

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS BACKGROUND

FOREWARD

Forestbird Design (a fully qualified Landscape Architectural practice and member of the Irish Landscape Institute) has been engaged to carry out a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the proposed residential development at Broomfield West on the north side of Midleton, Co. Cork.

METHODOLOGY

Assessment methodology follows the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) *Guidelines for Visual Assessment* and the Department of the Environment Community, Local Government (DOE) *Guidelines on Landscape Assessment (2000)*. Where no Irish guidelines are available, it also utilises methods outlined in the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (GLVIA, 3rd edition, UK).

The assessment process involves thoroughly reviewing the site, environs (ca. 4km radius) and statutory documents for any sensitive locations. All nearby Scenic Routes, Protected Structures, public facilities, walking routes, major public roads and cultural, environmental and heritage areas have been considered. This results in a series of *View Receptors*, each of which are visited and assessed for potential impact. They were primarily reviewed from a vehicular viewpoint for long range views and a pedestrian/cyclist viewpoint at mid and close range. During the process, the proposed building masses and heights were considered and how the proposals impact the view and character of the landscape from each receptor. The site and environs were visited during the months of April, August, and October 2022 and April, May, July and August 2023.

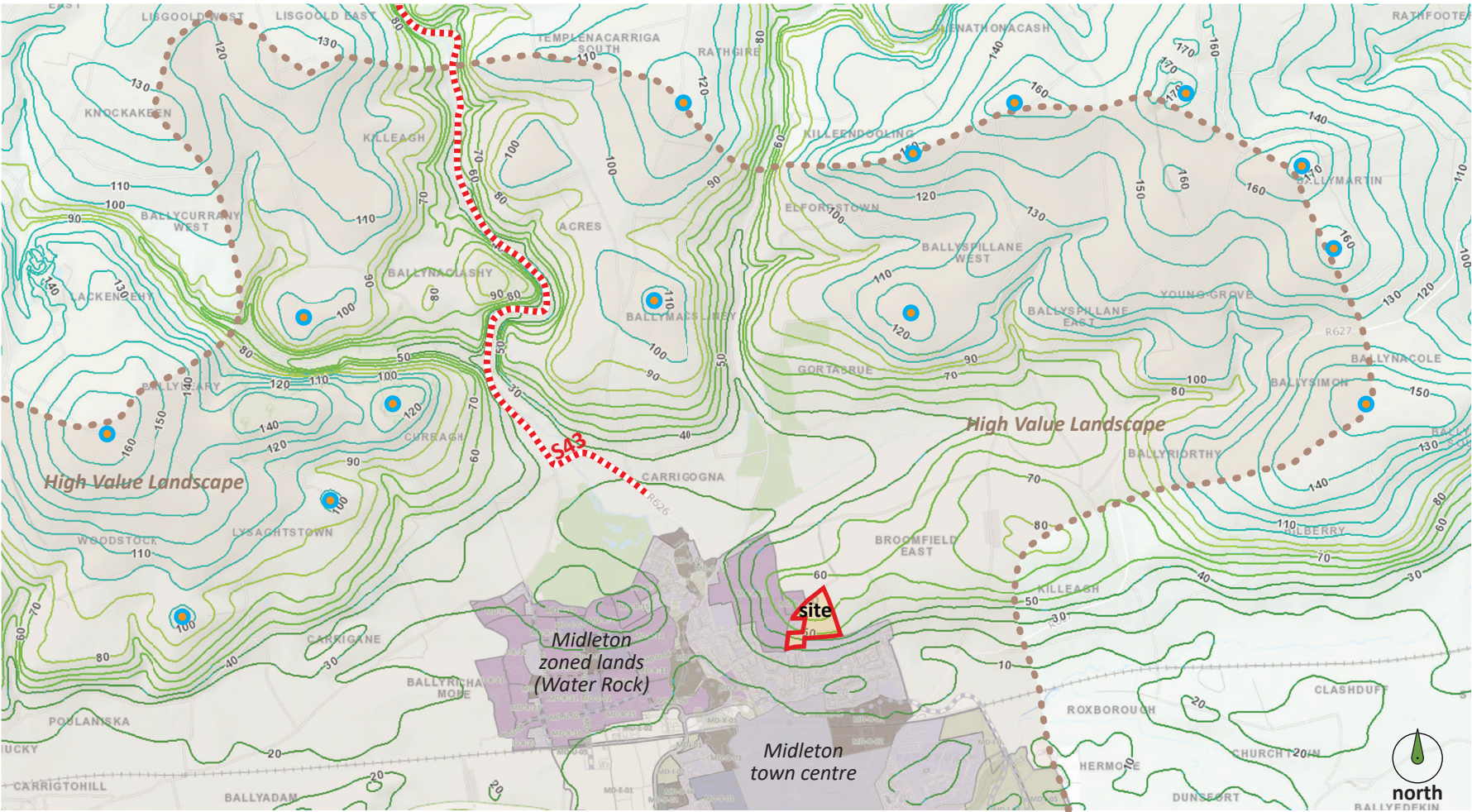
View receptors illustrating a strong visual relationship were then selected for the creation of photomontages (accurate visualisations of the proposed development), to which a *Degree of Impact* was applied. This weighs sensitivity, visibility and duration, resulting in one of five levels of impact. These levels are described in the table below.

Level of Impact	Criteria
Imperceptible	An impact capable of measurement, but without noticeable consequences. No discernible deterioration or improvement in the existing view.
Slight	An impact which causes noticeable changes in the environment without affecting its sensitivities. The impact has been minimised by its scale or intervening topography and vegetation.
Moderate	An impact that alters the character of the environment as a result of changes to an appreciable segment of the view or intrusion in the foreground.
Significant	An impact by which its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment. Where a view is obstructed or so dominated by a proposed scheme that it becomes the focus of attention.
Profound	An impact on a view that removes all sensitive characteristics or completely obstructs or alters the view.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

When carrying out the analysis, there are particular characteristics of the existing landscape and statutory context that are taken into consideration when viewing the site.

- The water treatment structure adjacent to site is a key visual element for understanding location and building heights.
- There are no mature A-quality or Veteran trees on site.
- The only trees taller than 5m are located along the western boundary; a portion of these are proposed for removal for roadway improvements.
- The site sits within the High Value Landscape zone (HVL), as does Midleton town.
- There are no archaeological features on site, with the nearest ones being 400m away and no perceivable cultural connection to this hill.
- Per County Development Plan maps, the other undeveloped local hill in Midleton (Water Rock, to the west) is zoned for residential development.
- Residential development directly northwest of the site (The Steeples) is currently under construction.



Context diagram illustrating the relationship of the site to zoned lands and hillside peaks to the north.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

The site is located on a local hilltop north of the town centre, adjacent to the Broomfield estate and other zoned lands. On a larger scale, it is a minor hill set within a semi-circle of higher peaks (refer map above). The site highpoint is at 67m. The majority of the site is on the south-facing hillside, oriented towards town. It is located within the High Value Landscape (HVL) zone, as is the entirety of Midleton. The HVL is distinct, in that it follows the ridgeline of the surrounding peaks. The HVL framework is based on the terrestrial relationship to the harbour and estuary.

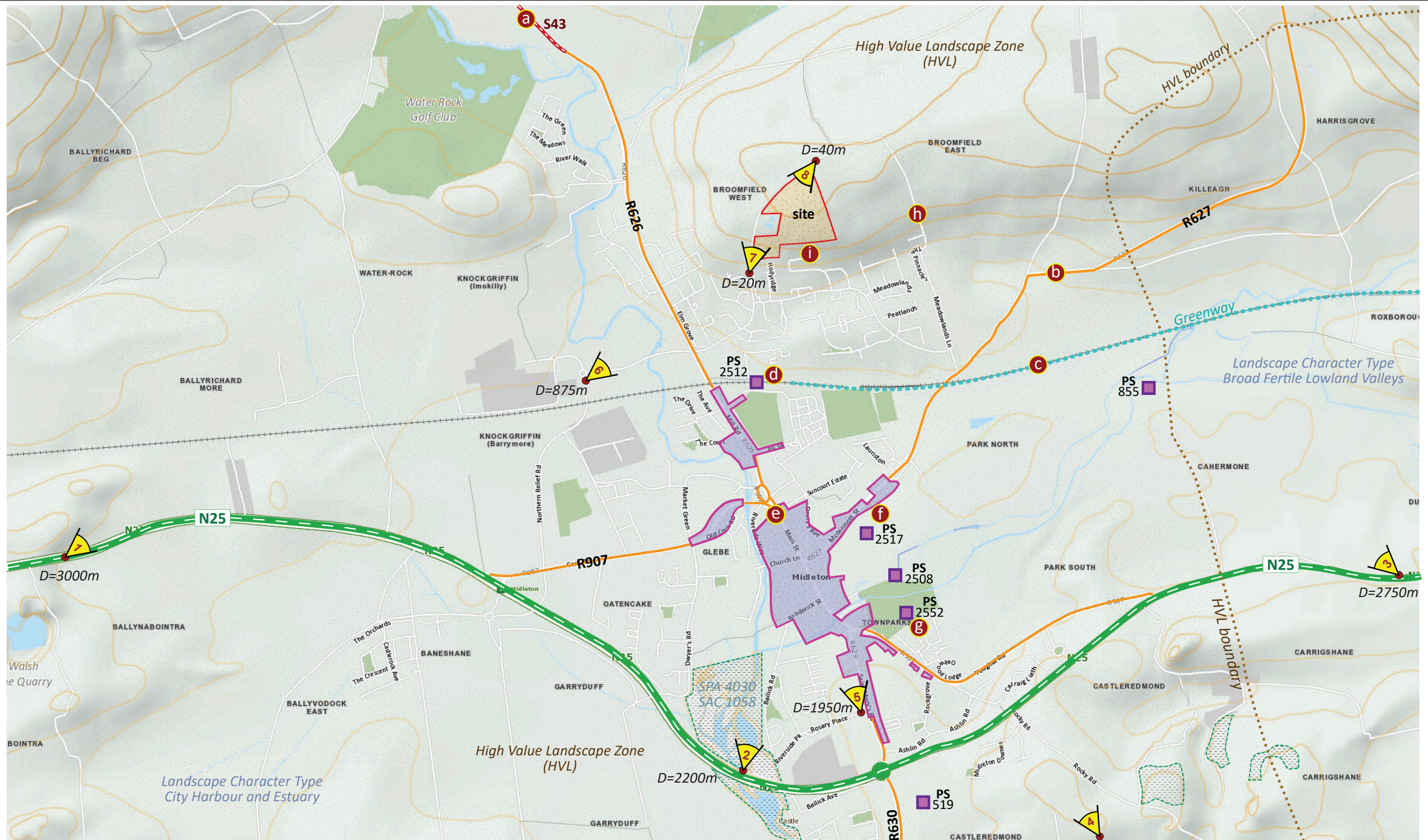
Site orientation combined with the higher peaks limits the potential visibility from the north. Visually, the peaks can also serve as a backdrop to the site. As a result, the greatest potential for visibility occurs from the south, where Midleton town and the N25 are located.

One designated Scenic Route (no. 43) comes within 1km of the site. It is northwest of the site and potential visibility would only be at the south end of the route. The distinct quality of Scenic Route no. 43 is based on the winding green valley through which it travels (Owennacurra River valley). The site does not form part of the characteristic landscape, but must be considered. Additionally, the permitted development north of the site would be more prominent and should also form part of the cumulative assessment.

The site has a degree of visibility from the public realm, but wouldn't be considered a defining landscape feature of the town. Development would not be visible from Main Street. The areas with greatest visibility occur to the north side of town where roads are elevated (i.e. river crossing). The site presents itself as pastureland in context of residential development. There is no discernible tree planting to define the hilltop or ridgeline. In this regard, the proposals play an important role in assessing visual impact on the ridgeline.

LEGEND

- 10m Contours below 100m elevation
- 10m Contour at 100m elevation and higher
- Hillside Peaks
- S no. 43 Designated Scenic Route
- High Value Landscape Zone



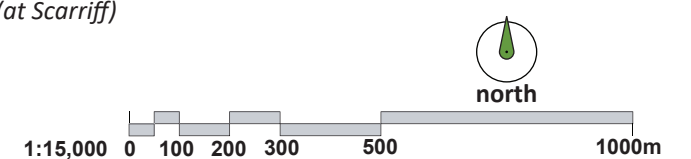
REFERENCE PLAN LEGEND

- Described Viewpoint with photomontage (D = distance to site)
- Potential Viewpoint Locations Considered

- Designated Scenic Route
- National Primary Road
- Regional Road

- Middleton-Youghal Greenway
- Protected Structure
- Architectural Conservation Area

- High Value Landscape Zone
- Proposed Natural Heritage Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas



Notes

- Centre of site located at ITM Reference (E,N): 588130, 575040.
- For reference images, refer dwg. LVA3-LVA5.

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED VIEW RECEPTORS



VIEW RECEPTOR 1

View from N25 Eastbound at Glebe House

Reason for Selection of Receptor: Arriving from Cork City on the N25, first impressions of Midleton begin as Carrigtwohill transitions at Glebe House. It is also the first glimpse of the site. It is a slightly elevated position illustrating Midleton in context of surrounding hillsides. The distillery towers and St. Mary’s spire identify the town centre. The Steeples estate northwest of the site is clearly visible at the ridgeline.



Analysis of Proposals: Despite the long viewing distance (3km), housing has the potential for visibility when located in the context of green hillsides. A degree of existing housing is visible at Elsinore Rise (below the site to the west) and The Steeples, as well as the adjacent water treatment structure. The site is located on a middleground hill. Taller hills to the background form the distinct green ridgeline. The proposed scheme will be visible, but it appears as an extension of the The Steeples, further linking development back to Midleton town. This hilltop will now be formed by house roof lines, but will not interrupt the larger background ridge. The retained trees around the water treatment facility create a strong visual filter, reducing the visual scale of the development. In this regard, protection and retention of the Sycamore hedgerows is important. The large pasture between Elsinore and the water treatment facility is also zoned for housing, consolidating this initial view of Midleton with residential development. The proposals are not out of character and serve to consolidate the view.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Slight, Neutral**



VIEW RECEPTOR 2

View from N25 at Estuary (Cork Harbour SPA 4030)

Reason for Selection of Receptor: Close to the town centre, the N25 passes over the Cork Harbour SPA. A clear view is provided across the estuary in context of town centre buildings and background hills. St. Mary’s church and the CBS secondary school are visible ahead on the N25 (not visible in photo).



Analysis of Proposals: The combination of the foreground estuary and the green background hillsides make this view composition attractive. The character of the urban development inbetween is mixed, influenced by numerous housing estates, apartment blocks at Water’s Edge and the radio tower (overshadowing the St. John the Baptist church spire). The historic town centre is not readily perceived. Adjacent to the site, the water treatment facility and The Steeples estate are visible, as are the white facades of Blossomhill just below the site. The proposals introduce a cluster of housing to a green field. However, the scheme appears quite contained and centred within the urban context. This middleground ridgeline is already disrupted by adjacent housing. The proposals provide consolidation. They would not visually impact the distant background hillsides. The green hillside west of the site (left of the apartment block) is also zoned for housing, adding a weighted residential backdrop to the north end of Midleton.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Slight, Positive**



VIEW RECEPTOR 3

View from N25 Westbound at Dunsfort

Reason for Selection of Receptor: Approaching Midleton from the east, the N25 undulates. A crest in the road arises at the Dunsfort Riding Centre, where the Broomfield estate and site are visible elements to the background. The town centre is not perceptible at this location.



Analysis of Proposals: Recent development at Broomfield (Blossomhill) is clearly visible to the middleground hillside. The water treatment facility and The Steeples estate can be seen above this. From this receptor, the proposed development blankets the hillside above the existing Blossomhill estate. It obscures much of The Steeples, with a similar finished ridge height. The green hillside is not obscured where the existing Sycamores are at, as they continue to rise above the houses to provide a green outline. This indicates that as proposed tree planting matures, it has the potential to rise above house ridgelines and soften the view. In this regard, it is important to include large canopy species in the planting scheme. There would be no visual impact to the wooded background hillsides of the Curragh Woods and Birch Hill (behind the site). The visual and character impact on arrival to Midleton would be to further consolidate the Broomfield area, emphasising a sense of a town centre.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Slight, Neutral**

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED VIEW RECEPTORS



VIEW RECEPTOR 4
View from L76592 at Scariff

Reason for Selection of Receptor: This is an elevated long-range view from the south. It illustrates the site in context of the town and broader landscape. Other local roads from Knockgorm to Sculleen were considered, with this image providing the best view. Much of Broomfield is visible, as is the Midleton Distillery. Inclusion of this view receptor is based on local authority feedback from the S247 meeting.



Analysis of Proposals: Development on the north side of Midleton is readily visible, having steadily expanded over the past 20 years. The site sits on a mid-level hill and from this receptor appears as a direct extension of Broomfield. Taller, undeveloped hills serve as a backdrop to the site and the town. Development at The Steeples is visible, but partially obscured by the water treatment facility.

This is a unique view receptor as it views the development from an elevated position, where all others are at a lower elevation. It is the only receptor where the proposals are visible in their entirety. The proposals would infill green space above Broomfield. Visually, this would appear as appropriate development, consolidating the extraneous built environment. But, it is a noticeable increase in housing numbers.

This view underscores the importance of tree planting along the amenity spine and along the southern boundary. Overall, the expansion neither improves nor degrades the setting of the town or the view of the greater landscape from this receptor.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Slight, Neutral**



VIEW RECEPTOR 5
View from St. Mary's Church (Protected Structure no. 2979)

Reason for Selection of Receptor: St. Mary's (Church of the Most Holy Rosary) is a prominent feature of the townscape and serves as a gathering point for much of the community. Views from the church itself are obscured. But, from the public footpath accessing the schools, a view across the graveyard provides a clear view of the site.



Analysis of Proposals: 20 years ago, the water treatment facility would have been the only visible development on this hillside. Broomfield has since expanded and the new Steeples estate to the north is also visible. The hillside parcel to the west is also zoned for housing.

Full development of the hillside alters the distant backdrop for the church grounds at this viewing angle. As a town centre church, being surrounded by development is not out of character. The valuation lies in the significance of the hillside to the setting of the church and graveyard. With the extent of existing housing diluting the green hillside, it is anticipated that consolidating the developed boundary will be more beneficial than detrimental in the long term. The church spires rise above the ridgeline and are not altered by additional housing. It is unlikely to adversely impact the setting of the graveyard. This view also underscores the importance of large canopy tree planting to achieve a soft visual integration. Until trees mature, there is a short term adverse impact due to receptor sensitivity, but this evolves into a positive long term community envelope.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Moderate, Negative-Positive**



VIEW RECEPTOR 6
View from Northern Relief Road (L3288) above Railway Track

Reason for Selection of Receptor: As the primary artery for access to Broomfield, Knockgriffin and Water Rock expansion, views from this road are experienced by a high number of users. Passing over the railway tracks the road rises, providing an elevated, clear view of the site that is unlikely to be obscured by future housing development.



Analysis of Proposals: Views from the Northern Relief Road are open and have a long viewing duration. The water treatment facility has traditionally signified 'the top of the hill'. This is now superseded by the Steeples development north of it (top left, in photo). The Brookdale/Elsinore estates (foreground) are visually prominent, but their maturity is evident by the large tree canopies embedded within it. Broomfield forms a secondary built edge, with newer developments more visible. The proposals result in a visual extension of Blossomhill.

Development on this site does not dilute the sense of a rural framework. Foreground and middleground lands play a much stronger role in determining this. Impact is further mitigated by retention of the Sycamore trees and additional tree planting along the east/west avenues. Development of this parcel provides a necessary visual link between Broomfield and the new Steeples estate, without having an adverse impact on the character of this area of Midleton.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Moderate, Positive**

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED VIEW RECEPTORS



VIEW RECEPTOR 7

View from Local Road L7630 Southwest of Site

Reason for Selection of Receptor: This is the primary point of access to the site. The removal of hedgerow and introduction of development will result in a high degree of visual change. It is also important to understand the relationship of the existing house to proposed houses and the interface with the public realm.



Analysis of Proposals: The development of The Steeples estate has resulted in significant changes to the L7630 with the removal of the western hedgerow for road widening and footpath improvements. The proposed development also removes the majority of the eastern hedgerow. However, it retains a segment of healthy Hawthorns and existing stone ditch at the southwest corner to ensure a buffer to the existing residence and a modicum of rural character retained. The upper storey of the duplexes is visible, yet the Sycamore trees at the water treatment facility still rise above the proposed rooflines. The landscape buffer at the southern boundary combined with modest building heights appears to sufficiently address potential overbearance. Recent road improvements have already significantly altered the character of the laneway and this receptor. The proposed scheme is presented as a natural extension of a heavily developed residential area. With a strong landscape character at the entrance, it has achieved the goal of minimising impact on the nearest neighbour.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Moderate, Positive**



VIEW RECEPTOR 8

View from Local Road L7630 Northeast of Site

Reason for Selection of Receptor: The L7630 is well-used locally as an amenity walking route, with greater potential impact on pedestrians than cars. This view illustrates the proposed changes in road character at close range (views from residences 100m to the east were obscured to a degree that they couldn't properly inform the application). It is important to understand the road finish and public relationship to proposed housing.



Analysis of Proposals: At this location the Steeples estate is obscured, but begins to appear as one ascends the hill (righthand side of photo). The scrub hedgerow at the boundary is removed and replaced with a widened road and footpath, backed by a low stone wall and new hedge. The difference between existing and proposed road widths is notable. This view has no background, so the houses become the visual ridgeline. The change from rural pastureland to suburban development will be abrupt. Housing will form the backdrop for views along this road. However, the sensitive treatment to the boundary will result in a safer path that still has a green character with a high degree of biodiversity. Locating houses at the boundary would have resulted in a negative impact. But the provision of a green buffer to the public road reduces this impact and provides an attractive setting for walks. Key views from this segment of the L7630 are towards the north, to which the proposed development will not adversely affect.

Predicted Impact (level, type of impact): **Significant, Neutral**

ADJACENT DEVELOPMENT

The water treatment facility has been a visual feature of the hillside for two generations; a developed parcel on a green hillside. As lands around it are developed, it will appear as a green node within an urban setting. In this regard, it is important to retain the perimeter hedgerows. The image below is from the public road.



The housing development (named The Steeples) northwest of the site has redefined visual parameters for this area of Midleton. New houses break the visual ridgeline and have a similar impact anticipated for the proposed scheme. The presence of this new estate underscores the need for visual connectivity to Broomfield, Elsinore Rise, etc, to ensure that development in Midleton is read as planned, cohesive thinking.



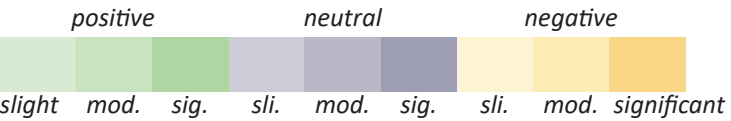
Along the southern boundary, the existing terrain provides natural separation between the site and existing housing estates within Broomfield. Elevation change and large offsets create a greater sense of separation. The image below shows Blossomhill relative to the site boundary (upper fence).



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER IMPACT AND VISUAL IMPACT SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF KEY VISUAL RECEPTORS

Receptor No.	Title of Receptor	Distance from Site	Receptor Sensitivity	Degree of Visible Change	Predicted Impact and Duration					Key Factors Contributing to Predicted Impact
					construction	short	medium	long	permanent	
1	N25 Eastbound at Glebe House	3000m	High	Low	Neutral	Slight, Neutral				Does not distract from the view, not a visual draw to road users; consolidation of urban area.
2	N25 at Estuary (Cork Harbour SPA)	2200m	High	Medium	Negative	Slight, Positive				Reduces weight of riverside apartments; concentrates urban expansion.
3	N25 Westbound at Dunsfort	2750m	High	Low	Neutral	Slight, Neutral				Finishes Broomfield development; reduces green middleground; no impact to background hills.
4	L76592 at Scariff	5600m	Low	Low	Neutral	Slight, Neutral				Full development is visible, finishes Broomfield defining the urban core; no impact to background hills.
5	St. Mary's Church (PS 2979)	1950m	High	High	Negative	Moderate, Negative-Positive				Consolidates town centre feel, but removes a green ridgeline; returning to green over time, evidenced by Sycamores.
6	Northern Relief Road (L3288)	875m	Medium	High	Negative	Moderate, Positive				Finishes Broomfield and consolidates scattered development; reinforces purpose of relief road.
7	L7630 Southwest of Site	20m	Medium	Very High	Negative	Moderate, Positive				Good development setback, corner hedgerow retention and landscape buffer to existing residences.
8	L7630 Northeast of Site	40m	Medium	Very High	Negative	Significant, Neutral				Urbanises a rural road, but provides a quality green interface to the public footpath.



OTHER VIEW RECEPTORS CONSIDERED

In assessing other potential view receptors, the key was to identify sensitive receptors then streamline in an attempt to illustrate ‘worst case scenario’. Consequently, the number of sensitive receptors with site visibility is very limited. The following were assessed and discounted due to lack of site visibility or negligible impact.

A - View from Scenic Route S43 (R626) - Emerging from the river valley, this highly sensitive receptor is fully obscured. Even The Steeples is not visible (which would be more pronounced from this angle).

B - View from Dungourney Road (R627) - The primary route from the northeast, this would signify the arrival into Midleton town. A various elevations and bends, the site is viewed at an angle and is fully obscured.

C - View from the Midleton to Youghal Greenway - A significant amenity that will open to the public in 2024. The path from Fitzgerald’s Bridge to the railway overpass was walked to assess visibility. The low elevation combined with intervening terrain and vegetation makes the site imperceptible.

D - View from Midleton Railway Station (Protected Structure no. 2512) - Waiting on the platform in front of the historic building, the site is not visible. Existing Broomfield apartments obscure the view. There is some visibility when standing on the modern elevated walkway, but impact was deemed negligible.

E - View from The Green roundabout - At the north end of the town centre ACA (Architectural Conservation Area), views are typically obscured by intervening buildings. Outside the ACA, there is a fleeting glimpse of the water treatment facility, but the view is not indicative of the space.

F - View from Midleton College (Protected Structure no. 2517) - A historic campus at the edge of the ACA, the school walls and housing density result in no site visibility here or within the R627 portion of the ACA.

G - View from County Council District Offices (Protected Structure no. 2552) - On elevated ground above the riverside park, there is improved viewing opportunity here. However, the distillery structures and mature trees in the park prevent clear views of the site.

H - View from the east end of L7630 - Part of the rural loop walk passing by the site, this was looked at to understand the full extent of impact on the rural environs. Rooflines will be visible, but a gentle mound rises in the adjacent field resulting in some screening. With the large agricultural field parcel separating the site (more than 300m wide), the road will retain its’ rural characteristic at the east end.

I - View from adjacent Broomfield estates - Reviewed from Blossomhill and Hollyridge, photomontages were considered. But the elevation difference combined with large offsets to the proposed houses means the visualisations would show nothing more than new tree planting along the boundary.

CONCLUSION

For many decades, the presence of the water treatment facility has set this hill apart from other rural hillsides with the portrayal of ‘human intervention’. With the growth of the surrounding Sycamore trees, it has become a somewhat attractive feature. Recently, significant degradation of the rural fabric has occurred with the construction of The Steeples housing estate. Road improvements have blown out full hedgerows and housing development has created a patchwork urban fabric.

The proposed development will be visible from all of the selected view receptors and from a number of other nearby locations with similar degrees of visibility. However, just because something is visible doesn’t mean it results in an adverse impact. As you can see in the table above, many receptors receive a *Positive* impact. This is primarily a result of consolidating the urban environment and creating a finished edge to the Broomfield estate. Additionally, without quality boundary buffers or landscape treatments, the positive impacts could have been downgraded. Prior to The Steeples estate, full development of the hillside would have been less warranted. Now it is a necessity. Some receptors receive a *Neutral* impact, balancing the loss of green hillside with an improved urban form. particularly in the short term while vegetation matures. Views from St. Mary’s Church were assessed as having a *Negative* impact in the short to medium term due to the sudden aesthetic change. This evolves to a *Positive* impact once vegetation matures and the sense of community enhanced. The scheme isn’t visually overbearing relative to adjacent neighbours. It is less than anticipated.

Overall, the positive elements outweigh the negative. The scheme is bolstered by a quality interface with the public realm, introducing placemaking and being sensitive to amenity road users. The most important trees are retained at the site boundaries, adding a degree of instant screening and visually breaking up the site. There is a substantial amount of tree planting proposed with urban woodlands. These are just visible in the photomontages (shown at 3-5 yr heights), but illustrate how these numbers will come to dominate the setting to create a future mosaic of houses and greenery.

In summary, the scheme will definitely be visible, particularly from long-range receptors. However, there is limited impact on statutorily designated receptors. The proposed development will result in a visual change by reducing a green hillside. But, this is a middleground hillside that does not impact the larger rural hills framing East Cork. Instead, it consolidates detached development improving the legibility of Midleton town. The gain outweighs the loss and no adverse landscape or visual impacts are anticipated.