



## **A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5 WTC)**

### **Appendix TNI – Theme Report: Landscape**

**26 July 2016**

## Appendix TNI – Theme Report:

### Landscape

As a reflection of our identity and diversity, the landscape is our living natural and cultural heritage, be it ordinary or outstanding, urban or rural, on land or in water. Landscapes are defined through a combination of natural, cultural and perceptual Influences that contribute to our “sense of place” within the world we live.

The impacts associated with the loss and/or fragmentation of such landscape components by the introduction of the Proposed Scheme and its traffic into the landscape have been evaluated and analysed, with the consequent effects on landscape character described. The full landscape character assessment can be referenced in Chapter 10 of the A5WTC Environmental statement 2016 (ES), which is available at [www.a5wtc.com](http://www.a5wtc.com).

The purpose of this theme report is to provide additional background and discussion in respect of specific areas of perceived impact on landscape, which have emerged as consistent themes during the course of the public consultation process. These themes include:

- ***The Foyle valley between New Buildings and Strabane, with specific reference to:***
  - *Effects on the Foyle Area of High Scenic Value (AoHSV), between New Buildings and Magheramason;*
  - *Effects at Sollus Hill, Bready; and*
  - *Effects on the Foyle Valley floodplain between Bready and Strabane.*
  
- ***The Mourne and Strule river valleys between Strabane and Omagh, and effects on the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)***

### Assessment Methodology and Significance of Effects

The assessment methodology is set out fully within the ES, however for the purpose of this report, relevant impact ratings and significance criteria used are as follows (as extracted from Table 10.4, P10-7 of the A5 WTC ES, 2016):

Effect Category	Typical descriptors of effect
Slight adverse	The Proposed Scheme would: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not quite fit the character (including the quality and value) of the landscape</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be at variance with characteristic features and elements</li> <li>• Detract from a sense of place</li> </ul>
<b>Moderate adverse</b>	<p>The Proposed Scheme would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict with the character (including the quality and value) of the landscape</li> <li>• Have an adverse impact on characteristic features and elements</li> <li>• Diminish a sense of place</li> </ul>
<b>Large adverse</b>	<p>The Proposed Scheme would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be at considerable variance with the character (including the quality and value) of the landscape</li> <li>• Degrade or diminish the integrity of a range of characteristic features and elements</li> <li>• Damage a sense of place</li> </ul>

## The Foyle Valley - New Buildings to Strabane

Areas of a predicted moderate adverse effect on landscape relate to:

- The Foyle Area of High Scenic Value to the south of New Buildings;
- Road cutting at Sollus Hill / Gortmonly Hill, Bready; and
- The Foyle floodplain between Bready and Strabane.

The location of these areas in the context of both this section of the corridor and the entire route can be seen in Figure 10.17, Volume 2 of the A5WTC ES.

### Foyle Area of High Scenic Value (AoHSV)

#### *Policy Context:*

The Foyle valley landscape in the vicinity of New Buildings is designated within the Derry Area Plan 2011 as an Area of High Scenic Value (AoHSV). The relevant Proposal and Policies are listed below:

#### **Derry Area Plan 2011: Areas of High Scenic Value**

#### **Proposal ENV 1 Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV)**

**The Department defines Areas of High Scenic Value on both banks of the Foyle north and south of the City and the Faughan Valley south east of Drumahoe to Burntollet Bridge**

These areas are shown on the District Strategy Map 1. The quality, character and importance of the AoHSV derives from a combination of the following factors:

- the contribution they make to the setting of the City;
- their relatively unspoilt nature and their relationship with the Rivers Foyle and Faughan in providing an attractive setting for the enjoyment of the rivers;
- their proximity to the urban area and their contribution in providing a high quality environmental image along the major approach roads to the City; and
- their intrinsic landscape quality based on the inter-relationship between river, riverbank, large country houses, many of considerable historic character set in mature parkland/woodland and well maintained agricultural land uses.

## **Policy ENV 1 Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV)**

**Proposals for development which would adversely affect or change either the quality or character of the landscape within the Areas of High Scenic Value will not normally be permitted.**

All AoHSV lie within the Green Belt and will remain undeveloped in the long term interests of the City and District. Whilst a limited number of uses may be acceptable within the Green Belt this does not imply that these uses will necessarily be acceptable within the AoHSV. In addition to meeting Green Belt policies, the development must demonstrate that there will be no adverse impacts or changes on the character or quality of the landscape.

Particular attention will be paid to the way proposals conserve and enhance the landscape of the AoHSV. The AoHSV are also identified as Areas of Constraint on Minerals Development (see [Plan Policy MN 1](#)) and will be subject to the constraints of that policy. Proposals for waste disposal within AoHSV will be determined in accordance with [Policy WD1](#).

## **Policy ENV 2 Design within AoHSV**

**Where development is permitted within the Areas of High Scenic Value, it must have special regard to siting, massing, shape, design, finishes and landscaping in order that it may be integrated into the landscape.**

The highest standards in design will be required within the AoHSV. Development should be seen as an opportunity to maintain and enhance the landscape quality. Landscaping proposals should indicate the overall impacts of the proposal on the landscape together with any mitigation measures. Proposals for tree planting of appropriate tree species should form an integral part of all proposals and in this respect the site must be large enough to accommodate the landscape element.

## **Policy ENV 3 Informal Uses within AoHSV**

**Within the Areas of High Scenic Value, favourable consideration will normally be given to the provision of pathways and informal recreational facilities of an appropriate scale and in a suitable location provided they are visually integrated with the landscape.**

The Areas of High Scenic Value can provide new opportunities for informal recreational activities and quiet enjoyment of the countryside, e.g. riverside and countryside walks, with potential to be linked by footpaths to the urban area. The City Council is actively involved in creating pedestrian access around Boom Hall to the north of the Foyle Bridge and in extending the Foyle Valley Railway to the south along the Letterkenny Road.

Correspondence received from Derry City and Strabane District Council (06-06-2016) states in abstract:

*“Derry City and Strabane District Council welcome the new / upgraded A5 road as it will improve accessibility to the City and District, reduce travel times, improve safety and in doing so will provide more opportunities to improve the economy of the District and make it more attractive as a location to live, work, etc.*

*Notwithstanding the above points, Derry City and Strabane District Council supports the important consideration and mitigation of any potential environmental impacts of the A5WTC A5WTC by DRD TransportNI / PAC Public Inquiry and through the various detailed reports / studies detailed in the Scheme consultation documents, including Environmental Impact Assessment, Habitat Regulations Assessment, Geotechnical, Drainage, Water Quality and Flooding Assessments.”*

### **Landscape Effects**

The introduction of the Proposed Scheme along the margin of the River Foyle between New Buildings and Magheramason would have a detrimental effect on this part of the river landscape. The road would serve to fragment the large and open field pattern that contributes to the river character at this location and which is evident between the existing A5, adjacent built development and the river.

Proposed mitigation, aimed at limiting the impact of the scheme on the wider valley landscape and in line with Policy ENV 2, has involved consideration of the vertical road alignment and the incorporation of planting strategy measures. There is a low vertical road alignment along the river margin, which maintains a sequence of generally shallow sidelong cuttings and low embankments. The areas of sidelong cutting help to partially screen the road and traffic to views across the Foyle valley from the existing A5 corridor and from built development along the eastern margin of the river. Proposed hedgerow planting along the road boundaries, in combination with targeted tree and shrub planting would tie in with the established vegetation pattern. The junction roundabout at New Buildings would be extensively planted.

The fragmentation of the marginal fields would be evident and noticeable, in particular to views from west of the river. However in respect of the scale of the valley landscape, the broad width of the Foyle, the built form of New Buildings and the backdrop of distant hills and wind turbines on the skyline there would not be considerable variance of character as a consequence of the scheme.

### **Bready and Sollus Hill/Gortmonly Hill**

As the Proposed Scheme approaches Bready it would be located on the eastern fringe of a gently undulating landscape defined by a low rise and contained within a prominent meander of the River Foyle. The introduction of a proposed deep cutting on the western facing slopes of Gortmonly Hill / Sollus Hill would influence the distinctive form and appearance of this local part of the landscape and perception of

the wider landscape in proximity to the hill. The approaches north and south of the cutting would cross over the existing A5 on embankment, while side roads would be carried over the dual carriageway, the most prominent of which would be Dunaanlong Road with its skewed alignment and more extended embankments.

Proposed mitigation, aimed at reducing the impact of the cutting on the wider landscape would comprise the profiling of the larger eastern cutting slope and its apex, in order to create a more natural transition between the existing hill slope profile at the northern entry to the cutting and its steeper southern exit, together with the part retention and re-establishment planting of the woodland edge at the southern transition from cutting. The slopes would otherwise be sparsely planted and predominantly grassed, in order to reflect the current form and relationship of the hill to the surrounding area.

While the broad scale of the valley is capable of accommodating development change, it is recognised that the effect of this cutting would influence the perception of the valley setting here, with a sense of erosion of the inherent qualities and value of this part of the lower Foyle valley.

### **The Foyle Floodplain - Bready to Strabane**

South of Bready and as far as Ballymagorry the Proposed Scheme would follow an alignment relatively close to the existing A5, extending into the Foyle floodplain to the west. There would be no material impact on the Burn Dennet and Glenmornan tributary valley landscapes to the east, however there would be a noticeable modification of landform on the approaches to and across the valley floor due to the horizontal alignment required for a dual carriageway that meets design standards. Embankments would be planted to soften their impact and break up the line of the road within the landscape. The new road and its associated landscaping would define a new sense of transition between tributary valley and broad floodplain, shifting this perception westwards and consequently further into the floodplain than the existing A5 corridor.

South of Ballymagorry, the road would occupy the easternmost fringe of the Foyle floodplain. Impacts on character would be largely limited to a contained corridor, defined by mature vegetation along the former Strabane Canal to the west and the existing A5 to the east. There would accordingly be a limited impact on the valley landscape that extends across the pasture down to the River Foyle, Corkan Isle and the floodplain to the west of the river at this location. The scheme would be evident to views from Park Lane adjoining the remnant canal, although vegetation cover would provide a strong sense of edge definition between the canal and road.

The arrangement of the proposed junction south of Ballymagorry provides for the main carriageway being kept on low embankment and the relatively short slip-road access link being elevated on high embankment to cross over the carriageway. It is an approach that would reduce the potential impact of the extensive junction

arrangement. The junction and the traffic using it would, nonetheless, constitute a prominent feature in the local landscape between Ballymagorry and north Strabane.

### **The Mourne and Strule Valleys – Strabane to Omagh**

An area of locally large adverse effect comprises the landscape setting of Harry Avery's Castle, to the west of Newtown Stewart. An area of moderate adverse effect comprises the Strule valley, set within the limits of the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) between Newtown Stewart and Mountjoy, to the north of Omagh.

The location of these areas in the context of both this section of the corridor and the entire route can be seen in Figure 10.17, Volume 2 of the A5WTC ES.

#### ***Policy Context:***

The landscape of the Sperrin Hills, with its distinctive character and special scenic value has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the purpose of this designation being to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of this landscape.

In Northern Ireland, AONBs are designated under the Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 and the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for the designation of AONBs and facilitates their management by putting in place management plans and mechanisms.

Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2, July 2013) establishes the objectives and the policies for new development within an AONB:

## Policy NH 6 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**Planning permission for new development within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will only be granted where it is of an appropriate design, size and scale for the locality and all the following criteria are met:**

- a) the siting and scale of the proposal is sympathetic to the special character of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in general and of the particular locality; and**
- b) it respects or conserves features (including buildings and other man-made features) of importance to the character, appearance or heritage of the landscape; and**
- c) the proposal respects:**
  - local architectural styles and patterns;**
  - traditional boundary details, by retaining features such as hedges, walls, trees and gates; and**
  - local materials, design and colour.**

5.14 This policy requires development proposals in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to be sensitive to the distinctive special character of the area and the quality of their landscape, heritage and wildlife.

5.15 The quality, character and heritage value of the landscape of an AONB lies in their tranquillity, cultural associations, distinctiveness, conservation interest, visual appeal and amenity value.

5.16 In assessing proposals account will be taken of the Landscape Character Assessments and any other published guidance such as countryside assessments produced as part of the development plan process, as well as AONB Management Plans and local design guides.

5.17 The Countryside Assessments will consider each designated AONB to identify each local landscape character type and their potential for protection and enhancement.

5.18 Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21 “Sustainable Development in the Countryside” (June 2010) sets out planning policies for development in the countryside. The provisions of PPS 21 apply to all areas of Northern Ireland's countryside. Supplementary Planning Guidance to PPS 21 is contained within “Building on Tradition – A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside” (May 2012).

5.19 Further information on statutory natural heritage designations can be found at [www.doeni.gov.uk/niea](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea).



## **Landscape Effects**

Taking the proposed planting and earthworks measures into consideration, effects on landscape character through the Mourne Valley south of Strabane would be slight. The proposed alignment, via a series of embankments and cuttings on the lower undulating western slopes of the valley would avoid conflict with the upper more exposed valley slopes which frame perceptions of the valley from the western fringes of the Sperrin AONB. The proposed planting would soften impacts on the modified landform, containing and masking earthworks crossing the tributary valleys. The effect would be a widening and increase in the influence of the strategic road corridor as part of the landscape composition, rather than the intrusion of a new and unfamiliar part of that composition.

The Proposed Scheme, where it rises away from the Mourne valley and the existing A5 on its approach to Newtownstewart would form a distinct intrusion on the landscape setting of Harry Avery's Castle as it passes in deep cutting to the immediate south. The effect of the impact would be locally contained and would not be apparent from the Strule valley and Newtownstewart, however the severance of the local landscape and introduction of a modern road in this context would constitute a large adverse impact.

In bypassing Newtownstewart, the Proposed Scheme would cross the open, lower northern slopes of Bessy Bell above the town. It would be aligned through a series of moderately deep cuttings which allow side roads to cross over the dual carriageway either at or close to existing ground level. The proposed alignment would not influence the appreciation of the distinctive massing and profile of Bessy Bell as a prominent and distinctive feature of the local landscape.

The valley further south defines the western limit of the Sperrin AONB. The Proposed Scheme would follow an alignment just within the AONB boundary, approximately 100m west of and above the existing A5. In combination with the river and existing road it would comprise a third and significant linear component along the lower valley. It is an alignment, however, which would avoid potential impacts of a large order that a higher alignment above the local road on the mid or upper slopes of Bessy Bell would introduce. Where there are views from the core of the AONB across the valley towards Bessy Bell, the focus is towards the distinctive profile of the hill and the windfarm ascending to its crest. The location of the Proposed Scheme close to the valley floor would not appear markedly different from the existing relationship of traffic using the existing A5 and would not have a significant effect on perception of the character of the AONB to the east of the river.

Correspondence received from Northern Ireland Environment Agency (20-05-2016) is in broad agreement with the assessment conclusions in that:

*"We have considered the route of the A5 Western Transport Corridor using the agent/clients' on-line interactive map showing all current environmental designations. It would appear that the route would impinge on a fairly narrow 'sliver' of land ( east of Bessy Bell ) at the edge of ( but within ) the Sperrin AONB. The overall impact on*

*the AONB would, on balance, be relatively minor in nature. We have therefore concluded that the proposed A5 transport corridor would not have a significant regional impact on the landscape and features contained therein.”*