

1 Eastern Uplands

1.1 Description

The Eastern Uplands are located in the northeast of the County and extend into the neighbouring County of Wicklow, as they are part of the Wicklow Mountain complex. The undulating hills situated within County Kildare lie to the east of the Liffey. The topography rises from the lowland plains, through undulating terrain to the highest points of 379m above sea level (Ordnance Datum) at Cupidstown hill east of Killeel and 349m A.S.L. at Caureen east of Rathmore; further south the maximum elevation being 332.25m O.D. at Slieveroe, east of Morganstown and west of Blessington.

The elevated nature of this area provides a defined skyline with scenic views over the central plains of Kildare and the neighbouring Wicklow Mountains which further define the skyline and the extent of visibility.

Soils in the area are dominated by Grey Brown Podzolics combined with Brown Earths and mineral soils. The hilltops (mainly Brown Earths) are poorly suitable for tillage and pasture and moderately suitable for forestry, and the rest of the lands have good suitability for the mentioned agricultural and forestry practices.

1.2 Land Uses

The Eastern Kildare Uplands are rural in context with a number of scenic views from elevated vantage points. The general land use on the uplands is pasture, however some areas are occupied by arable lands, such as tillage, and conifer plantations. Mineral extraction sites are also of significance, particularly east of Caureen hill as a result of the natural resource allocation (sand pits and slate quarries). Land parcels are of medium to large size, with a proliferation of gorse on unmanaged lands. Hedgerows are generally low and well-maintained, with scattered hedge trees at some sections.

Small villages, together with a dispersed pattern of farm structures are indicative of a relatively low rural population density.

1.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the topography and geology of the area, which largely coincide with the subsoil (i.e. quaternary geology) and soils, and are further confirmed by the landform and the existing land uses.

1.4 Critical Landscape Factors

• Elevated Vistas

The R410 secondary road and a number of local third class roads give access to the uplands. Local roads cross the upper and lower slopes of the hills. As a result of the elevated road level and the generally low vegetation, there are long distance views towards the Kildare lowlands and the Chair of Kildare.

• Slopes

Steep slopes often define the visual boundary of lowland areas. Sloping land often provides an area with its character and intensifies the visual prominence of any feature over greater distances, as in the case of the Eastern Uplands.

Slope also provides an increased potential for development to penetrate primary and secondary ridgelines when viewed from lower areas of the public realm such as the roads and population centres (e.g. Rathmore, Eadestown, Killeel) in this area.

• Prominent Ridgelines

These occur as either primary ridgelines (visible only against the sky from any prospect) or secondary ridgelines (visible at least from some prospects below a distant primary ridge line).

In this upland environment of the Eastern Kildare Uplands, nearly all ridgelines are secondary when viewed from the lowland areas, as the Wicklow Mountains to the east define the skyline (i.e. form primary ridgelines).

Ridgelines perform the important roles of providing adjacent areas with visual identity, acting as dominant landscape focal points, and defining or enclosing the extent of visual catchments.

• Undulating topography

Gently undulating topography occurs within the upland area of this character unit. The physical shielding of a built form within the lee of hills provides areas that are visually unobtrusive in the landscape. Furthermore, the dynamic and complex nature of undulating land encloses smaller vistas and helps to provide a more intimate scale and visual containment not available in other open lands.

- Low Vegetation

Low vegetation occurring in this unit as grassland, moorland and generally low hedgerows, is generally uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas and allowing long distance visibility. These areas therefore exhibit an inability to visually absorb development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation, represented in certain locations of this unit by coniferous plantations and other woodlands, provides visual screening and helps to provide a visual containment not available in open, low-vegetation lands.

- Localised River Views

River valleys are generally visually enclosed and highly localised areas of very distinctive character with a high degree of visual consistency. Due to the elevated nature of this landscape character unit, views of the River Liffey valley as well as of the Poulaphouca Reservoir are available from the hilltops and high points at some of the local roads.

2 South Eastern Uplands - Corballis Hills

2.1 Description

The South-eastern Uplands coincide with Corballis and Hughstown Hills to the south-east of the County, east of Castledermot. This upland area also extends into the neighbouring Wicklow Mountains, as they are part of the same geomorphological complex. The topography gently rises from the southern lowlands, through undulating terrain to the highest point of 298m O.D. at Hughstown Hill. Another significant landmark in the area is provided by the coniferous hilltop of Corballis Hill, at 258m O.D.

The relatively elevated nature of this area provides a locally defined skyline to the east with scenic views over the southern plains of Kildare as well as to the neighbouring Wicklow Mountains, which further define the skyline and the extent of visibility.

Soils in the area are dominated by Grey Brown Podzolics combined with Brown Earths and mineral soils. The lands have generally good suitability for tillage, pasture and forestry, however the hilltops are poorly suitable for such practices.

2.2 Land Use

The South-eastern Uplands are rural in context, the general land use being pasture. Significant areas however are occupied by arable lands, mainly tillage, and conifer plantations. Natural vegetation also occurs at certain parts of Hughstown Hill. Land parcels are of medium size, with generally unmaintained and thus tall hedgerows that screen potentially scenic vistas along the local roads.

A relatively high density of rural housing, together with a dispersed pattern of farm structures are indicative of a growing rural population density.

2.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the topography and geology of the area, which largely coincide with the subsoils, soils and landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

2.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Elevated Vistas

A number of local roads cross these upland areas. The local roads run through the upper and lower slopes of the hills and provide access to residences within the uplands. As a result of the elevated road level and the lack of tall vegetation, there are long distance vistas towards the Southern Kildare Lowlands. However, these views are affected by the generally unmaintained hedgerows and tall vegetation (i.e. existing conifer plantations).

- Slopes

Slopes often define the visual boundary of lowland areas. Sloping land often provides an area with its character and offers an increased elevation,

intensifying the visual prominence of any feature over greater distances, as in the case of the Corballis Hills. Slope also provides an increased potential for development to penetrate primary and secondary ridgelines when viewed from lower areas of the public realm such as the roads and population centres in this area.

- **Prominent Ridgelines**

In this upland environment of the Hughstown and Corballis Hills, all ridgelines are secondary when viewed from the lowland areas, i.e. the hilltops are visible from some prospects below the distant primary ridgeline formed by the Wicklow Mountains to the east.

Ridgelines perform the important roles of providing adjacent areas with visual identity, acting as dominant landscape focal points and defining the extent of visual catchments.

- **Undulating topography**

Gently undulating topography is presented within the Corballis upland character unit. The physical shielding within the lee of hills can conceal relatively large new features (e.g. between Hughstown and Corballis Hills) rendering them visually unobtrusive. Furthermore, the dynamic and complex nature of undulating land encloses local vistas and helps to provide a realistic scale and visual containment not available in open lands.

- **Low Vegetation**

Low vegetation, represented at some areas of this unit by grassland and moorland, is generally uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas and allowing long distance visibility, thereby, providing an inability to absorb development.

- **Shelter Vegetation**

Shelter vegetation, largely represented in this unit by coniferous plantations and generally unmaintained and tall hedgerows, provides visual screening, enclosing vistas and helping to provide a visual containment not available in open, low-vegetation lands.

3 Northern Hills - Newtown Hills

Description

This character area is a small upland area on the central-northern part of the County boundary, which includes the hills to the north and south of Newtown (with 145m O.D. and 135m O.D. respectively) that locally define the skyline in this area. This unit lies immediately south of the Royal Canal.

The relatively elevated nature of the local roads in this area, which run through both hilltops, provides scenic views over the northern and north-western plains of Kildare as well as to the Royal Canal corridor at certain vantage points and to the neighbouring County Meath undulating lowlands.

Soils in the area are dominated by Grey Brown Podzolics combined with Complex mineral soils and Gleys. The area is suitable to moderately suitable for tillage, pasture and meadow and suitable for forestry. However, the northern hill is less suitable for the mentioned practices due to its gley composition.

3.1 Land Uses

The Northern Uplands are rural in context, the area being largely dominated by pastureland. A number of agricultural land areas are occupied by non-irrigated arable lands, mainly tillage, and small areas of naturally occurring vegetation. Land parcels are of medium to large size, with generally well-maintained low hedgerows.

However, hedgerows contain trees which screen potentially scenic vistas at some sections along the local roads. Small villages such as Newtown, together with a dispersed pattern of farm structures are indicative of a relatively low rural population density.

3.2 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit directly derive from the topography, soils and geology of the area, which largely coincides with the subsoils, and are further confirmed by the landform and the existing land uses.

3.3 Critical Landscape Factors

- **Elevated Vistas**

A number of local roads run through Newtown Hills providing access for established villages within the uplands, e.g. Newtown village (located between the two existing hills). As a result of the elevation on the local roads and the generally low, well-maintained hedgerows, there are long distance views towards the Northern and North-western Lowlands.

- Slopes

Sloping land often provides an area with its character and intensifies the visual prominence of any feature over greater distances, as in the case of the Newtown Hills. The gentle slope of this character unit also defines the visual boundary of the adjacent lowland areas and provides an increased potential for development to penetrate the ridgelines when viewed from local roads and villages in the area.

- Prominent Ridge Lines

Although the ridgelines of this upland area of Newtown Hills are not of major order, they locally appear as primary ridgelines when viewed from the lowland areas, due to the generally smooth terrain and flat topography of the surrounding environs.

Ridgelines generally perform the important roles of providing adjacent areas with a sense of visual identity, acting as dominant landscape focal points, and defining the extent of visual catchments. Therefore, it is important to avoid interruption by development that will reduce the integrity of Newtown Hills ridgelines.

- Undulating topography

Gently undulating topography is presented within the upland area of this character unit. The dynamic nature of the existing undulating land between the two hills locally encloses vistas and helps to provide a realistic scale and visual containment not available in the generally open and flat lands of County Kildare.

- Low Vegetation

Low vegetation occurring in this unit as grassland and generally low hedgerows is generally uniform in appearance. It fails to break up vistas and allows long distance visibility, thereby providing an inability to visually absorb development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation, represented in certain areas of this unit by coniferous plantations, provides visual screening, enclosing vistas and helping to provide a visual containment. Chair of Kildare - Red Hill, Dunmurry Hill, Hill of Allen.

4 The Central Uplands or the Chair of Kildare

4.1 Description

The Central Uplands or the Chair of Kildare as the area is locally known consists of a number of hills that interrupt the continuity of the Kildare plains. This landscape character unit is located immediately north of Kildare town. The land rises to a maximum of 233m O.D. at Dunmurry Hill. The ridgeline of Dunmurry together with the ridgelines of Grange Hill (223m O.D.), Red Hill (197m O.D.),

Boston Hill (159m O.D.) and Hill of Allen (219m O.D.) define the skyline of central Kildare and represent significant features on the landscape.

The elevated nature of this area provides highly scenic views over the central plains and boglands of Kildare.

Soils in the area are dominated by Grey Brown Podzolics combined with small pockets of mineral soils as well as raised bogs and reclaimed peats. The area is generally suitable for tillage, pasture and forestry, the suitability of boglands areas being unclassified.

Cultural Significance

The Hill of Allen is of mythological significance, with the legendary Fionn MacCumhaill and the Fianna. It is supposed to have been the site of their camp, with the surrounding area as their training ground.

4.2 Land Uses

The Chair of Kildare comprises a number of landuses. Large fields within this area are generally used as pasture lands, however a significant amount of non-irrigated agricultural lands, mainly containing tillage, can also be found. Coniferous forestry represents another significant landuse in the area,

with some patches of naturally occurring vegetation, mainly at Allen and Dunmurry Hills.

Allen Hill is characterised by the mineral extraction and quarrying activities on its north-western part. Similarly, Boston Hill has a large area of gravel extraction activities. A visually dominant feature of Red Hill is the telecommunication mast located on the hilltop.

Land parcels within this unit are of medium to large size, with generally well-maintained low hedgerows. Small villages such as Allen, Killeagh and Guidenstown, together with a dispersed pattern of rural houses and farm structures are indicative of a relatively high rural population density.

4.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the geology, subsoils (i.e. quaternary geology) and topography of the area, which largely coincide with the soils and landform and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

4.4 Critical Landscape Factors

• Elevated Vistas

A number of regional and local roads run through this landscape character unit. The roads cross the upper and lower slopes of the hills and provide access to established residences as well as to Kildare town. As a result of the elevated road level and the generally low vegetation, there are long distance and extensive views towards the surrounding lowlands and boglands.

• Slopes

The slopes of the hills that form the Chair of Kildare define the visual boundary of the adjacent lowland areas. Sloping land intensifies the visual prominence of any feature over greater distances, as in the case of the Hill of Allen, Red Hills, Dunmurry and Grange Hills. Slope also provides an increased potential for development to penetrate primary and secondary ridgelines when viewed from lower areas of the public realm such as the roads and population centres in this area.

• Prominent Ridge Lines

These occur as either primary ridgelines (visible only against the sky from any prospect) or secondary ridgelines (visible at least from some prospects below a distant primary ridge line). In this upland environment of the Chair of Kildare, nearly all ridgelines are primary when viewed from the surrounding lowland areas.

Ridge lines perform the important roles of providing adjacent areas with visual identity, acting as dominant landscape focal points, and defining the extent of visual catchments.

• Undulating topography

Gently undulating topography is presented within the upland area of this character unit, particularly to the south (i.e. between Red, Dunmurry and Grange Hills). The physical shielding within the lee of hills can conceal relatively large new features, where it does not break the skyline. The dynamic and complex nature of undulating land has the potential for locally enclosed vistas.

• Low Vegetation

Low vegetation, represented in this unit by grassland, moorland and generally low hedgerows, is generally uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas and allowing long distance visibility, thereby, providing an inability to visually absorb development.

• Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation, represented in certain areas of this unit by coniferous plantations, provides visual screening, enclosing vistas and helping to provide a visual containment.

• Localised Canal Views

Canal corridors are generally visually enclosed and highly localised areas of very distinctive character with a high degree of visual consistency. The area has localised vistas to the

Milltown Feeder of the Grand Canal that runs south of Hill of Allen and north of Grange Hill.

5 Northern Lowlands - Naas & Environs

5.1 Description

This extensive lowland area to the north-east of the County is bisected by the River Liffey valley. The Royal Canal runs along its northern boundary and the Grand Canal corridor follows a northeast to south-west alignment. This area is characterised by generally flat terrain and open lands with regular (medium sized) field patterns. Hedgerows are generally well maintained and low, with scattered trees along the field boundaries that partially screen the lowest lying areas. Nevertheless, the generally low-lying vegetation of the area allows long-distance and extensive visibility. Distant views include the skylines of the Eastern Uplands, the Newtown Hills to the west, and the Chair of Kildare hilltops to the south-west.

Soils in the area are dominated by complexes (generally mineral soils) with pockets of Grey Brown Podzolics and Gleys. The area is suitable to moderately suitable for tillage, pasture and meadow and suitable for forestry.

5.2 Land Uses

The predominant land use in this area is pasture, with large areas of non-irrigated arable lands (mainly tillage). A number of coniferous plantations and deciduous woodlands can also be found, as well as large patches of bogland and peat extraction sites.

Settlement patterns in this area are linked to the closeness of Dublin City. Existing large towns such as Naas, Clane, Celbridge, Leixlip and Maynooth, together with other small villages at the outskirts of major towns and a high density of dispersed rural houses and farm dwellings throughout the countryside, are indicative of a high population density. This character unit contains the largest population concentrations of the county.

5.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the soils, topography and geology of the area, which largely coincide with the subsoils (i.e. quaternary geology) and landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

5.4 Critical Landscape Factors

• Smooth Terrain

Smooth terrain and the generally flat topography and landform that characterise this landscape character unit, allow vistas over long distances without disruption. As a result development can have a disproportionate visual impact, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed.

• Undulating topography

Gently undulating topography is presented at certain areas of this character unit, providing the potential for local visual enclosure thereby absorbing development where it does not break the skyline (i.e. it renders visually unobtrusive of the overall landscape scale). St. Patrick's Hill, Ardrass, Celbridge represents an important topographical feature within the Northern Lowlands area.

• Low Vegetation

The grassland, tillage fields and generally low hedgerows of this area provide similar characteristics to smooth terrain in landscape terms, and the two are often interrelated due to soil attributes. Grassland vegetation and agricultural crops are usually uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long distance visibility. Existing low hedgerows partially screen the lowest land parcels, nevertheless the common low vegetation proves unable to visually absorb new development.

• Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by coniferous plantations, deciduous woodlands and the presence of trees that grow on field hedgerows. In a similar manner to undulating topography, shelter vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms. It can provide a natural visual barrier and also adds to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

• Localised River and Canal Views

River valleys and canal corridors are generally visually enclosed and highly localised areas of very distinctive character with a high degree of visual consistency. This character unit includes sections of

the River Liffey and the Grand and Royal Canals. Due to the low lying nature of this area, many views of the river valley and the canal corridors are available from the local roads and from the viewing points located on bridges.

6 Southern Lowlands

6.1 Description

This landscape character unit comprises an extensive lowland area to the south-west of the County, the River Barrow and the Grand Canal running along its western quarter. This area is characterised by generally flat terrain and open lands with regularly shaped large field patterns. Hedgerows are well maintained and low, with scattered trees along the field boundaries that partially screen the lowest lying areas.

Nevertheless, the generally flat topography and the low lying vegetation allow long-distance and extensive visibility. Distant views include the skylines of the Eastern Kildare Uplands, the Newtown and Hughstown Hills and the Wicklow Mountains to the east, the Chair of Kildare hilltops to the north-east and the neighbouring hills of County Laois to the south-west.

Soils in the area are largely dominated by Grey Brown Podzolics, although pockets of gleys and mineral soils also occur. The area is generally classified as widely suitable for tillage, pasture, meadow and forestry.

6.2 Land Uses

The predominant landuse in this area is tillage, combined with other agricultural crops and relatively large areas of pastureland. A number of coniferous and mixed forestry plantations also occur, as well as small patches of deciduous woodlands and naturally occurring vegetation. Some bogland areas can also be found.

Existing large towns such as Monasterevin and Athy, together with other smaller settlements and dispersed rural houses and farm dwellings throughout the countryside, are indicative of a relatively high population density.

6.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the soils, geology, and topography of the area, which largely coincide with the subsoils (i.e. quaternary geology) and landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

6.4 Critical Landscape Factors

• Smooth Terrain

Smooth terrain and the generally flat topography and landform that characterised this landscape character unit, allows extensive vistas over long distances without disruption, as the planar surface does not break up fore and middle ground. Consequently, development can have a disproportionate visual impact due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed by the flat terrain.

• Low Vegetation

The grassland, large tillage fields and generally low well maintained hedgerows of this area provide similar characteristics to smooth terrain in landscape terms, and the two are often interrelated due to soil attributes. Grassland vegetation and tillage crops are usually uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long distance visibility.

Although existing low hedgerows partially screen the lowest land parcels, the generally low vegetation proves unable to visually absorb new development.

• Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by coniferous plantations, deciduous woodlands and the presence of trees that grow on field hedgerows. Tall vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms as it can provide a natural visual barrier and also adds to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

• Localised Water Corridor Views

River valleys and water corridors are generally visually enclosed and highly localised areas of very distinctive character and high degree of visual consistency.

This character unit includes sections of the River Barrow and the Grand Canal. Due to the low lying nature of this area, many views of the river valley and the canal corridor are available from the local roads and from the viewing points located on bridges.

7 North-Western Lowlands - Cadamstown & Environs

7.1 Description

This lowland landscape character unit is located on the northwestern boundary of the county. The area is characterised by generally flat topography and smooth terrain, gently undulating around Carbury, to a maximum elevation of 142m O.D. at Carbury Hill. The occurring open lands with medium to large field patterns are bordered by well-maintained and low hedgerows, which contain scattered trees along some sections of the field boundaries. Although hedgerows partially screen the adjacent lowest lying areas, the commonly flat terrain allows long-distance visibility. Distant views include the skylines of Newtown Hills to the east and Allen Hill to the south-east.

Soils in the area are characterised by a combination of Grey Brown Podzolics and Gleys, with small pockets of Raised Bog soils. Consequently, the area is generally suitable for tillage, pasture and forestry, although lands overlying Gley soils are classified as poorly suitable for tillage and moderately suitable for pasture and forestry.

7.2 Land Uses

The predominant landuse in this area is pasture, with large areas of non-irrigated arable lands (mainly tillage). A relatively large area of mixed forest, combined with some coniferous plantations, can also be found. Extensive areas of bogland also occur, combined with peat extraction sites, as well as gravel extraction sites west of Cadamstown. Existing small villages such as Carbury & Cadamstown, combined with other smaller settlements and dispersed rural houses and farm dwellings throughout the countryside, are indicative of a relatively low population density.

7.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the soils, geology and topography of the area which largely coincide with the subsoils (i.e. quaternary geology) and landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

7.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Smooth Terrain

Smooth terrain and the generally gentle topography and landform that characterise this landscape character unit, allows vistas over long distances without disruption. Consequently development can have a disproportionate visual impact in such terrain, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed.

- Undulating topography

Undulating topography is presented around Carbury on this character unit, providing a physical shielding and visual enclosure of a built form within the lower-lying lands. These areas have a potential for visual enclosure, where development does not break the skyline.

- Low Vegetation

The grassland, bog type grasses and generally low hedgerows of this area provide similar characteristics to smooth terrain in landscape terms and the two are often interrelated due to soil attributes. Grassland vegetation and tillage crops are usually uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long-distance visibility.

Although existing hedgerows partially screen the lowest land parcels, the commonly low vegetation proves unable to visually absorb new development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by mixed forests and the presence of trees that grow on field hedgerows. In a similar manner to undulating topography, shelter vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms. It can provide a natural visual barrier and also add to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

8 Central Undulating Lowlands

8.1 Description

This lowland landscape character unit is characterised by undulating topography and located in the centre of the County. The terrain gently rises to a maximum elevation of 147m O.D. at the east of the Curragh lands. The Curragh racing course and its natural grasslands represent a significant landscape feature in the area.

The generally medium sized open lands are bordered by well maintained hedgerows that contain scattered trees along some sections of the field boundaries. Although hedgerows are generally low, the undulating lands provide the potential to screen adjacent low-lying areas. The skyline to the east is defined by the Eastern Kildare Uplands and the Chair of Kildare defines the extent of visibility to the west.

Soils in the area are dominated by Grey Brown Podzolics combined with mineral soils. As a result, the area is suitable to moderately suitable for tillage, pasture, meadow and forestry.

The unit is generally perceived as being important and special in landscape terms (see Appendix 4), particularly due to the Curragh which is perceived as the most important landscape feature in the County. The road that runs through the Curragh is considered to have scenic value and the area is perceived as having significant tourism potential, however it is not considered suitable for other type of developments - except for telecommunication antennae.

8.2 Land Uses

The Curragh natural grassland represents the larger and most considerable landuse in this unit. Agricultural lands, including tillage and complex cultivation patterns, are dispersed both to the north and south of the Curragh, with a dispersed pattern of large areas of coniferous and mixed forestry. Patches of peat bog also occur to the south of this character unit.

Established large population centres such as Kildare and Newbridge, combined with other smaller settlements such as Milltown and a dispersed, relatively high density of rural housing on the outskirts of the major urban areas, are indicative of a high population density.

8.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the geology, soils and topography of the area, which largely coincide with the subsoils (i.e. quaternary geology) and landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

8.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Undulating topography

The gently undulating topography that characterises this character unit provides physical shielding. The dynamic and complex nature of undulating lands have the potential to locally enclose vistas and thus, help to provide a realistic scale and visual containment where development does not break the skyline.

- Elevated Vistas

The roads that run through the upper elevation areas of this undulating terrain allow long distance vistas to the Curragh open lands, as well as to the Northern and Southern Kildare Lowlands. These views however are interrupted along some sections by unmaintained and thus, tall hedgerows.

- Low Vegetation

The grassland, tillage fields and generally low hedgerows of this area provide similar characteristics to smooth terrain in landscape terms, and the two are often interrelated due to soil attributes. Grassland vegetation and tillage crops are usually uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas and allowing for long distance visibility.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by the presence of coniferous and mixed forests. In a similar manner to undulating topography, shelter vegetation has screening and absorbing quality in landscape terms. It can provide a natural visual barrier and also add to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

- Localised River Views

The River Liffey runs through this character unit, which is easily accessible by existing roads. Due to the undulating nature of this area, many views of the river valley are available from vantage points along the river valley. River valleys are generally visually enclosed and have very distinctive characters with a high degree of visual consistency.

9 Western Boglands

9.1 Description

This lowland landscape character unit, located to the western central part of the County, is characterised by flat topography and smooth terrain. The terrain has a high water table and it is badly drained, providing generally unstable and unproductive land. This area of the county is highly distinctive due to the existing large areas of bogland vegetation. The commonly large sized open lands are often bordered by unmaintained hedgerows, which contain scattered trees, and have the potential to partially screen adjacent lands. Nevertheless, the generally low vegetation and the even ground provide extensive long-distance visibility. The skyline to the south of this unit is defined by the Chair of Kildare Hills and the Northern Uplands define the skyline to the northeast.

Soils in the area are largely dominated by raised bog and reclaimed peat, with some areas of grey brown podzolics and complex mineral soils. The area is generally unclassified with some lands classified as suitable and other areas considered of poor suitability for tillage, pasture and being of moderate suitability for forestry.

9.2 Land Uses

The major land use in the area is peat extraction due to the largely occurring natural resource in the area (i.e. mantled peatbogs).

Although boglands dominate the landscape of this character unit, significant areas of pastureland can also be found, together with patches of tillage and non-irrigated arable lands. A complementary significant land use in the area is represented by the large coniferous forests planted in cutaway bogs and the natural revegetation occurring in set-aside cutaway areas.

Badly drained bogs and alluvial lands characterise the unit, which has remained unattractive to

agricultural settlement. As a result, the area is thinly populated. However, small settlements such as Allenwood or Robertstown, combined with existing clusters of scattered rural houses (e.g. Lullymore, Blackwood) can be found. Although there is a low population density, the recreation and tourism potential of the area is recognised.

9.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the soils and topography of the area, which largely coincide with the subsoils (i.e. quaternary geology), geology and landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

Critical Landscape Factors

- **Smooth Terrain**

Smooth terrain and the generally gentle topography and landform that characterised this landscape character unit, allows vistas over long distances without disruption. Consequently, development can have a disproportionate visual impact in such terrain, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed by the planar terrain.

- **Low Vegetation**

The grassland, moorland and bog type grasses that are commonly found in this unit, provide similar characteristics to smooth terrain in landscape terms. Bogland type vegetation and grassland are usually uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long distance visibility. Existing low hedgerows around field boundaries partially screen the adjacent low-lying land parcels. Nevertheless, the commonly peat bog vegetation proves unable to visually absorb new development.

- **Shelter Vegetation**

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by the presence of large coniferous plantations and scattered trees that grow on field hedgerows. Shelter absorbing quality in landscape terms; it can provide a natural visual barrier and add to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

Two of the Grand Canal feeders can be found in this character unit with local roads running parallel to the water corridor and being easily accessible. As a result many views of the canal are available from the local roads and from viewing points located along the corridor. Water corridors are generally visually enclosed areas of very distinctive character with a high degree of visual consistency.

10 Eastern Transition Lands

10.1 Description

This transitional landscape character unit, located between the uplands and lowlands to the east of the County, is characterised by undulating topography. The River Liffey bisects the unit north and south. The lands are generally of medium size and regular pattern, with commonly well-maintained hedgerows. Gorse and natural vegetation occur at some areas of this unit.

The terrain gently rises from the lowland areas to the hilltops of the Eastern Kildare Uplands. The land undulates through a series of hilltops, the main ones being: Old Kilcullen Hill (179m O.D.) Bullhill (174m O.D.), Mullacash Hill (171m O.D.), Nine Tree Hill (168m O.D.) and Carrighill (166m O.D.). The elevated vantage points along the local roads provide long-distance views of the Kildare lowlands. The skyline to the east of this unit is defined by the Eastern Uplands, distant views including the neighbouring Wicklow Mountains, define the extent of visibility. The hilltops of the Chair of Kildare Hills partially define the skyline to the west.

Soils in the area are composed of grey brown podzolics and complexes (mainly mineral soils). As a result, the area is classified as widely to moderately suitable for tillage, pasture and forestry. The area is generally perceived as being important and special in landscape terms, particularly along the River Liffey valley. Preferred scenic drives are located within this unit, as part of the drives from Naas and Kilcullen to Ballymore Eustace. The unit is perceived as having some development potential to the south, along the primary national road.

10.2 Land Uses

The major and most extensive landuse in the area is pasture, with patches of non-irrigated agricultural lands (mainly tillage). Small clusters of naturally occurring vegetation together with some coniferous forests and woodlands can also be found.

Existing large towns, such as Kilcullen, and smaller settlements (e.g. Kill, Narraghmore, Ballitore, Timolin, etc.) combined with a high density of dispersed rural houses and farm structures are indicative of a relatively high rural population density.

10.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the geology, and topography of the area, which largely coincide with the subsoils (i.e. quaternary geology), soils and landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

10.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Undulating topography

Undulating topography, which characterises this unit, provides a physical shielding within the lee of hills and thus, can conceal relatively large new features on the lower-lying lands.

Furthermore, the dynamic and complex nature of undulating land encloses local vistas, rendering development unobtrusive on the overall landscape.

- Slopes

Sloping land often provides an area with its character and intensifies the visual prominence of any feature over greater distances. The gentle slopes of the hills in this character unit start to define the visual boundary of the adjacent lowland areas (further defined by the Eastern Uplands) and provides an increased potential for development to penetrate the ridgelines when viewed from local roads and villages in the area.

- Low Vegetation

The grassland, tillage fields and generally low hedgerows of this area are usually uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long distance visibility. Existing well maintained hedgerows partially screen the lowest land parcels.

Nevertheless, the commonly low vegetation proves unable to visually absorb new development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by coniferous plantations and the presence of scattered trees that grow on field hedgerows. In a similar manner to undulating topography, shelter vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms. It can provide a natural visual barrier and also adds to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

- Localised River Valley Views

This character unit is bisected by the River Liffey valley. River valleys are visually enclosed and highly localised areas of distinctive character with a high degree of visual consistency.

Due to the undulating nature of this area, many views of the river valley are available from vantage points along the local roads.

11 River Liffey

11.1 Description

The Liffey Valley is located on the north-eastern quarter of the County, flowing in a north-east to south-east pattern and its waters winding along the central lowlands. Many towns have become well established along the riverbanks, such as Leixlip, Celbridge, Clane, Newbridge, Kilcullen and Ballymore Eustace, where the River Liffey flows into Poulaphouca Reservoir.

This lowland unit, characterised mostly by smooth terrain and low vegetation, has extensive open mountain views (i.e. the Chair of Kildare to the west and the Eastern Uplands to the east; distant views including the neighbouring Wicklow Mountains).

Soils in the area are classified as Regosols (of alluvial origin) and are widely suitable for tillage, pasture, meadow and forestry. Generally, the river valley is identifiable by its floodplain levels and slopes of naturally occurring shrubs and trees with a slow progression to grasslands. At some sections, pasturelands directly occur on the floodplains, whilst conifer and deciduous forest occupy some other

parcels. Large tillage fields with few inner boundaries are also common in this area, with well-trimmed and thus low hedgerows that allow for long-distance visibility.

The river valley lands gently undulate as it runs through the upland areas of the County. Along this section, deciduous woodlands are commonly found on the gentle slopes that rise from the valley. This landscape character unit is perceived as having significant landscape value, and as being both special in landscape terms and sensitive to development. It is also perceived as having high amenity value, preferred scenic drives running along its corridor.

The river valley is considered to be a landmark of the County - particularly between Kilcullen and Ballymore Eustace. The rich mix of water and land features along the valley and the extent of the corridor, characterise this area of the County.

11.2 Land Uses

The fertile Liffey Valley area is well drained providing good soil conditions and the potential for a variety of agricultural and horticultural uses. A large proportion of the river shore is occupied by natural vegetation. Although pasturelands generally occupy the riverbanks, there are also a significant number of large tillage fields.

Small parcels of coniferous and deciduous forests also occur along the river valley. The local population of County Kildare is largely concentrated along the Liffey Valley. Major urban centres include Leixlip, Celbridge, Clane, and Newbridge. Smaller settlements can also be found (e.g. Kilcullen, Ballymore Eustace, Straffan, Athgarvan). Scattered houses and farm structures are dispersed in the rural hinterland. The Liffey Valley embraces a high population density.

11.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the subsoils of the area, which largely coincide with the landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

11.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Smooth Terrain

Smooth terrain and the generally gentle topography and landform that characterise this landscape character unit, allow vistas over long distances without disruption along the river corridor. As a result development on the shores of the river can have a disproportionate visual impact, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed.

- Undulating topography

Undulating topography is presented at some sections of this character unit (particularly to the southeast) where the land gently rises at floodplain slopes. This provides a physical shielding and has the potential to visually enclose the built form within the river valley, where it does not break the skyline.

- Low Vegetation

The grassland, tillage fields and generally low hedgerows along the river corridor are commonly uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, allowing long distance visibility and proving unable to visually absorb new development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by the presence of natural and native woodland that grows on the floodplains of the river, as well as by conifer plantation in adjacent lands. In a similar manner to undulating topography, shelter vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms. It can provide a natural visual barrier as well as add to the complexity of a vista.

- Localised River Views

This character unit follows the path of the Liffey River, which is easily accessible by the local roads. Many views of the river valley are available from the local roads and from vantage points and bridges located along the water corridor.

12 River Barrow

12.1 Description

The Barrow Valley is an extensive river valley flowing in a north south pattern along the western boundary of the County. The river valley is easily accessible by local roads and many towns have become well

established along the riverbanks, such as Monasterevin and Athy.

The river valley is characterised by its floodplain levels and gentle slopes of deciduous trees with a slow progression to pasture lands. Running along the Barrow Way, the riverbanks are predominately grassland, although sometimes there is a transition of natural vegetation. Medium to large tillage fields with hedgerow boundaries are also common to the river valley. The terrain is generally even with long-distance views of mountains – the Chair of Kildare hills and the Eastern Uplands, and the Wicklow Mountains being discernible to the east.

Soils in the area are composed of complexes (mainly mineral soils) of alluvial origin. They are classified as suitable to moderately suitable for tillage, pasture and meadow and suitable for forestry.

12.2 Land Uses

The fertile valley area is well drained providing mixed uses such as agricultural and horticultural crops. A large proportion of the river shore is occupied by natural vegetation. Although pasturelands generally occupy the riverbanks, there are a significant number of tillage fields occurring adjacent to the riverbanks. Small parcels of coniferous and deciduous forests also occur along the valley.

The local population is concentrated in the towns of Monasterevin and Athy, however, smaller settlements can also be found. Scattered houses and farm structures are dispersed in the rural hinterland. The settlement pattern of the Barrow valley area is indicative of a relatively high population density.

12.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the soils of the area, which largely coincide with the landform, and are further confirmed by the existing land uses.

12.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Smooth Terrain

Smooth terrain and the generally gentle topography and landform that characterise this landscape character unit, allow long-distances views of the water corridor and the surrounding environs. It is

noteworthy that development on the river shores can have a disproportionate visual impact as a result of such terrain, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed.

- Low Vegetation

The grassland, tillage fields and generally low hedgerows of this area provide similar characteristics to smooth terrain in landscape terms. Grassland vegetation and tillage crops are commonly uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long distance visibility. Existing low hedgerows partially screen the lowest land parcels. Nevertheless, the common low vegetation proves unable to visually absorb new development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by the presence of natural and native woodland that grows on the floodplains of the river. In a similar manner to undulating topography, shelter vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms. It can provide a natural visual barrier and also add to the complexity of a vista, breaking it up to provide scale and containment for built forms.

- Localised River Views

This character unit follows the path of the Barrow River, which is easily accessible by road. Due to the low lying nature of this area, many views of the river valley are available from the local roads and from viewing points located along the valley trail.

River valleys are generally visually enclosed and highly localised areas of very distinctive character with a high degree of visual consistency.

13 Water Corridors - Grand Canal

13.1 Description

The Grand Canal is an extensive water corridor that flows in an east to south-west direction through the County. The canal corridor is divided at Sallins into the Naas and Corbally Branch, and is further divided in three branches at Robertstown: the Milltown Feeder, the Barrow Line and the continuation of the Grand Canal into the neighbouring County Offaly. The canal corridor is easily accessible by local roads

and a number of towns have been established along the canal banks such as Allenwood, Robertstown and Rathangan.

Smooth terrain and even topography characterise the canal corridor which generally progress into pasturelands and boglands, although natural vegetation occurs at some of the sections. The corridor and its adjacent lands have been landscaped and enhanced along the sections where the canal crosses urban areas.

Canal locks are distinctive features of this water corridor. Long-distance views of the canal corridors can be obtained from existing bridges and distant views of the County uplands (such as Red Hill and Allen Hill) can also be gained from certain vantage points.

13.2 Land Uses

The canal provides drainage to adjacent lands, rendering them a higher potential for mixed use. Nevertheless, grasslands are a common progression of the canal shores pasture being the major landuse along the water corridor. Where the canal runs through bogland areas, bog type grasses and natural vegetation can be found in lands adjacent to it. Large tillage fields also occur at some areas, as well as coniferous plantations and mixed forests.

Small settlements such as Allenwood and Robertstown, together with a significant number, however dispersed pattern, of scattered houses on the canal shores, are indicative of a relatively low population density.

13.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the ecological designation of the canal as a proposed Natural Heritage Area by National Parks and Wildlife.

13.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Smooth Terrain

Smooth terrain and the generally gentle landform that characterised this landscape character unit, allow vistas over long distances without disruption, where the canal flows in a in a straight-line direction. Consequently, development can have a disproportionate visual impact along this water

corridor, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed by the existing topography.

- Low Vegetation

The grassland, and bogland grasses that occur at the banks of the canal corridor are low and commonly uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing long distance visibility. Thereby proving unable to visually absorb new development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at this unit by the presence of natural vegetation that grows along the shores of the canal, as well as by coniferous and mixed plantations adjacent to the water corridor. Shelter or tall vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms, as it provides a natural visual barrier as well as adding to the complexity of a vista.

- Localised Canal Views

This character unit follows the path of the Grand Canal, which is easily accessible at many points from the local roads – and sometimes runs parallel to this landscape feature. Consequently, many views of the canal are available, both from the local roads and from viewing points on bridges located along the canal corridor. Water corridors are generally visually enclosed with a highly localised areas of very distinctive character and high degree of visual consistency.

14 Water Corridors - Royal Canal

14.1 Description

The Royal Canal flows in an east to west direction along the northern boundary of the County. The canal corridor flows through Leixlip, Maynooth and Kilcock and continues into the neighbouring County Offaly. Local roads run parallel to the corridor along some sections.

Smooth terrain and even topography characterise the canal corridor, which generally progresses into pasturelands, although natural vegetation occurs at some of the sections and tillage fields can also be found in adjacent lands. The lands along the corridor have been landscaped and enhanced where the

canal crosses urban settlements. Canal locks are distinctive features of this water corridor.

Long-distance views of the canal corridor and its surrounding environs can be obtained from local roads and existing bridges.

14.2 Land Uses

The canal provides drainage to adjacent lands, increasing the potential for mixed use. Nevertheless, grasslands are a common progression of the canal shores. Although pasture is the major landuse along the water corridor, large tillage fields also occur at some areas, as well as coniferous plantations and mixed forests.

Large urban settlements such as Leixlip and Maynooth, together with a significant number of scattered houses along the canal shores, are indicative of a relatively high population density.

14.3 Boundary Determinants

The boundaries of this unit are directly derived from the ecological designation of the canal as a proposed Natural Heritage Area by the DoEHLG.

14.4 Critical Landscape Factors

- Smooth Terrain

Smooth terrain and the generally gentle landform that characterise this landscape character unit, allow vistas over long distances without disruption where the canal flows in a straight-line direction. Consequently, development can have a disproportionate visual impact along this water corridor, due to an inherent inability to be visually absorbed by the existing topography.

- Low Vegetation

The grasslands that generally occur at the banks of the canal corridor are low and commonly uniform in appearance, failing to break up vistas, and allowing for long distance visibility. Thereby proving unable to visually absorb new development.

- Shelter Vegetation

Shelter vegetation is represented at some stretches of this unit by the presence of natural vegetation growing along the shores of the canal, as well as by

coniferous plantations adjacent to the water corridor. Shelter or tall vegetation has a shielding and absorbing quality in landscape terms, as it provides a natural visual barrier as well as adding to the complexity of a vista.

- Localised Canal Views

This character unit follows the path of the Royal Canal, which is easily accessible at many points from the local roads – and sometimes runs parallel to this landscape feature. Consequently, many views of the canal are available, both from the local roads and from viewing points on bridges located along the canal corridor. Water corridors are generally visually enclosed, with a highly localised areas of very distinctive character and high degree of visual consistency.