building.
- Magnitude of change: High.

**Significance of visual effects**

- Moderate neutral. The loss of the vegetation from the view is counterbalanced by the improvement in the quality of the built form, which elevates the quality of the townscape overall. The design response to the context, particularly in the new buildings' scale (which is modest) is appreciable.

## Viewpoint 2: Jamestown Road

**Existing View**

- The viewpoint represents users of Jamestown Road. The view is framed by houses fronting the road to either side of a wide green space between two terraces.
- The existing building on the site can be seen in the middle distance, closing the vista. The building is in poor condition and unsightly.
- Viewpoint sensitivity: Medium. Considering the location, the composition is somewhat untidy and the condition of the site contributes to a relatively low level of visual amenity. There is capacity for change in the view.

**Proposed View**

- The existing building on the site is replaced by a new building, similarly located. The increase in height from two to three storeys is modest; it remains well below the roofline of the foreground houses. The change to the overall composition is thus limited. Nonetheless, the new building has a distinctly urban typology.
- The design and material quality of the new building is appreciably higher than the existing building (due to measures such as the vertical recess, recessed balconies and variations in material, which articulate the façade and reduce the massing).
- Magnitude of change: Low-Medium.

**Significance of visual effects**

- Slight positive. The development would cause a subtle shift in townscape character - towards a more urban condition. This is not inappropriate for the location (which is urban, and in which there is already considerable diversity in building typologies and scale, especially close to the canal). The introduction of an attractive, contemporary building to the townscape would improve its appearance overall.

## Viewpoint 3: View Along Jamestown Court Frontage

**Existing View**

- The viewpoint represents (a) lateral views from the gardens of the Jamestown Road houses, and (b) the view experienced by pedestrian traffic between Blackhorse Luas stop and the Jamestown Road area.
- Block A on the site frames the view to the left. The refurbished façade of the building is unfortunately screened by the railings of the projecting walkways which add complexity to the view.

- To the right are the rear facades and boundary walls of the Jamestown Road houses. The view shows the separation distance between the houses and the site, and the relatively limited visibility of the site buildings (existing and proposed) from the houses' gardens (due to the high boundary walls) despite their proximity.
- Viewpoint sensitivity: Low. The street has the appearance of a back lane and it lacks a sense of place. Block A, seen at an acute angle, does not improve the view, which is dominated by built elements of limited design and material quality.

**Proposed View**

- The new building fronting the lane beyond Block A is a prominent addition to the view. While one storey taller than Block A and the houses to the right, it is of modest scale and avoids any sense of excessive enclosure.
- Magnitude of change: Medium.

**Significance of visual effects**

- Moderate positive. With its height, strong frontage and clean lines the building gives some structure/definition to the streetscape, shifting its character from that of a back lane towards that of an urban street. The development adds an element of architectural quality to the townscape. drawing attention from the elements of lesser quality and improving visual amenity overall.
- This view illustrates the positive effects of increased building height on the site.

## Viewpoints 4 & 5: Grand Canal Corridor West of Site

**Existing View**

- The two views are taken from the north and south towpaths to the west of the site. These viewpoints inform the assessment of the effects on the canal corridor and the nearest houses in Jamestown Square to the west of the site.
- The canal banks and the northern towpath are densely vegetated with tall reeds and grass. Ahead, along the site boundary, a dense thicket of trees and scrub between the towpath and the site (Tree Group 1).
- To the right on the south side of the canal a belt of tall, mature trees screens the Bernard Curtis apartments from view.
- Beyond these trees is the Lansdowne Hall apartment building, marking the location of Blackhorse Bridge, the Luas stop and the Naas Road. (This indicates the viewpoint's proximity to an important urban place.) Another relatively tall building can be seen (in View 4) further along the canal in the distance.
- In the foreground to the left is the gable end of the Jamestown Square terrace that backs onto the site. The way in which the building (and Jamestown Square overall) addresses the canal is a reflection of an earlier attitude when it was considered more as a security threat than an open space and visual amenity asset. The gable end of the existing site building can be seen just behind the Jamestown Square building.
- Viewpoint sensitivity: Medium. The lands to the left of the canal are zoned for residential development and there are buildings visible on these lands but they deliberately turn away from it and make no positive contribution to the character or visual amenity of the canal corridor. The Lansdowne Hall building contrasts starkly with these low density buildings, and the diversity contributes to a capacity for change in the view.

**Proposed View**

- The canal-side building is a prominent addition to the view, rising above the vegetation on the canal embankment. The building clearly addresses the canal, by its parallel alignment and its façade treatment including the projecting balconies overlooking the canal.

- The height of the building is modest seen in the context of the canal corridor, the trees and the Lansdowne Hall building in the middle distance.
- The building is however taller than the neighbouring two storey house. The view shows that the building would be a significant intrusion in rear views from the houses towards the southern end of the Jamestown Square terrace.
- Magnitude of change: Medium.

**Significance of visual effects**

- Moderate positive. In addressing the canal though its position/alignment, its residential use and design, the building enhances the Grand Canal corridor as an open space. The development's recognition and use of the amenity resource heightens the value of both the site (as a residential land parcel) and the canal itself.
- In visual terms, the building improves the spatial definition of the corridor, and townscape legibility – suggesting/indicating the canal's approach to an urban place (Blackhorse) by the gradation of building typologies and scale from the house, to the modestly scaled apartment block, to the landmark building further along.
- The building itself is of high design and material quality, and adds an attractive contemporary building to the view. With a vast industrial area alongside the canal directly behind the viewer, the addition of a high quality new residential building is a positive change.
- There would be a negative effect on rear views from the houses towards the southern end of the Jamestown Square terrace (due to the greater visual enclosure). However, the other houses in the terrace would benefit from the removal of the existing building inside the site's west boundary. It is a common and unavoidable outcome of compact growth policy that taller apartment buildings intrude in views from houses in traditionally/previously low density areas. Such change is not inappropriate in well-serviced urban areas.
- On balance the positive visual effects for a large number of receptors outweigh the negative effects for a small number of receptors.

## Viewpoint 6: Grand Canal Southern Towpath South East of Site

**Existing View**

- The view west is similar to Views 4 and 5 except for the absence of any building of note in the canal corridor (such as Lansdowne Hall). Instead, in the distance running alongside an industrial zone, is a line of pylons.
- The site is hidden by the trees across the canal to the right. The gable end of the Jamestown Square terrace faces the canal just beyond the site.
- To the left in the foreground a line of street lamps and benches (out of view just off the footpath) highlights the potential amenity function of the canal corridor, which is not fully realised. The lack of passive surveillance of the space is a factor in this.
- Viewpoint sensitivity: Medium. The lands across the canal are zoned for residential development and there are glimpses of the small buildings through the vegetation but developments thus far have deliberately turned away from the canal and make no positive contribution to its character or visual amenity. Further ahead, the industrial buildings and pylons detract from the landscape quality. There is capacity to a capacity for change in the view.

**Proposed View**

- The canal-side building is a prominent addition to the view, rising above the vegetation on the canal embankment. The building clearly addresses the canal, by its parallel alignment and its façade treatment including projecting balconies overlooking the canal.

- The height of the building is modest seen in the context of the canal corridor. (It should also be noted that there is a complex of four storey buildings directly behind the viewpoint, although screened by trees - the Bernard Curtis apartments.)
- The proposed building is taller than the neighbouring two storey house terrace, but the step in height is not uncomfortable seen from this angle in which the separation distance is revealed.
- Magnitude of change: Medium.

**Significance of visual effects**

- Moderate positive. In addressing the canal though its position/alignment, its residential use and design, the building enhances the Grand Canal corridor as an open space. The development's recognition and use of the amenity resource heightens the value of both the site (as a residential land parcel) and the canal itself.
- The building provides enclosure to the wide space and creates a sense of place different to the industrial character further along.
- It is a common and unavoidable outcome of compact growth policy that taller apartment buildings are position in the vicinity of houses in traditionally/previously low density areas. Such change is not inappropriate in well-serviced urban areas.
- In summary, the development would shift the character of the canal corridor towards a more urban condition, appropriate to the location, and elevate its quality by the addition of a distinctive, contemporary building.

## Viewpoint 7: Naas Road/Blackhorse Bridge

**Existing View**

- The view is dominated by the landmark Lansdowne Hall building to the left. The pronounced contrast in typology and scale with the houses of Jamestown Road to the right illustrates the transitioning character of the area, in the canal corridor in particular.
- The eastern end of Block A (already refurbished) on the site is visible in the middle distance to the right of the canal-side vegetation.
- Viewpoint sensitivity: Medium. The view is taken from a key position in the Grand Canal CA, but there is substantial diversity in the built form, which contributes to a capacity to accommodate further change.

**Proposed View**

- The new building fronting the lane protrudes marginally above the roofline of Block on the site. In the complex composition this amounts to a negligible change.
- Magnitude of change: Negligible.

**Significance of visual effects**

- Not significant neutral. There would be no significant change to the character or quality of the view.

# 6.0 Conclusions

## 6.1 Visual Effects

The predicted visual effects are summarised in Table 2 below (for detailed commentary and explanation of the significance classifications for each view refer to Table 1).

***Table 2: Summary of visual effects assessment***

| No. | Viewpoint Location | Viewpoint Sensitivity | Magnitude of Change | Significance of Effects |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Lane approaching site entrance | Medium | High | **Moderate neutral** |
| 02 | Jamestown Road | Medium | Low-medium | **Slight positive** |
| 03 | View along Jamestown Court frontage | Low | Medium | **Moderate positive** |
| 04 | Grand Canal northern towpath west of site | Medium | Medium | **Moderate positive** |
| 05 | Grand Canal southern towpath south west of site | Medium | Medium | **Moderate positive** |
| 06 | Grand Canal southern towpath south east of site | Medium | Medium | **Moderate positive** |
| 07 | Naas Road/ Blackhorse Bridge | Medium | Negligible | **Not significant neutral** |

## 6.2 Overall Townscape Effects

### 6.2.1 Townscape Sensitivity

- The site is a Z1 (Residential) zoned brownfield land parcel occupied by three buildings, two of which are derelict. The other, Block A, has recently been refurbished. Overall the site is in poor condition and it detracts from the townscape character and visual amenity of its immediate environs, particularly the houses on Jamestown Road and in Jamestown Square. These neighbouring residential areas are sensitive to change on the site, but in its current condition the site affects them negatively; they could benefit from its redevelopment.
- There is a belt of vegetation just outside the site boundary along the Grand Canal (Tree Group 1), which forms a buffer between the site and the canal, which as a pNHA and Conservation Area is also a sensitive receptor. This vegetation has value as a habitat and a landscape feature and visual screen. There are a number of trees internal to the site, mostly older specimens of ornamental Cherry nearing the end of their lives. These are of lower value (than Tree Group 1) as landscape features.
- The site is located in an urban area of mixed use and a diversity of plot and building typologies, scale and architecture, including:
    - Terraced two storey houses such as on Jamestown Road and in Jamestown Square;
    - Medium density housing such as Jamestown Court itself and the four storey Bernard Curtis apartments across the canal to the south;
    - Contemporary high density housing such as the nine storey Lansdowne Hall apartments diagonally across the canal from the site;
    - Industrial and commercial use to the west (Jamestown Industrial Centre, Kylemore, etc.);
- In addition to the built form the area includes:
    - Green/blue open space in the form of the Grand Canal corridor and Lansdowne Valley Park;
    - A range of transport infrastructure including the Naas Road (a key urban thoroughfare and route of entry into the city), Tyrconnell Road leading to Inchicore neighbourhood centre, Davitt Road leading

to the city centre, the Luas red line (with the Blackhorse stop 200m from the site), and the Grand Canal greenway (providing a pedestrian and cycle route into the city centre).

- A notable development in the area has been the elevation of Blackhorse as a 'place' in the townscape. It is both a gateway to the city and a hub of transport modes, providing road, bus, tram, cycle and pedestrian access to the city centre. Its gateway status has been recognised and reinforced by the development of the Lansdowne Hall building, which was located and designed to be visible from a distance, to function as a landmark. It adds to the diversity of built form locally, and the capacity to accommodate further change.
- At four storeys in height the proposed development is of modest scale and therefore its area of potential visibility is limited to the local area. The main potential receptors of change, are:
    - Jamestown Road and Jamestown Square to the north and west. As residential receptors these areas are sensitive to inappropriate change, but in its existing condition the site detracts from the character and quality of their environs.
    - The Grand Canal corridor. The canal is a key element of the area's cultural and natural heritage, the urban structure and the open space and pedestrian and cycle networks. It is a pNHA and Conservation Area. However, along the stretch of the canal west of the Naas Road/Blackhorse the canal has not been embraced by adjacent development as it has elsewhere in the city. There is a lack of built frontage to the space, and the land use mix does not activate the corridor to its full potential. It also lacks passive surveillance. At 50m wide the canal corridor can accommodate height in the adjacent built form.
    - The Naas Road/Blackhorse Bridge. The built topography of the canal limits the extent of the view west towards the site from Blackhorse Bridge.

Taking all of these factors into account, **the sensitivity of the receiving environment can be classified 'medium'** (definition: *'Areas where the townscape 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 townscape 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 townscape character or facilitate appropriate, necessary change.'*)

### 6.2.2 Magnitude of Townscape Change

- The proposed development involves the demolition of two existing two storey apartment buildings on site and the construction of two new buildings - one of three storeys and one four storeys - along with a new site entrance, parking area and landscaping. The development would thus retain the residential use of the site but increase the density. This is supported by the site's residential zoning and the policy of compact growth.
- A key aspect of the proposal is the positioning of a four storey building along the canal frontage, with the building facing the open space corridor. This would fundamentally change the site's relationship with the canal. Until now, development in the area (including Jamestown Court itself, the neighbouring Jamestown Square and the Bernard Curtis apartments across the canal) has withdrawn or turned away from the canal. The proposal seeks to establish a spatial and visual relationship with the canal, contributing to the enclosure/definition and passive surveillance of the space and in turn 'borrowing' the open space and visual amenity for the benefit of the development/residents.
- Another important aspect of the proposal is the retention of the canal-side vegetation, Tree Group 1. Austen Associates' *Arboricultural Impact Statement* states: *"There is an important band of mixed tree planting forming a buffer between the proposed development site and the Grand Canal pNHA. These are in neighbouring lands and are to be retained and protected."* Protective measures have been specified by Austen Associates to protect this important tree group.
- On the other side of the site, facing the lane to the rear of the Jamestown Road houses, the proposed new building is three storeys. This responds to the immediate context which includes the refurbished two storey Block A on the site, and the two storey houses fronting Jamestown Road – while still achieving a more sustainable density as required by compact growth policy.
- The removal of the existing building inside the site's west boundary would benefit some of the houses in the eastern terrace of houses in Jamestown Square – as it is proposed to locate the internal parking area

against that boundary to the rear of the houses. However, the proposed canal-front building would be located behind the houses towards the southern end of the Jamestown Square terrace. It must be recognised that there would be a negative effect on rear views from these houses, not because the proposed building is unsightly (it is not) but rather due to the increased visual enclosure.

In summary, (a) the rearrangement of built form and open space on the site to engage with the Grand Canal, (b) the increase in height across the site to four storeys, and (c) the contemporary architecture of the proposed development, would cause a change in townscape character locally.

While the change would be important to the houses and the lane on the south side of Jamestown Road, a part of Jamestown Square, and a stretch of the Grand Canal west of Blackhorse, due to the modest scale of the development the geographic extent of its townscape and visual effects would be limited.

It is important to note that there is a trend of change across the city – from the city centre to the suburbs – of increasing density and building height in response to compact growth policy. Due to its width and vegetation the canal corridor has been recognised as having capacity to accommodate height on the adjacent lands. Pockets of increased height can be seen along the canal especially in locations well served by public transport such as the Luas.

Taking these factors into account, **the magnitude of townscape change which would result from the proposed development can be classified 'medium'** (definition: *'Change that is moderate in extent, resulting in partial loss or alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the townscape, 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 townscape.'*)

### 6.2.3 Significance and Quality of Townscape Effects

Measuring the magnitude of change against the townscape sensitivity **the significance of the townscape effects is predicted to be 'moderate'** (EPA definition: *'An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends'*).

The photomontages for Viewpoints 2 and 3 show that **the proposed development's effects on Jamestown Road and the lane parallel to the road would be positive**. (The lane has become a well used pedestrian through-route between Jamestown Road and the Blackhorse Luas stop.) The increase in height of the new building fronting the lane, from two to three storeys, is modest. There would be no sense of excessive enclosure or dominance of the lane, or of the Jamestown Road houses which back onto the lane. The design and material quality of the new building are appreciably higher than the existing building. Therefore, in addition to giving definition and sense of place to the lane, it would add an element of architectural quality, shifting its character towards that of an urban street.

The photomontages for Viewpoints 4, 5 and 6 show that **the proposed development's effects on the Grand Canal would be positive**. The four storey canal-side building would be a prominent addition to the canal corridor although it would be partly screened and softened by the retained Tree Group 1 on the boundary. The development's recognition and use of the amenity resource would heighten the value of both the site (as a residential land parcel) and the canal itself. In addition to adding an attractive contemporary building to the canal-corridor, it would improve passive surveillance of the open space, encouraging its use. There would be an appreciable gradation of building typologies/scale between the two storey Jamestown Square houses, the four storey apartment block, and the landmark Lansdowne Hall building, reinforcing the status of Blackhorse as a place in the townscape. This would improve legibility.

There would be a negative effect on rear views from the houses towards the southern end of the neighbouring Jamestown Square terrace (due to a greater degree of visual enclosure resulting from the four storey building). The other houses in the terrace would benefit from the removal of the existing building inside the site's west boundary. It is a common and unavoidable outcome of compact growth policy that taller apartment buildings intrude in views from houses in traditionally/previously low density areas. Such change is not inappropriate in

well-serviced urban areas. **On balance the positive potential townscape and visual effects for a large number of receptors outweigh the negative effects for this small number of receptors**.

# 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 *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

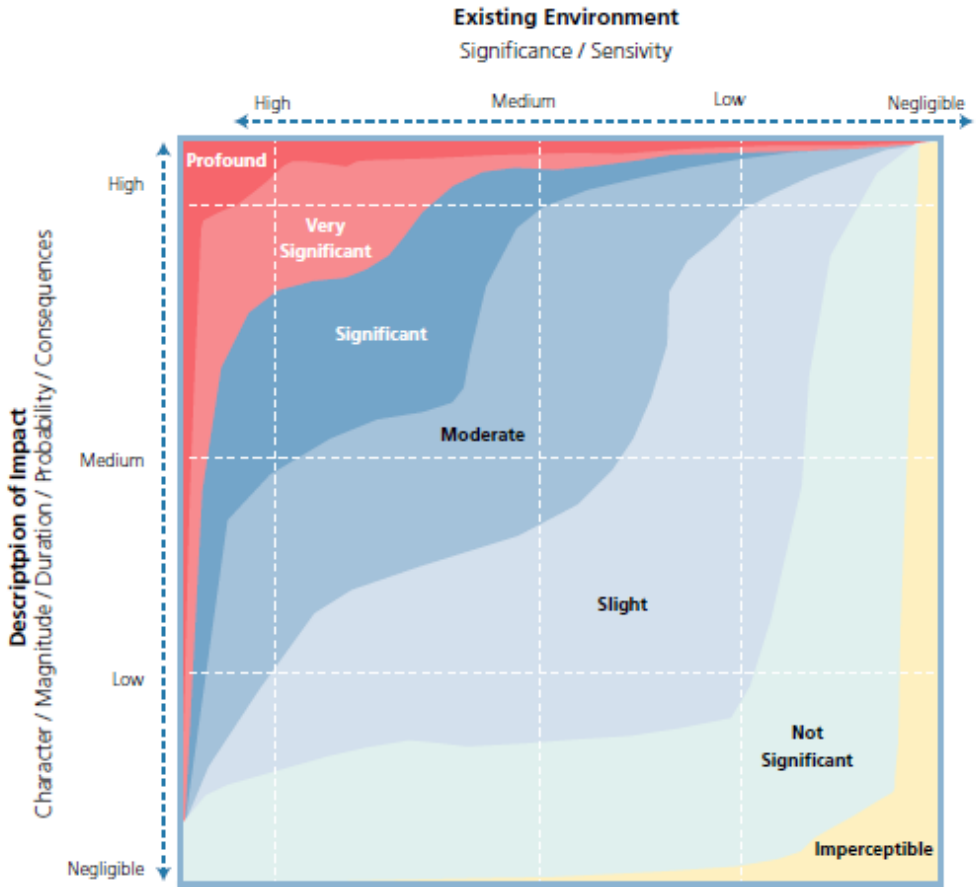
To classify the significance of effects the magnitude of change is measured against the sensitivity of the landscape/townscape using Table 3 and Figure 1 as a guide. The significance classification matrix (Table 3) is derived from the EPA's Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, 2017 (specifically Figure 3.4 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***

| | | ***Sensitivity of the Landscape Resource/View*** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Very High** | **High** | **Medium** | **Low** | **Negligible** |
| ***Magnitude of Change*** | **Very High** | *Profound* | *Profound to Very Significant* | *Very Significant to Significant* | *Moderate* | *Slight* |
| | **High** | *Profound to Very Significant* | *Very Significant* | *Significant* | *Moderate to Slight* | *Slight to Not Significant* |
| | **Medium** | *Very Significant to Significant* | *Significant* | *Moderate* | *Slight* | *Not Significant* |
| | **Low** | *Moderate* | *Moderate to Slight* | *Slight* | *Not significant* | *Imperceptible* |
| | **Negligible** | *Slight* | *Slight to Not Significant* | *Not significant* | *Imperceptible* | *Imperceptible* |

***Figure 1: 'Chart showing typical classifications of the significance of impacts' (Source: Figure 3.4 of the EPA's Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, 2022)***




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.