

Online Assessment Report

Appendix G – Landscape Baseline

Existing Conditions / Baseline Environment

Section 1:

This section of the Route Corridor comprises part of the River Foyle valley as it flows north from the confluence of the River Finn and Mourne River at Strabane towards Londonderry. It is a landscape of large scale, in which the wide valley floor is framed by the Lifford Hills to the west and the Sperrin Hills to the east. The north-western fringe of the Sperrin Hills is defined by a series of lower hills that form a transition between the high valley perimeter and the floodplain. Prominent hills include Gortmonly Hill to the south of Magheramason and Knockavoe to the east of Strabane.

The existing A5 follows the eastern margins of the River Foyle, linking developments on this more extensively settled side of the river. There is a significant break of landform where the valley of the east-west flowing Burn Dennet, a tributary of the River Foyle descends from the Sperrin Hills to the east. A second, small tributary of the River Foyle, the Glenmornan River, joins the Foyle immediately south of its confluence with the Burn Dennet, the valley becoming well-contained and intimate beyond the northern limit of Ballymagorry towards Artigarvan.

The hill slopes to the south of the Burn Dennet valley represent the north western extent of the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The relationship of the AONB to the Route Corridor is shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figure D – 11014*.

The western side of the Foyle valley is framed by a grouping of lower hills including a prominent grouping west of Londonderry, Dooish Mountain, Binnion Hill and Croaghan Hill to the west of Strabane and Lifford. There is a significant break in the western profile between Binnion and Croaghan Hill, where the valleys of the Swilly Burn and Deelee River combine to establish an open vista out to the west.

New Buildings, on the fringes of Londonderry and the adjoining towns of Strabane and Lifford to the south, constitute significant centres of population within this section. Strabane is the residential, administrative and commercial centre of Strabane District. Strabane Glen is a local area of recognised landscape importance located east of the town, a steeply incised and distinctive gorge.

Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Character Sub-Zones (LCSZ):

Three of the sub-regional landscape character areas identified in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment are associated with this section of the Route Corridor: Foyle valley (character reference No.27), Burngibbagh & Drumahoe (character reference No.31) and Sperrin Mountains (character reference No.29). The extent of the character areas is shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figures 796036-3000-D-11013 and 796036-3000-D-11014*.

At a more detailed level the assessment team has identified 13 Local Landscape Character Sub-Zones (LCSZs). These are shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figures 796036-3000-D-11013 and 796036-3000-D-11014*. Of these, 8 have been identified as being of a high sensitivity to change. These are scheduled below:

- New Buildings and Ballougry Hill
- Gortmonly Hill
- Binnion and Black Hill
- Cavan and Dromore Hills
- Croaghan Hill
- Southern Lifford Hills
- Knockavoe and Meenashesk Hill Slopes
- Sion Mills

Visual Context:

The following potential visual receptors have been identified:

- The southern fringes of New Buildings including a number of properties that occupy elevated locations overlooking the settlement;
- Properties in Magheramason with views of the adjacent open countryside;
- Dwellings to the west and east of Bready with views of the adjacent countryside, in particular those that overlook the floodplain to the west and the edge of Gortmonly Hill to the east;
- A number of properties that occupy a location adjacent to the crossing of the Burn Dennet by the existing A5, in particular those with open views to the west, including recreational areas;
- Properties within Clogher and several that occupy slightly elevated locations to the east of the existing A5;
- A number of properties within and around Ballymagorry, particularly those to the west along with a number in the Glenmoran Valley between the towns of Ballymagorry and Artigarvan;
- A large number of properties on the urban fringe of Strabane, in particular those to the west with views of the River Foyle along with a number to the east that occupy an elevated plot with views to the east; and

- A number of scattered properties occupying elevated locations that are afforded views of Strabane, the River Foyle and hills to the west.

In addition, there are views from a short section of National Cycle Network Route 93 utilising the B48 between New Buildings to Drumagore to the west across the existing A5 and the Route Corridor.

Part of the Central Sperrins Scenic Driving Route uses the A49 as it runs from the east through Artigarvan and continues south along the A5 through Strabane. These routes are promoted by Sperrins Tourism with the objective of introducing leisure drivers and tourists to the landscape and cultural interest of the Sperrins and their immediate environs.

Section 2:

There is a marked contrast in the landscape associated with the upland river valleys of the Mourne and Strule, towards the shallower drumlin farmland that surrounds Omagh.

Between Sion Mills/Glebe and Newtownstewart, the River Mourne meanders through a valley framed to its east by a series of rounded hills that mark the western margins of the Sperrin AONB. The relationship of the AONB with the Route Corridor is shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figures 796036-3000-D-21015 and 796036-3000-D-21016*. The western side of the valley is defined by hills of a similar scale, the most prominent of these being Glentimon Hill and Clady Hill. The settlements of Sion Mills and Victoria Bridge are set within the valley and closely associated with the Mourne, while the small settlement of Glebe sits above Sion Mills on rising, gentle hill slopes. At the confluence with the River Derg, there are wider prospects along its valley to the west and towards Ardstraw.

Newtownstewart is located at the confluence of the Strule and Owenkilleg Rivers, above a wide floodplain and framed by the Sperrin Hills. The town sits above a distinctive meander in the river, with the northern slopes of Bessy Bell, an outlier of the Sperrins forming a prominent backdrop to the town. It is a landscape well appreciated from the existing A5 where it bypasses the town to the north and east, where Harry Avery's Castle becomes a visible and defining feature set on a local hill crest. The windfarm on the elongated crest of Bessy Bell is a noticeable feature within the wider landscape

To the south of Newtownstewart, the Strule valley is more incised, contained by the steeply rising slopes of Bessy Bell to the west and the broad shallow dome of Deers Leap to the east, with wider prospects of the Sperrin Hills. The Route Corridor encompasses the river, the existing road corridor and lower-mid slopes of Bessie Bell, these areas representing the western limit of the Sperrin AONB.

Beyond the confines of the Strule Valley, the Route Corridor opens towards the floodplain of the Fairy Water near Omagh and a landscape of distinctive, undulating drumlin farmland. There are substantial blocks of woodland, stands of tree planting and boundary hedges that punctuate the landform and conceal a network of local roads. It is a landscape pattern which extends south of the town, albeit at a generally lower elevation than the area to the west.

Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Character Sub-Zones (LCSZ):

Four of the sub-regional landscape character areas identified in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment are associated with this section of the Route Corridor: Sperrin Mountains (character reference No.29), Derg Valley (character reference No. 20) Bessy Bell and Gortin (character reference No. 26) and Fairy Water (character reference No. 21). The extent of the character areas is shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figures 796036-3000-D-21015 and 796036-3000-D-21016*.

At a more detailed level the assessment team has identified 16 Local Landscape Character Sub-Zones (LCZs). These are shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figures 796036-3000-D-21015 and 796036-3000-D-21016*. Of these, 7 have been identified as being of a high sensitivity to change. These are scheduled below:

- Sion Mills
- Southern Lifford Hills
- Knockavoe and Meenashesk Hill Slopes
- Newtownstewart
- Baronscourt Valley
- Bessy Bell
- Sperrins Lower Slopes

Visual Receptors:

The following visual receptors have been identified:

- a number of properties in and around the villages of Sion Mills and Glebe;
- scattered properties that occupy the eastern slopes of the River Mourne valley to the east of the existing A5 extending to the south as far as Newtownstewart;
- properties in and around the village of Victoria Bridge, including a number that occupy a gently rising landform to the west;
- properties within Newtownstewart, in particular those to the east of the Town that are afforded open views of the river valley and existing A5 , and properties to the west with views of the surrounding hill slopes;
- a number of properties within the village of Mountjoy and the surrounding areas;
- a number of properties that occupy locations adjacent to the existing A5 to the north of Omagh;

- a small number of residential streets to the west of Omagh that are afforded views of the open countryside to the west; and
- scattered properties that occupy extensive areas of open countryside to the west and south west of Omagh.

In addition, there are views from sections of National Cycle Network Route 92 where it passes through Omagh and follows the B48 and unclassified roads immediately east of the Rivers Strule & Mourne as far north as Strabane and Route 95 where it extends from Castlederg to the west to cross the existing A5 at Newtownstewart and link with route 92 before continuing eastwards in the direction of Gortin.

Parts of two Scenic Driving Routes promoted by Sperrins Tourism include roads and local lanes within the section. The existing A5 between Sion Mills and Newtownstewart and the B46 between Newtownstewart and Gortin form part of the Central Sperrins Scenic Route. The parts of the route within this section are shown In Figure D – 21015. The A32 running south west of Omagh, a local road running south from Newtownstewart linking with the A5 as far as Mountjoy and a local lane that runs along the mid southern slopes of the Owenkillew Valley as far as Gortin form part of the Southern Sperrins Scenic Driving Route.

Section 3:

The landscape south of Omagh is characterised by extensive areas of drumlin lowland, enclosed and divided by a series of sandstone ridges and local hill forms.

The shallow and intimate drumlin farmland south of Omagh has a local context, with generally contained views and a concealed network of meandering rivers and streams. There is an awareness of the extent of the wider landscape, where occasional broad vistas to the surrounding hills are revealed.

Near Gortaclare, the landform of Curr Mountain marks a transition in landscape character from the drumlin farmlands toward the rolling dip slope terrain of the Brougher ridgeline.

The landscape along the existing A5 corridor ascends the gentle dip slope of the Brougher Ridge within the upper valley of the Routing Burn, flanked by the slopes of Garvagh Big Hill to the west and Slievedivena to the east. Beyond Garvagh the corridor reaches the head of the valley and plateaus between the ridge peaks of Knockbrack and Slievemore, marking the highest point of transition across the ridge. Views are contained by these local and distinctive hill forms. The wind turbines on Slievedivena are a prominent feature in close proximity to the corridor.

To the west the transition from drumlin landscape to ridgeline dip slope is less pronounced. It is a lower-lying landscape as the corridor skirts Tullanafoile Hill before rising onto the ridgeline west of Tycanny. As it crosses the ridge and begins to descend towards the Clogher Valley the corridor is contained within a shallow elevated valley flanked by Beltany Hill, Birney's Hill and Tycanny Hill. The section of corridor between Glennageeragh and Culnaha is a visually appealing area of coherent landscape character.

As the corridor descends from the ridgeline there are interrupted yet expansive vistas across the extensive drumlin fields of the River Blackwater towards the distant Slieve Beagh hill mass. An elevated area of hummocky moraine deposits separates Ballymackilroy from the expanse of the more open drumlin field landscapes below. This area has a particular sense of place, heightened by the diversity of landform and the long association of settlement within the valley. There are views from Ballygawley across this part of the corridor.

The Clogher valley lowlands are broadly confined between the Brougher Mountain and Slievemore ridges to the north and Slieve Beagh to the south. This is a distinctive part of the corridor with a drumlin landform crossed by a network of rivers and streams. Between the drumlins are numerous local water courses, small raised bogs and numerous hedgerows. There is a strong sense of enclosure.

The crossing of the A4 corridor marks a transition as the influence of the Brougher Ridge is left behind. Views from within and across this landscape are varied, with filtered and occasional expansive vistas towards the rounded, wooded hills of Favour Royal Forest. At lower levels the landscape is markedly more intimate with views contained by the rounded drumlin landforms.

The town of Aughnacloy is located at the southern end of the corridor on the River Blackwater where it leaves the Clogher Valley. Here, the surrounding landscape is one of visually appealing drumlin landform and riverside settings. The historic core of the town is located on a drumlin crest, set above the shallow river margin landscapes and drumlin landforms of the river. Its broad and linear main street accommodates the current A5 and has a strong townscape and visual quality. The town's churches are conspicuous features of the landscape setting, also the "Thistle" an early 18th Century design laid out in a series of extensive ditches and planted banks. The form of the Thistle is barely evident at ground level but can be noticed from the elevated prospect of the town.

Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Character Sub-Zones (LCSZ):

Six of the sub-regional landscape character areas identified in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment are associated with this section of the Route Corridor: Omagh Farmland (character reference No.22); Slievemore (character reference No.44); Dungannon Drumlins and Hill (character reference No.45); Blackwater Valley (character reference No.46); Clougher Valley Lowlands (character reference No.17); and Brougher Mountain (character reference No.16). The extent of the character areas is shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figures 796036-3000-D-31017 and 796036-3000-D-31018*.

At a more detailed level the assessment team has identified 15 Local Landscape Character Sub-Zones (LCSZs). Of these, 5 have been identified as being of a high sensitivity to change. These are scheduled below:

- Knockmany Ridgeline
- Ballymackilroy Moraines
- Blackwater Drumlins
- Favour Royal Forest

- Aughnacloy

Visual Context:

The following potential visual receptors have been identified:

- scattered properties across the drumlin landscapes to the south of Omagh;
- clustered properties within Moylagh and Gortaclare;
- properties in and around Newtonsaville;
- properties within Garvaghy and along the adjacent hill slopes;
- residential properties along the Brougher/Slievemore ridgeline, from Ballymackilroy through to Culnaha, Longridge and Glenhoy;
- residential properties to the western margins of Ballygawley;
- scattered properties across the drumlin landscapes crossing the A4 between Ballygawley and Augher;
- scattered properties across the drumlin landscapes between Ballygawley and Aughnacloy; and
- properties bordering the main street in Aughnacloy with direct views to the west and properties to the northern and southern limits of the town with exposed views.

In addition, there are views from a section of the Ulster Way where it crosses the southern part of the section from Favour Royal Forest through to Aughnacloy. There are also several marked trails in the vicinity of Knockmany Forest, a popular local recreational destination. National Cycle Network Route 92 crosses the northern part of the section connecting Fintona with Omagh as shown in the *A5WTC Preferred Options Report Figure 796036-3000-D-32116 and 32117*.