

Rock of Dunamase Car Park, Co. Laois

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

prepared for:

**Laois County Council
Aras an Chontae
Portlaoise
Co Laois**

March 2023

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Revision History

Revision Ref/Date	Amendments	Issued to
S3-P01 – 16/03/2023	Draft Report	Laois County Council

Contract

This report describes work commissioned by Shared Access Limited, by an email dated 9th January 2023. Conor O’Neill, Maria Inês Timóteo and Christos Papachristou of JBA Consulting carried out this work.

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Executive summary

This LVIA report identifies and outlines the potential landscape and visual impacts of the proposed car park and ancillary features to be located at the Rock of Dunamase, Co. Laois. This report forms part of the planning application for the proposed development; the report should be read in conjunction with the unverified photomontages (2No.) in Appendix C and accompanying Engineering design drawings.

The implementation of the proposed development, on a site approximately 2.5 hectares in total, will result in the loss of a portion of agricultural land. There will be the introduction of a hardstanding car park area approximately 0.3 hectares in size, and associated landscape proposals, footpaths, attenuation, drainage, seating and 2no. picnic areas. The majority of the 2.5-hectare area will remain as green open space, with built elements restricted to a portion of the area.

Based on the height and extent of the proposals, and the sensitivity of the Rock of Dunamase, an area of 2km radius was deemed appropriate and proportionate for a study area. Impacts outside this radius are not expected to be significant.

The landscape in the area is generally made up of medium and large-scale open fields, portions of woodland and small clusters of residential properties. The Rock of Dunamase is a strategic placed fortress on top on an imposing landscape feature in the area and sits on the southern boundary of the proposed development site. The site is on ground which slopes down towards the north. Views to the north are generally open from higher elevations, with intermittent mature trees lining the field's northern, eastern and southern boundaries, providing a screening in these directions. Due to the steep gradient of the Rock of Dunamase and its position immediately adjacent to the site, views of the ruins are angled and partially screened. Southmost locations within the proposed development site comprise no views to the fortress, due to the mature woodland planting located along this boundary. Within this context, the proposals are not expected to appear out-of-scale with the landscape. The landscape character is a broad-scale character area. No significant effects are expected for a development of this scale.

The proposal would introduce an urban element within a predominantly rural landscape. In the vicinity of the proposed development location there is limited similar infrastructure to that of a car park, and there are no similar amenity areas such as the proposed picnic areas and pedestrian loop. There are currently no dedicated parking spaces to the Rock of Dunamase, with parking occurring solely at the bottom of the pedestrian access to the east, immediately adjacent to the existing Holy Trinity Church grounds. This informal space is contained by mature vegetation surrounding it, especially to the south. The proposed development will offer a larger and more formalised car park. Parts of the proposed car park and southern picnic area will be visible from the dedicated footpaths running around the perimeter of Rock of Dunamase, and from surrounding visual receptors to the north. The western picnic area is likely to not be visible from the Rock of Dunamase due to the existing mature woodland between the fortress and the picnic area, however, this proposed amenity space will be visible from surrounding visual receptors to the north, due to its location in a higher elevation that offers long ranging views to the north.

In terms of landscape character, the study area falls within the landscape character area *Hills and Upland Areas* as described in the Landscape Character Assessment of County Laois and the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 (CDP). According to the CDP, this area has medium sensitivity and has capacity to accommodate a range of uses, taking local landscape sensitivities into account. The proposals are not expected to significantly affect any of the key characteristics of the area as a whole. The localised magnitude of change will therefore be *medium*, and the effect on landscape character within 0.5km will be *permanent, slight, negative*. Beyond 0.5km the magnitude of change will be *low to negligible*, resulting in a *permanent, slight, negative* effect. These effects are not significant.

In terms of visual impacts, the highest level of effect experienced by residential receptors is expected to be *moderate negative*. Most residential receptors will experience *slight* negative effects. No residential properties are expected to experience the highest levels of impact i.e., 'Profound negative visual impacts' as a result of the proposed development.

The visual effect of the proposal on the Rock of Dunamase itself will vary. At the north-eastern corner of the Rock where the proposal will be at its most visible, the effect would be *permanent, significant, negative*. However, this will reduce to *moderate* and then *slight* for other parts of the footpath around the hill, and finally to *neutral* for parts of the hill facing away from the proposed development.

No impacts on designated views or scenic routes are expected.

In summary, *no significant impacts are expected to arise from the proposed development*. Due to the sensitive nature and archaeological heritage of the Rock of Dunamase, mitigation measures in the form of native screening vegetation will be put in place. These will be planted along the boundaries of the car park and will help to screen the proposed development from receptors to all directions as the vegetation matures. The long-term residual effects will be reduced from the effects described in the main body of the assessment of this report.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

JBA Consulting Ireland Ltd. has been commissioned by Laois County Council to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in relation to the development of a car park and associated amenities at the Rock of Dunamase, Co. Laois.

1.2 Description of the development

The development comprises the items listed below and as shown in the Figure 1.1 overleaf.

The proposed development will consist of:

- A new 48 space asphalt surfaced car park. Car park to be constructed on fill elevating the surface approximately 1m above the existing topography at its northern extent;
- 4 no. bay bus parking area;
- Picnic areas accessed from the car park via new footways;
- Wetland feature to north of car park to function as stormwater attenuation;
- Perimeter bund to the northern boundary to retain stormwater from the car park in extreme flood events;
- Widening of adjacent existing carriageways servicing the site;
- Resurfacing of access roads to Rock of Dunamase for increased accessibility.

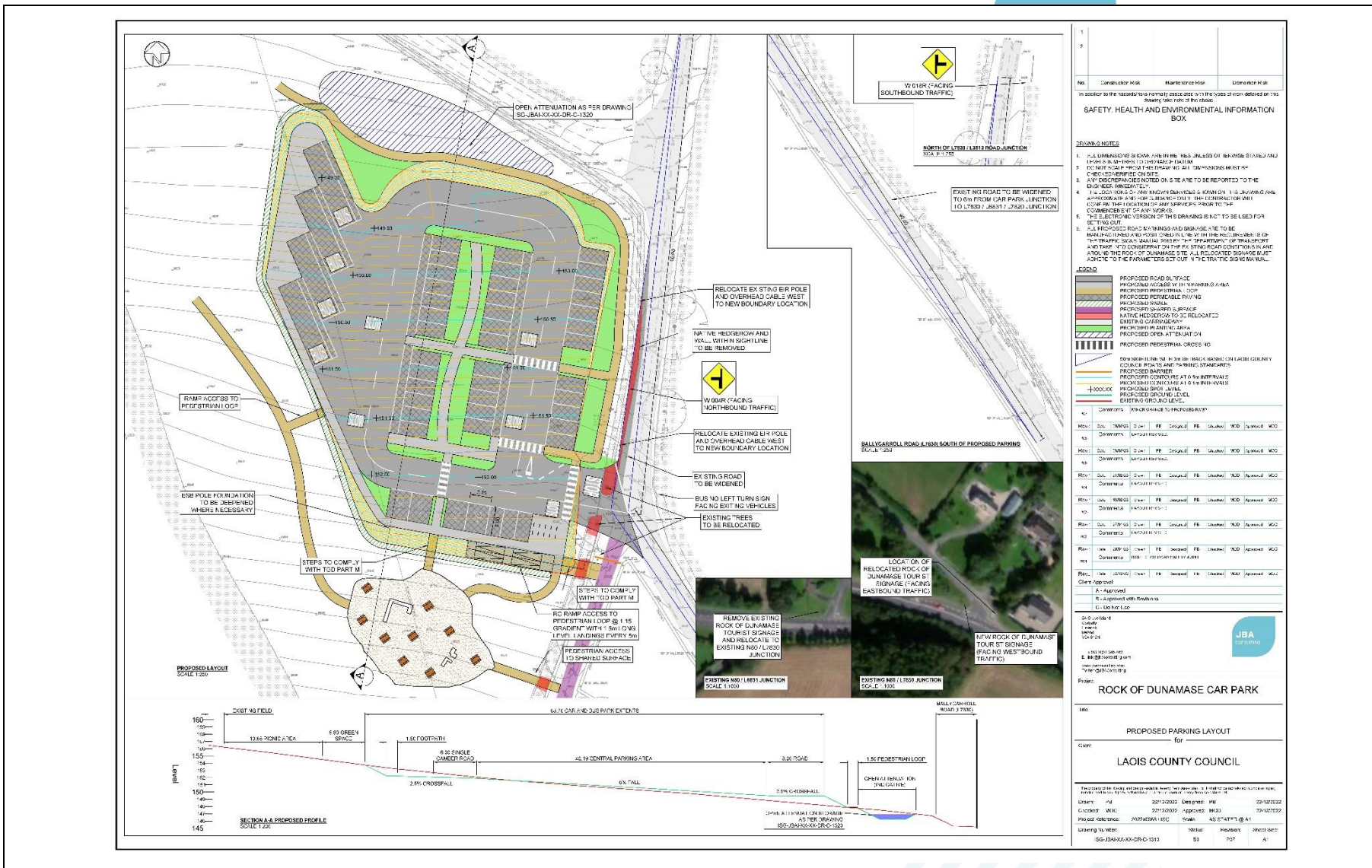


Figure 1.1 Proposed Parking layout



Figure 1.2 Proposed Landscape Masterplan

2 Assessment Methodology

2.1 Assessment Methodology

The assessment is based on the recommendations in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA)¹ as published by the Landscape Institute (UK) and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (3rd Edition, 2013). The assessment also considers the landscape character assessment within the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 (CDP).

The LVIA was carried out in February 2023 and was undertaken through a combination of desk studies and field surveys by an environmental scientist and a senior landscape architect.

The site work stage involves the verification of nearby views from the initial desk-based study and observations of the site and wider landscape for the purposes of the impact assessment. Field notes are recorded in relation to topography, land use, significant landscape features and overall landscape character.

Unverified photomontages were produced using images taken on-site. The photomontages have been prepared in order to indicatively illustrate the proposed development in the operational phase. They have been included to inform the reader of the location and size of the proposed development. The assessment of impacts was based on the on-site observations of the surveyors only.

2.1.1 Landscape Impact Assessment Criteria

When assessing the potential impacts on the landscape resulting from a proposed project, the following criteria are considered:

- Landscape character sensitivity;
- Magnitude of likely impacts; and
- Significance of landscape effects.

2.1.2 Sensitivity of the Landscape

The sensitivity of the landscape to change is the degree to which a particular Landscape Character Area (LCA) can accommodate changes or new elements without unacceptable detrimental effects to its essential characteristics.

Landscape Sensitivity, often referred to as 'value', is classified using the following criteria which have been derived from a combination of industry guidelines¹ from the Landscape Institute for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and professional judgement.

- **Very high** - Areas where the landscape character exhibits a very low capacity for change in the form of development. Examples of which are very high value landscapes, protected at an international level e.g., World Heritage Site, where the principal management objectives are likely to be protection of the existing character;
- **High** - Areas where the landscape character exhibits a low capacity for change in the form of development. Examples of which are high value landscapes, protected at a national level e.g., National Park, where the principal management objectives are likely to be protection of the existing character;

¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, 2013 Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition. Routledge

- **Medium** - Areas where the landscape character exhibits a medium capacity for change in the form of development. Examples of which are medium value landscapes, protected at a Local or Regional level e.g., Open space areas mentioned within a County Development Plan, where the principal management objectives are likely to be protection of the existing character;
- **Low** - Areas where the landscape character exhibits a high capacity for change and has very few or no designated landscapes or open space areas; and
- **Negligible** - Areas of landscape character that include derelict, mining, industrial land or are part of the urban fringe where there would be a reasonable capacity to embrace change or the capacity to include the development proposals. Management objectives in such areas could be focused on change, creation of landscape improvements and/or restoration to realise a higher landscape value.

2.1.3 Magnitude of Likely Landscape Impacts

The magnitude of a predicted landscape impact is a product of the scale, extent or degree of change that is likely to be experienced as a result of the proposed project. The magnitude takes into account whether there is a direct physical impact resulting from the loss of landscape components and/or a change that extends beyond the boundary of the proposed project that may have an effect on the landscape character of the area.

- **Very high** - Change that would be large in extent and scale with the loss of critically important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an overall change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality;
- **High** - Change that would be more limited in extent and scale with the loss of important landscape elements and features, that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that contribute to an overall change of the landscape in terms of character, value and quality;
- **Medium** - Changes that are modest in extent and scale involving the loss of landscape characteristics or elements that may also involve the introduction of new uncharacteristic elements or features that would lead to changes in landscape character, and quality;
- **Low** - Changes affecting small areas of landscape character and quality, together with the loss of some less characteristic landscape elements or the addition of new features or elements;
- **Negligible** - Changes affecting small or very restricted areas of landscape character. This may include the limited loss of some elements or the addition of some new features or elements that are characteristic of the existing landscape or are hardly perceivable;
- **Neutral** - Changes that do not involve the loss of any landscape characteristics or elements and will not result in noticeable changes to the prevailing landscape character; and
- **Positive** - Changes that restore a degraded landscape or reinforce characteristic landscape elements.

2.2 Significance of landscape effects

The significance of the landscape impact will be the combination of the sensitivity of the landscape against the magnitude of the change. It is summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Significance of Landscape and Visual effects based on Magnitude and Sensitivity					
MAGNITUDE	SENSITIVITY				
	Very high	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Very high	Profound	Very significant	Significant	Moderate	Slight
High	Very significant	Significant	Moderate	Slight	Slight
Medium	Significant	Moderate	Slight	Slight	Imperceptible
Low	Moderate	Slight	Slight	Imperceptible	Imperceptible
Negligible	Slight	Slight	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible
Neutral	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible	Imperceptible
Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Imperceptible

2.2.1 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Unlike landscape sensitivity, the sensitivity of visual receptors has an anthropocentric (or human-centric) basis. It considers factors such as the perceived quality and values associated with the view, the landscape context of the viewer, the likely activity they are engaged in and whether this heightens their awareness of the surrounding landscape.

Visual receptors most susceptible to changes in views and visual amenity are;

- **Very high** - Residents in properties within protected landscapes and travellers on a Scenic route where awareness of views is likely to be heightened;
- **High** – Residents in properties with predominantly open views from windows, garden or curtilage. People, whether residents or visitors, who are engaged in outdoor recreation including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focussed on the landscape and on particular views, and those on a scenic route where the view is not specifically in the direction of the proposed development;
- **Medium** - Visitors to heritage assets, or to other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience, and communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area.
- **Low** - People engaged in outdoor sport or active recreation on a local scale, which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape; and people at their place of work whose attention may be focussed on their work or activity, not their surroundings and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life, and people travelling in vehicles where their view is limited to a few minutes at any viewpoint; and
- **Negligible** - Changes affecting restricted viewpoints.

2.2.2 Magnitude of Visual Impact

The magnitude of a visual effect is determined on the basis of several factors: the relative numbers of viewers, the distance from the viewpoint, the visual dominance of the proposed development within a view and its effect on visual amenity, as follows:

- **Very high** - The proposal intrudes into a large proportion or critical part of the available vista and is without question the most noticeable element. A high degree of visual clutter or disharmony is also generated, strongly reducing the visual amenity of the scene;
- **High** - The proposal intrudes into a significant proportion or important part of the available vista and is one of the most noticeable elements. A considerable degree of visual clutter or disharmony is also likely to be generated, appreciably reducing the visual amenity of the scene;
- **Medium** - The proposal represents a moderate intrusion into the available vista, is a readily noticeable element and/or it may generate a degree of visual clutter or disharmony, thereby reducing the visual amenity of the scene. Alternatively, it may represent a balance of higher and lower order estimates in relation to visual presence and visual amenity;
- **Low** - The proposal intrudes to a minor extent into the available vista and may not be noticed by a casual observer and/or the proposal would not have a marked effect on the visual amenity of the scene; and
- **Negligible** - The proposal would be barely discernible within the available vista and/or it would not detract from, and may even enhance, the visual amenity of the scene.

Magnitude can also be described as:

- **Neutral** - Changes that are not discernible within the available vista and have no bearing the visual amenity of the scene; and
- **Positive** - Changes that enhance the available vista by reducing visual clutter or restoring degraded features.

2.2.3 Visual Impact Significance

As stated above, the significance of visual impacts is a function of visual receptor sensitivity and visual impact magnitude. This relationship is expressed in the same significance matrix as used earlier in respect of landscape impacts, see Table 2.1.

2.2.4 Impact Classification Terminology

Table 2.2 overleaf presents the Impact Classification Terminology as published in the EPA guidance document². Standard definitions are provided in this glossary, which permit the evaluation and classification of the quality, significance, duration and type of impacts associated with a proposed development on the receiving environment.

Each impact is described in terms of its quality, significance, extent, duration & frequency and type, where possible.

2.3 Cumulative Impact Assessment

The cumulative effect of a set of developments is the combined effect of all the developments taken together.

² Environmental Protection Agency (August 2017) Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (Draft)

Cumulative effects on visual amenity consist of combined visibility and sequential effects.

Combined visibility occurs where the observer can see two or more developments from one viewpoint.

- Combined visibility may either be in combination (where several masts are within the observer's arc of vision at the same time) or in succession (where the observer must turn to see the masts).
- Sequential effects occur when the observer has to move to another viewpoint to see different developments. For example, this could be when travelling along roads or paths. The occurrence of sequential effects may range from frequently sequential (the features appear regularly and with short time lapses between, depending on speed of travel and distance between the viewpoints) to occasionally sequential (long time lapses between appearances, because the observer is moving very slowly and / or there are large distances between the viewpoints).

Cumulative landscape effects affect the physical fabric or character of the landscape, or any special values attached to the landscape.

- Cumulative effects on the physical fabric of the landscape arise when two or more developments affect landscape components such as woodland, dykes or hedgerows. Although this may not significantly affect the landscape character, the cumulative effect on these components may be significant – for example, where the last remnants of former shelterbelts are completely removed by two or more developments.
- Cumulative effects on landscape character arise from two or more developments. Masts introduce new features into the landscape. In this way, they can so change the landscape character that they can create a different landscape character type. That change need not be negative; some derelict or industrialised landscapes may be enhanced as a result of such a change in landscape character. The cumulative effects on landscape character may include other changes, for example trends or pressures for change over long time periods, which should form part of any consideration of a particular project.

The area in which the proposals site is located contains other mast developments and therefore there is potential for cumulative effects on landscape and visual amenity.

2.4 Definition of the study area

In order to define the study area of the assessment the primary consideration is the Zone of Theoretical Visibility. This is the area from which it is expected that the proposed development will be visible based on a bare earth scenario. A bare earth scenario does not take into consideration elements that screen views like existing built environment and vegetation. A proportionate approach is taken based on the sensitivity of the landscape, the extents and nature of the proposal.

For developments of similar nature, an area covering 2km radius around the proposals is generally accepted as a proportionate approach.

Table 2.2 Impact Classification Terminology (EPA, 2022)

IMPACT CHARACTERISTICS	TERM	DESCRIPTION
Quality of Effects	Positive	A change that improves the quality of the environment.
	Neutral	No effects or effects that are imperceptible, within normal bounds of variation within the margin of forecasting error.
	Negative/ Adverse	A change that reduces the quality of the environment.
Significance of Effects	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.
Extent and Context of Effects	Extent	Describe the size of the area, the number of sites, and the proportion of a population affected by an effect.
	Context	Describe whether the extent, duration, or frequency will conform or contrast with established (baseline) conditions.
Probability of Effects	Likely	The effects that can reasonably be expected to occur because of the planned project, if all mitigation measures are properly implemented.
	Unlikely	The effects that can reasonably be expected not to occur because of the planned project, if all mitigation measures are properly implemented.
Duration and Frequency of Effects	Momentary	Effects lasting from seconds to minutes.
	Brief	Effects lasting less than a day.
	Temporary	Effects lasting less than a year.
	Short-term	Effects lasting one to seven years.
	Medium-term	Effects lasting seven to fifteen years.
	Long-term	Effects lasting fifteen to sixty years.
	Permanent	Effects lasting over sixty years.
	Reversible	Effects that can be undone, for example through remediation or restoration
Frequency	Describe how often the effect will occur (once, rarely, occasionally, frequently, constantly – or hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, annually)	
Types of Effects	Indirect/ Secondary)	Impacts on the environment, which are not a direct result of the project, often produced away from the project site or because of a complex pathway.
	Cumulative	The addition of many minor or significant effects, including effects of other projects, to create larger, more significant effects.
	'Do-Nothing'	The environment as it would be in the future should the subject project not be carried out.
	'Worst case'	The effects arising from a project in the case where mitigation measures substantially fail.
	Indeterminable	When the full consequences of a change in the environment cannot be described.
	Irreversible	When the character, distinctiveness, diversity or reproductive capacity of an environment is permanently lost.
	Residual	The degree of environmental change that will occur after the proposed mitigation measures have taken effect.
Synergistic	Where the resultant effect is of greater significance than the sum of its constituents.	

3 Baseline Environment

3.1 Site Location and Context

The site is situated in a field adjacent to the north side of the Rock of Dunamase, Co. Laois. The site is accessed off the L7830 road and is approximately 2.6km east of Junction 16 of the M7. Portlaoise is directly west of the site, approximately 5km away on the far side of the M7. The N80 national road is 600m to the south.



Figure 3.1 Site Location

3.2 Timing of Surveys

Surveys and fieldwork were carried out in February 2023 when deciduous vegetation was not in leaf. There is a mix of deciduous and evergreen vegetation in the area. The level of screening by vegetation, in areas where vegetation is not composed of dense woodland, was therefore moderate at the time of the site visit and would increase in Summer when deciduous vegetation is in leaf. Where deemed relevant, consideration of seasonal changes in vegetation has been given within the assessment.

3.3 Landscape character

3.3.1 Immediate site surrounds

The site location is within an arable field that is broadly rectangular in shape. The topography of the area is undulating, sloping down towards the north, with tall hills appearing among large, flat areas of agricultural fields. The site is open towards the north, with a mature treeline on the eastern and western boundaries, a tall, pruned hedge with portions of stone wall across the northern and eastern boundaries, and a mature woodland located along the southern boundary. The Rock of Dunamase is on the southern boundary, and its tall, steep sides provide partial screening of the proposed

car park site from the top of the hill. The existing woodland surrounding the Rock of Dunamase is identified in Map 11.5 of the CDP as a 'Significant Tree Group'. This existing woodland provides screening to the proposed development, and, although it's located outside of the proposed development boundary, its protection will be ensured as per the objectives and policies BNH25 to BMH 30, DM BNH 4 and DM BNH 5 as set out by the CDP.

Land use in the surrounding area is almost entirely agricultural, with scattered detached houses and small local roads.

3.3.2 Wider character

The wider landscape is predominantly rural, composed of a patchwork of pastoral and arable fields and plots of forestry. Holy Trinity Church, listed as Recorded Structure RPS 379 in the CDP, is located at the bottom of the Rock of Dunamase hill to the east, approximately 60 metres southeast from the proposed site, and is enclosed by mature tree vegetation and boundary walls.

The N80 road is approximately 600m south of the site, and the M7 motorway is approximately 2.4km west of the site. Due to the sloping topography of the field and the Rock of Dunamase along the southern boundary, the site is not visible from the N80 or the M7.

Fields are generally irregular in shape and bounded by trees, low hedgerows, stone walls, or post and wire fencing. Fields range in size, with the site being one of the smaller fields in the area. Small woodland areas are present around the area.

3.3.3 Laois County Development Plan

The CDP 2021-2027 notes that the landscape of Laois has an inherent value and importance. Sensitive areas include upland areas, visually open and expansive areas, and areas in the vicinity of natural heritage or built heritage assets or scenic views. The Laois Landscape Character Assessment has been prepared to describe and assess the landscape character areas (LCA) of the county. The proposed development sits within the **Hills and Upland Areas** LCA. The sensitivity of this LCA is **Medium**, an area which has "capacity to accommodate a range of uses without significant adverse effects on the appearance or character of the landscape having regards to localised sensitivity factors".

Policy Objectives LCA 2 to LCA 3 describe overall Landscape Character areas, and LCA 5 to LCA 11 deal with Hills and Uplands Areas. The policies are shown below, as they appear in the Laois CDP 2021-2027. LCA 10 refers to the Slieve Bloom Mountains, which are not in the vicinity of the proposed development and therefore not relevant to this assessment.

Policy Objectives for Landscape Character Areas	
LCA 2	Protect and enhance the county's landscape, by ensuring that development retains, protects and, where necessary, enhances the appearance and character of the existing local landscape and conserve valuable habitat including any European and National Designations
LCA 3	Seek to ensure that local landscape features, including historic features and buildings, hedgerows, shelter belts and stone walls, are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development
Policy Objectives for Hills and Uplands Areas and Mountain Areas	
LCA 5	Ensure that development will not have a disproportionate visual impact (due to excessive bulk, scale or inappropriate siting) and will not

	significantly interfere with or detract from scenic upland vistas, when viewed from areas nearby, scenic routes, viewpoints and settlements
LCA 6	Ensure that developments on steep slopes (i.e., >10%) will not be conspicuous or have a disproportionate visual impact on the surrounding environment as seen from relevant scenic routes, viewpoints and settlements
LCA 7	Facilitate, where appropriate, developments that have a functional and locational requirement to be situated on steep or elevated sites (e.g., reservoirs, telecommunication masts or wind energy structures) where residual adverse visual impacts are minimised or mitigated
LCA 8	Maintain the visual integrity of areas which have retained a largely undisturbed upland character and respect the remote character and existing low-density development in these areas.
LCA 9	Have regard to the potential for screening vegetation when evaluating proposals for development within the uplands
LCA 11	Protect the positive contribution that views across adjacent lowland areas and landmarks within the landscape make to the overall landscape character

3.4 Visual Amenity

3.4.1 Summary of visual amenity

The site of the proposed development is in a gently sloping and undulating area of a rectangular, stone wall-, hedge- and partially tree-lined field. Local screening consists of mature tree lines and hedgerow to the east and west, mature woodland and the Rock of Dunamase to the south, and a well-maintained hedgerow which provides partial screening to the north. Stone walls were identified along the northern and eastern boundaries, overtaken by existing ivy and hedgerow vegetation.

Overall, the impression is of a landscape with long-ranging views over areas to the north, with views in other directions more restricted by field boundaries and the topography and woodland of the Rock of Dunamase.

3.4.2 Scenic Views and Prospects

The County Development Plan 2021-2027 identifies scenic views and prospects which have important amenity and tourism value for the County and its people.

Two such designations are within the study area, Scenic Views 008 and 009. Scenic View 008 is the view towards the Rock of Dunamase from the N80 road, i.e., towards the north in the direction of the proposed development. Scenic View 009 is the view towards Hewson Hill from the N80, i.e., away from the proposed development.

3.4.3 Heritage Assets

The Rock of Dunamase is a natural and built heritage asset of importance for both domestic and international tourism. The towering hill has steep sides and commanding views of the surrounding area. The ruins of Dunamase Castle sit atop the hill. The monument dates from the Norman period and has been ruined since at least the 1600s.

The Castle is listed on the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP Number LA013-052) and is a National Monument (615). It is an objective of the CDP 2021-2027 to preserve and protect the integrity and character of archaeological sites and prevent inappropriate development in their vicinity, while also setting out special measures to make it more accessible to the public. It is also a specific objective to require visual impact statements for developments within the area of the Rock of Dunamase.

4 Potential Effects

4.1 Assessment of Effects on Landscape Character

The LCA Hills and Upland Areas is a very broad-scale character area extending along a large portion of the eastern half of the county. Hills and uplands are described in the Landscape Character Assessment as prominent features of the county, particularly in the northwest and southeast. The sensitivity of the area is *medium*.

There would be a change to the fabric of the landscape through the loss of a small portion of arable land for the footprint of the car park, picnic areas and dedicated footpaths, together with the removal of three trees and a small section of hedgerow and stone wall for the new vehicular and pedestrian entrances. The proposal would not affect the field pattern, and access points would be off the adjacent local road, minimising land-take.

The field pattern in the area is generally made up of irregular fields with trees, hedgerows, stone walls or fences along the boundaries. The position of the proposed development in a gently undulating area, partially enclosed by screening vegetation reduces the impact of developments on the landscape. The proposals would therefore not feel out-of-scale with the landscape.

The proposals are not expected to affect any of the key characteristics of the Landscape Character Area as a whole. Within a radius of 0.5km, the proposed development would appear as an additional urban element within the largely rural landscape. However, the effect is reduced due to the undulating topography, existing vegetation, and the Rock of Dunamase and limestone outcrop it stands on.

In accordance with the methodology, within 0.5km the localised magnitude of change will be *medium*. In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the effect on landscape character within 0.5km would be *permanent, slight, negative*.

Effects will reduce with distance and beyond 0.5km the magnitude of change on the Landscape Character Area will be *low to negligible*. In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the effect on landscape character beyond 0.5km would be *permanent slight negative* reducing to *imperceptible* with distance. Outside the study area, i.e., beyond 2km, the proposed development is expected to have no impact on landscape character.

4.2 Assessment of Effects on Visual Amenity

Receptor groups were identified during the initial desktop investigation using aerial imagery and verified on site during the site visit. Receptors were grouped in terms of function, i.e., residential buildings, community buildings, etc., and location. Receptors with the same function and general location were grouped. See Appendix A for the 'Visual Receptor Plan' which shows the identified receptor groups. These receptor groups are discussed below with an assessment of the effects on their visual amenity.

4.2.1 The Rock of Dunamase

The Rock of Dunamase sits directly south of the proposed development, with the proposed site at the northern base of the hill. The Rock of Dunamase is a popular and important heritage attraction for Co. Laois, with visitors focused on the castle itself and the commanding views it has over the surrounding landscape.

Sensitivity Receptors would be visitors to the attraction. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude The primary views from the proposed development are focused on the castle itself, and on the landscape surrounding the hill. The views to the castle face inward and will not be affected by the proposed development. Views over the landscape are wide-ranging and range from short to long distance. The proposed development

would be partially visible from parts of the designated footpath around the top of the hill (existing view shown in Views 1 and 2, Appendix D, and proposed view shown in Photomontage 1, Appendix C). The steep slopes indicate that the proposed development would not be visible from most parts of the castle ruins and would be most prominent from the extreme north-eastern edges of the hill, which although is outside the designated pedestrian trail, it is accessible by visitors. In accordance with the methodology the magnitude of change would be *high* to *medium* at the north-eastern edge of the hill, reducing to *low* from the dedicated footpath at that point, and further reducing to *negligible* to *neutral* for other parts of the Rock of Dunamase trails and monument.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the visual effect would therefore range from *permanent, significant, negative* at the north-eastern corner of the Rock of Dunamase, to *permanent, moderate to slight negative* for other parts of the footpath around the hill, to *neutral* for parts of the hill facing away from the proposed development.

4.2.2 Visually Sensitive Residential Receptors and Settlements

R1 (0.1 – 0.35km north) Two detached houses, with other farm buildings, to the north of the proposed development. The houses are facing west or east, with primary views facing away from the proposed development. Vegetation along the boundaries of the houses is mainly deciduous.

Sensitivity Receptors would be residents at home. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude The dwellings have main views facing away from the proposed development. The proposed development would appear in angled views at worst and will be partially screened by existing farm buildings and existing and proposed vegetation. In accordance with methodology the magnitude of change would be *low*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative*.

R2 (0.7 – 1.7km north) A large group of detached single- and two-storey houses facing west. The houses generally have large front and rear gardens and are surrounded by agricultural fields. The field boundaries are lined with a mix of deciduous and evergreen vegetation. Views from this group are most closely represented by View 5 (Appendix D).

Sensitivity Receptors would be residents at home. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude The primary views from the houses face east and west, away from the proposed development. Glimpse angled views of the development through deciduous and evergreen tree and hedge vegetation will be available in a limited number of places. In accordance with the methodology the magnitude of change would be *low* to *negligible*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative*.

R3 (0.7 – 1.2km northeast) A large group of detached single- and two-storey dwellings, with large front and rear gardens. Some of the houses have primary views facing towards the Rock of Dunamase and the proposed development, while others in the group face away from the development. Vegetation on the boundaries of the houses is intermittent with a mix of deciduous and evergreen. Views from this group are most closely represented by View 4 (Appendix D).

Sensitivity Receptors would be residents at home. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude Views from the dwellings are partially filtered by intermittent vegetation and the undulating topography between them and the proposed development. Views when available would be experienced as glimpses through this vegetation and would mostly be angled and indirect. In accordance with the methodology the magnitude of change would be *low to negligible*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative*.

R4 (1.5km northeast) A group of two detached dwellings on large open plots with primary views facing south, away from the proposed development. There is little to no vegetation around the houses, and they sit on localised high points.

Sensitivity Receptors would be residents at home. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude These dwellings are partially filtered from the proposed development by existing intervening vegetation, particularly the vegetation along the eastern boundary of the proposed site. Views where available would be angled, and the proposed development would form a small part of the overall view due to the distance between this residential group and the proposed development. In accordance with the methodology the magnitude of change would be *medium to low*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the visual effect would therefore be *permanent, moderate to slight, negative*.

R5 (0.1 – 0.5km northwest) A group of eight detached one- and two-storey dwellings. The dwellings have small front and rear gardens with a mix of deciduous and evergreen boundary vegetation providing a low level of screening. Primary views are to the southwest or northeast, away from the proposed development. Views from this group are most closely represented by View 7 (Appendix D), which also shows the existing field boundaries adjacent to local road L7830.

Sensitivity Receptors would be residents at home. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude The Rock of Dunamase is visible through glimpse views through vegetation, as shown with View (Appendix D). The site of the proposed development is screened from these dwellings due to the undulating topography and existing boundary vegetation. Views where available will be glimpses only. In accordance with the methodology the magnitude of change would be *negligible*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative*.

R6 (0.6 – 1.5km northwest) A large group of detached one- and two-storey dwellings. The dwellings have primary views facing to the southwest or northeast, away from the proposed development. The landscape between this residential group and the proposed development is composed by grassland fields divided by deciduous and evergreen hedgerows with occasional mature deciduous trees, as well as property boundaries that include formal hedges. The existing local road L7830 is screened on both sides by field hedgerow boundaries which also offers a dense level of screening to the proposed development. Views from this group are most closely represented by View 7 (Appendix D).

Sensitivity Receptors would be residents at home. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude Views are expected to be filtered partially by existing vegetation and topography. Where available, views will be indirect and of the upper parts of the development only. In accordance with methodology the highest magnitude of change would be *low to negligible*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the highest visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative to imperceptible*.

R7 (2km northwest) A group of three detached residential buildings northwest of the development site. Primary views from the dwellings are facing southeast towards the proposed development site. There is a mix of existing deciduous and evergreen hedge and tree vegetation along the boundaries of these properties. Vegetation along the southeast boundaries is low in the direction of existing agricultural fields.

Sensitivity Receptors would be residents at home. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude Views are expected to be filtered partially by existing vegetation and the intervening distance and undulating topography. Where available, views will be direct, but will be glimpsed and will form a small part of the overall view. In accordance with methodology the highest magnitude of change would be *low to negligible*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the highest visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative*.

4.2.3 Open Space Receptors

Walking trails (0.7 – 1.7km south-southwest) Two woodland walking trails are situated south of the Rock of Dunamase, south of the N80 road. The trails are within Dysart Woods and Carrigmeal Woods.

Sensitivity Receptors would be walkers on the trails. Sensitivity is *high*.

Magnitude The trails are mostly enclosed by trees, with occasional long-range views from a limited number of viewing points. Due to existing vegetation and the topography of the Rock of Dunamase, the proposed development will not be visible from either trail. In accordance with the methodology the magnitude of change would be *neutral*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 and 2.2 the highest visual effect would therefore be *imperceptible*.

Other open spaces in the area include agricultural land, which makes up most of the land surrounding the proposed development, and carriageways and footpaths. Farmers working on their land are receptors, as are people walking in the area on carriageways and footpaths. Significant effects are not expected on open space beyond 0.5km.

Sensitivity Receptors would be farmers engaged in work, and walkers out on roads and footpaths. In accordance with the methodology their sensitivity is *low*.

Magnitude The proposals would form a new feature in the rural landscape. Due to the undulating topography of the area and the frequent deciduous and intermittent evergreen vegetation along field boundaries, the proposed development would be filtered or screened in many cases, leaving glimpses of the development only. In accordance with the methodology the magnitude of change would be *medium* in the immediate vicinity of the proposals (within 0.5km) grading out to *negligible* with distance and levels of intervening screening.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative* within 0.5km reducing to *imperceptible* with distance.

4.2.4 Community Receptors

C1 (0.8km northeast) The Kiltale Church (ruin) and Graveyard are on a small open plot on slightly raised ground northeast of the proposed development. The graveyard grounds have direct views to the Rock of Dunamase. Vegetation is limited to a low hedgerow and intermittent trees on the plot boundary. Views from this group are most closely represented by View 3 (Appendix D).

Sensitivity Receptors would be visitors to the graveyard. Sensitivity is *low*.

Magnitude The main views from the graveyard are over the immediate surrounding countryside, with the Rock of Dunamase forming a small but important part of the wider view. Due to the intervening topography and existing mature vegetation along the eastern boundary of the proposed site, the proposed development would be largely filtered. Views where available would be glimpse views through vegetation and would not obscure views of the Rock of Dunamase. In accordance with methodology the highest magnitude of change would be *low*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the highest visual effect would therefore be *imperceptible*.

C2 (0.07km east) The Holy Trinity Church, Recorded Protected Structure 379, is located directly east of the Rock of Dunamase and proposed site. The church grounds have primary direct views of the Rock of Dunamase. The existing informal parking area for the Rock and the church are on the southern boundary of the church grounds. Mature deciduous and evergreen tree vegetation is present along the north-eastern and north-western boundaries, together with areas of hedgerow and scrub. Views from this group are most closely represented by View 8 (Appendix D).

Sensitivity Receptors would be visitors to the church and cemetery. Sensitivity is *medium*.

Magnitude The proposed development will be filtered by existing intervening vegetation. Views where available will be partially filtered. The main views of the Rock of Dunamase will not be affected. In accordance with methodology the highest magnitude of change would be *low*.

Effect In accordance with Tables 2.1 & 2.2 the highest visual effect would therefore be *permanent, slight, negative*.

4.2.5 Photomontages

Photomontages have been produced to indicate the location and scale of the proposal. See Appendix C for photomontage sheets and location plan.

The photography was undertaken in February when the deciduous plants were not in leaf and were providing minimum theoretical screening to the proposal.

The photomontages are unverified and indicatively illustrate the proposed development in the operational phase. They have been included to inform the reader of the location and scale of the proposed development. The assessment did not take into consideration the photomontages and was based solely on the on-site observations. These photomontages are indicative only and were prepared to represent the location and scale of the proposal. Once established, screening provided by the proposed vegetation may vary from the mature deciduous vegetation used in the images.

Photomontage 1

This photomontage shows the expected view of the proposed development from the northeastern corner of the Rock of Dunamase. The view is from the edge of the path, overlooking the proposed site. The sensitivity, magnitude, and eventual effect on this photomontage is as described for the Rock of Dunamase in Section 4.2.1 above. Photomontage 1 shows the proposed parking area and footpaths with proposed planting at a progressed stage (5-10 years post-planting). After construction, the proposed development will be easily visible from this part of the Rock of Dunamase. Before the tree planting reaches maturity, views towards the proposal will be slightly negatively impacted as the car park will be adding to the urbanizing elements, such as the farm

buildings in this view. Once the vegetation reaches maturity, the proposal will be less visible and the visual impact will be reduced further as a result.

The expected visual impact has been assessed as *permanent, significant, negative*, reducing to *permanent, slight, negative* over time as vegetation matures.

Photomontage 2

This photomontage shows the expected view of the proposed development from the L3813 local road to north. The sensitivity, magnitude, and eventual effect on this photomontage is as described for visual receptor group R2. The proposed development site is visible from this point, albeit forms a small part of the overall view. With the proposed tree planting in and around the parking area, upon reaching maturity the vegetation will fully screen the proposal, allowing it to blend almost fully into the protected woodland behind it at the base of the Rock of Dunamase. The proposed picnic area on the western side of the site is also visible, although is barely perceptible due to the distance involved. The expected visual impact has been assessed as *permanent, slight, negative*, reducing to *imperceptible* over time as vegetation matures.

5 Cumulative Assessment

5.1 Cumulative effect assessment

The nearest development of similar nature is the car parking area at the front entrance of the rock of Dunamase serving the Holy Trinity Church and cemetery, as well as the Rock of Dunamase in an informal capacity. The two developments are not expected to be in the same view and are not considered to be of size and proximity to have an expected cumulative negative impact to the amenity offered by the local landscape. Therefore, the cumulative impact is expected to be neutral.

6 Mitigation

6.1 Mitigation Measures

No significant negative impacts are expected from the proposed development therefore no mitigation is deemed necessary.

The proposed Landscape Masterplan that is shown in Appendix E includes proposals for tree planting along the boundaries and centre of the proposed car park.

Once the proposed planting reaches maturity, it is expected to enhance the already existing screening of the proposed development from visual receptors.

7 Residual Effects

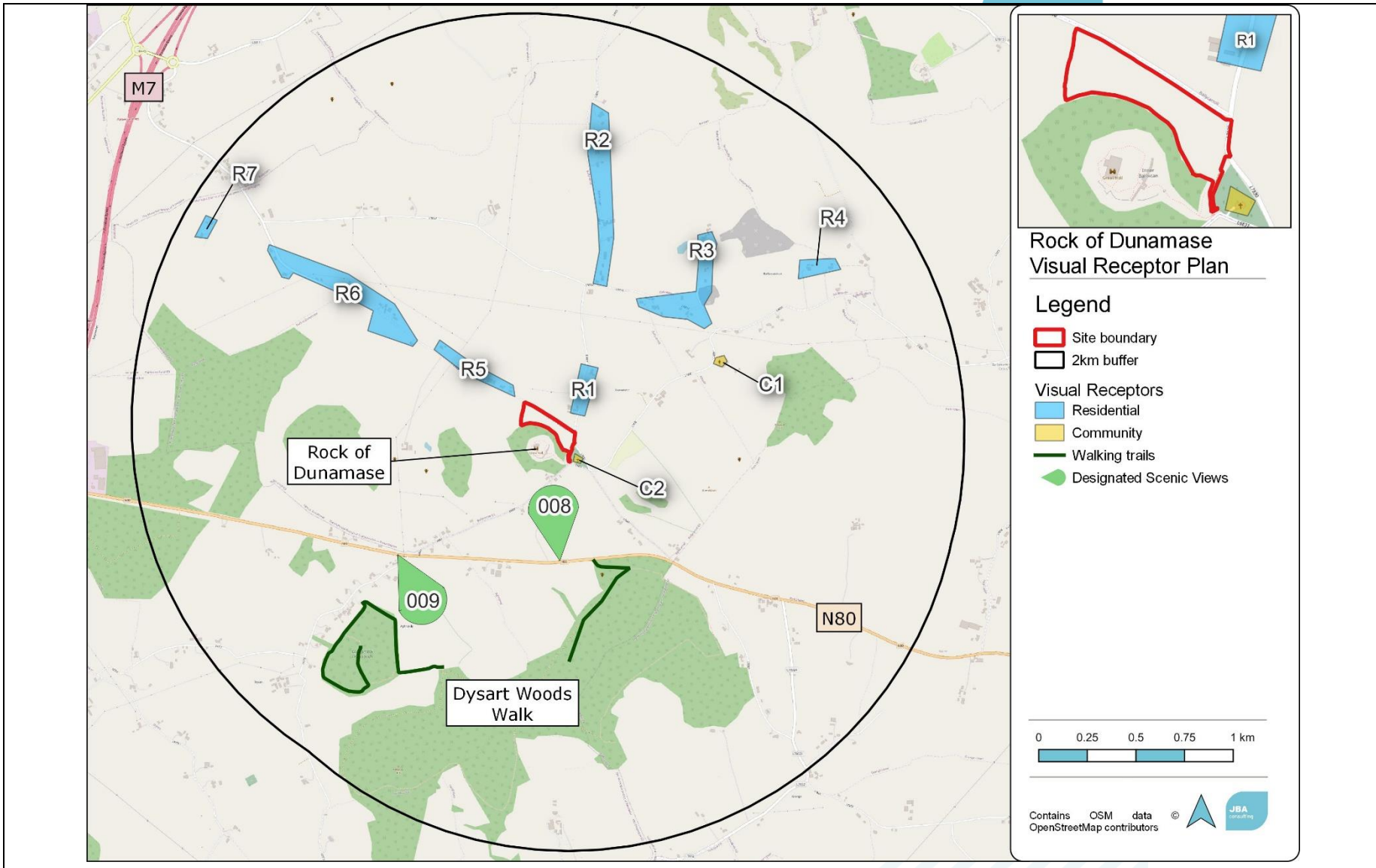
7.1 Anticipated Residual Effects

No significant negative impacts are expected from the proposed development therefore no mitigation has been deemed necessary.

Any other, non-significant negative impacts are expected to be further reduced as the proposed planting will be reaching maturity as described in Section 4.

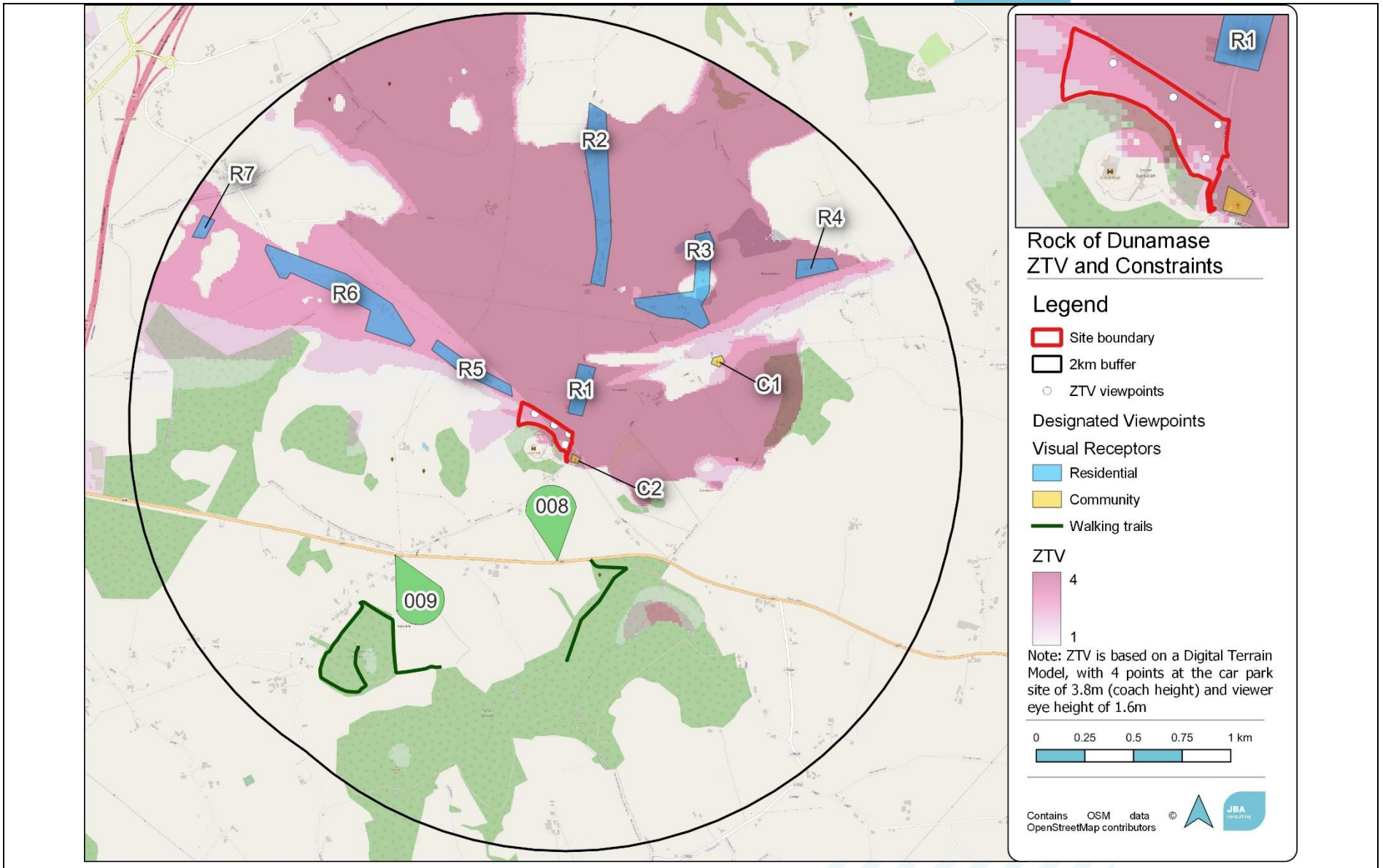
Appendices

Appendix A – Visual Receptor Plan



Visual receptor plan

Appendix B – Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and Constraints Plan



ZTV and constraints plan

Appendix C – Photomontage Sheets and Location Plan



Photomontage Location Plan



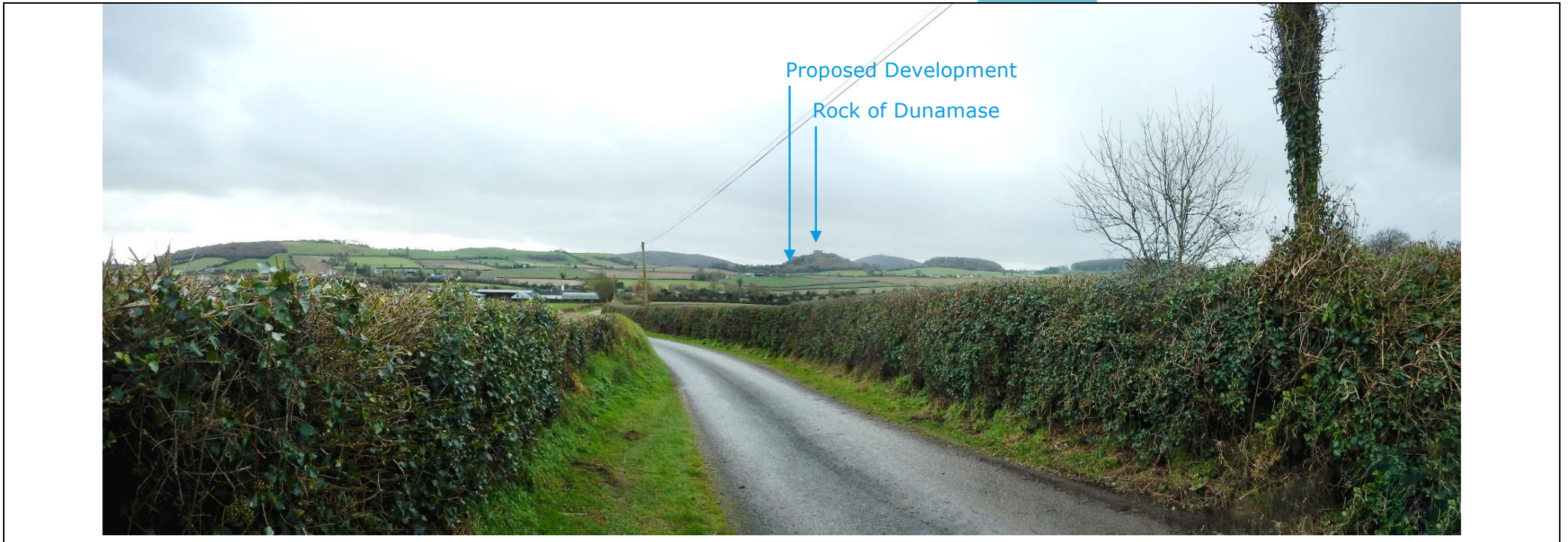
PM1 Existing View



PM1 Proposed View

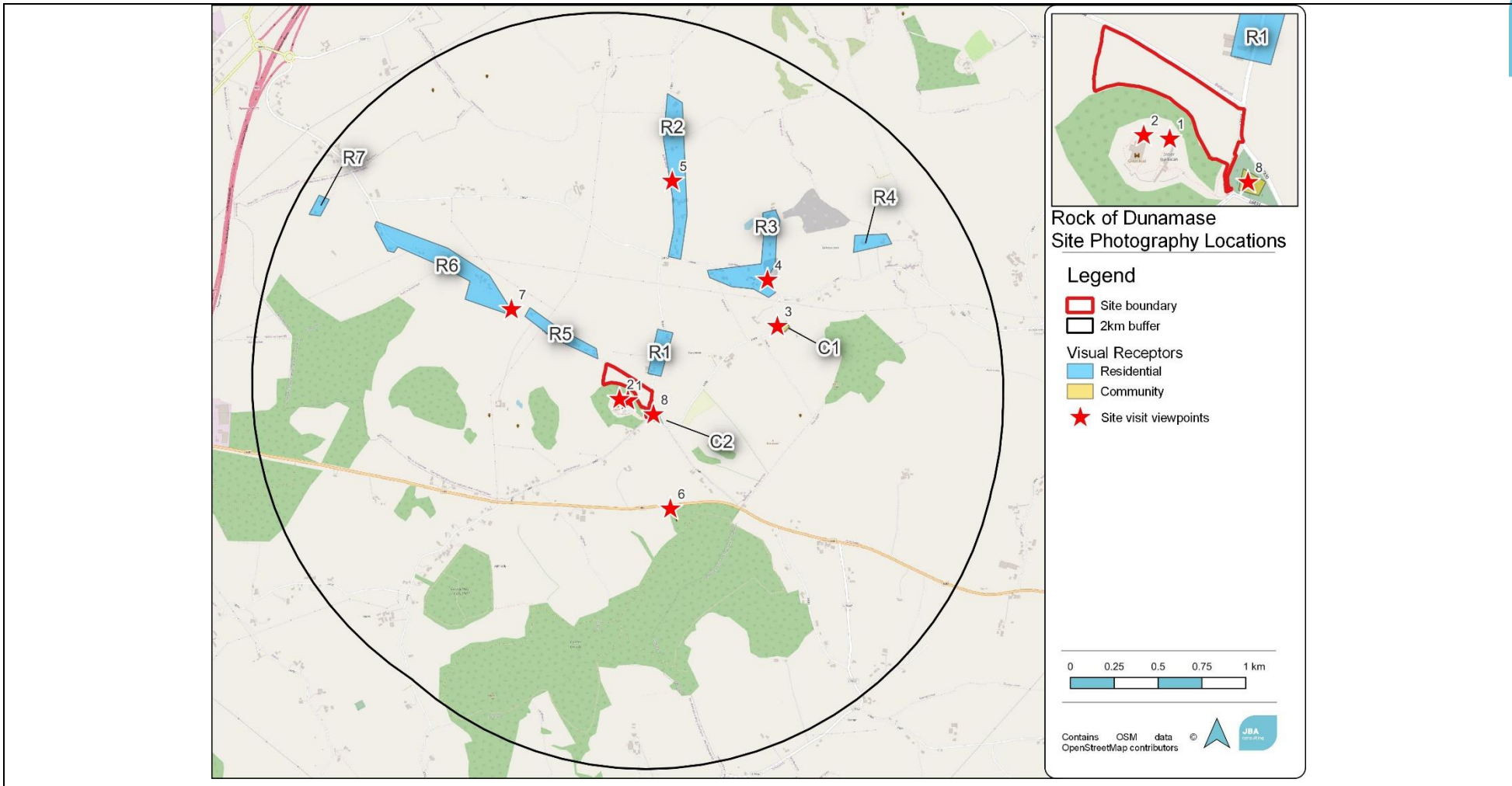


PM2 Existing View



PM2 Proposed View

Appendix D – Site photography



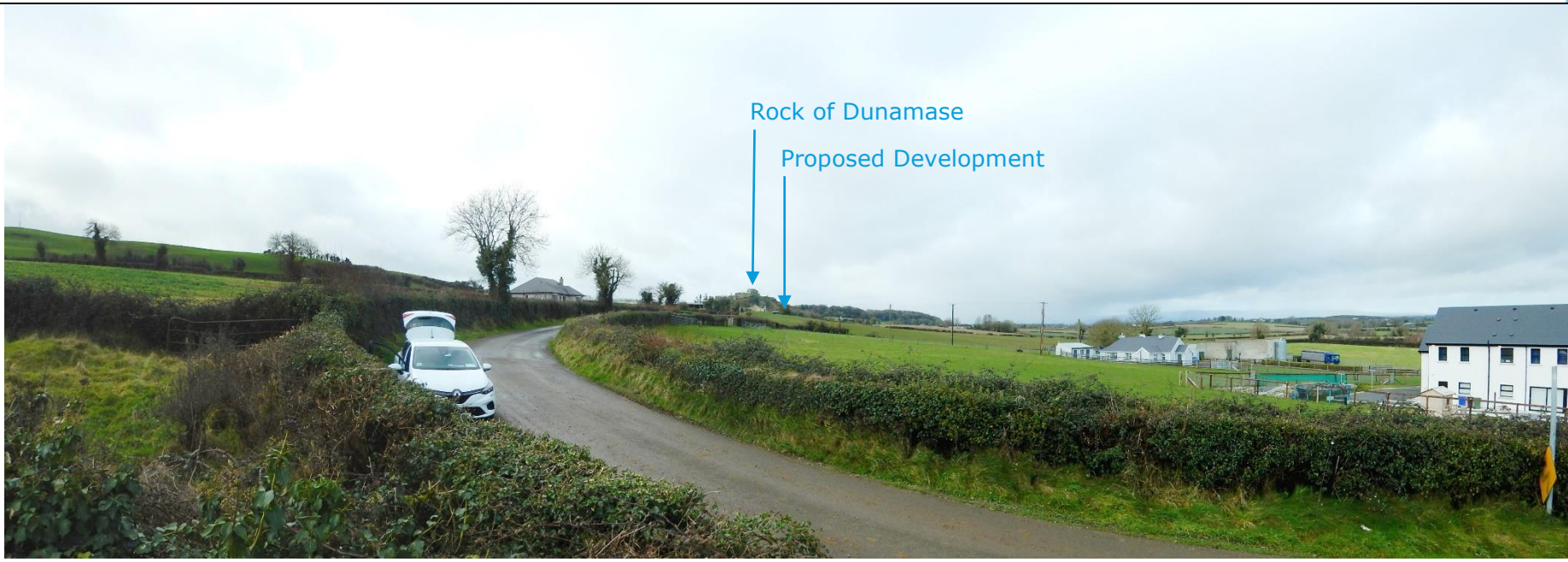
Plan showing site photography locations



View 1 The view north from the Rock of Dunamase over the surrounding countryside. The field directly below is the subject site. The proposed car park will be in the field below.



View 2 The view north from the Rock of Dunamase over the surrounding countryside. The field directly below is the subject site.



View 3 From C1, Killeale Church and Graveyard. Existing topography and vegetation provide a level of screening for the proposed development



View 4 View towards the Rock of Dunamase from R3. Existing vegetation and the undulating topography provide a level of screening for the proposed development



View 5 View to the Rock of Dunamase from receptor group R2. The proposed development will be partially screened or filtered by the undulating topography and existing and proposed vegetation.



View 6 The Rock of Dunamase from the N80 road to the south. The proposed development will be fully screened by the topography.



View 7 From the local road to the northwest of the site, showing the view of the Rock of Dunamase. The undulating topography and existing vegetation along the road will fully or partially screen the proposed car park, at the left side of the base of the Rock of Dunamase as seen from here.





View 8 From the Holy Trinity Church, showing the view of the Rock of Dunamase from the church grounds and the existing vegetation and topography which will provide full or partial screening of the proposed development, on the far right behind the treeline.

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