



Aultmore Wind Farm Redesign

Technical Appendix 6.1: LVIA Methodology

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Appendix 6.1 Methodology

A.1 Introduction

"Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and people's views and visual amenity." (GLVIA3, paragraph 1.1). Wherever possible, identified effects are quantified, but the nature of landscape and visual assessment requires interpretation using professional judgement. In order to provide a level of consistency to the assessment, the prediction of magnitude and assessment of significance of the residual landscape and visual effects have been based on pre-defined criteria.

The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition) (GLVIA3) states that *"professional judgement is a very important part of the LVIA"* (paragraph 2.23) and that *"in all cases there is a need for the judgements that are made to be reasonable and based on clear and transparent methods so that the reasoning applied at different stages can be traced and examined by others."* (paragraph 2.24). It goes on at paragraph 3.32 to state that *"there are no hard and fast rules about what effects should be deemed 'significant' but LVIAs should always distinguish clearly between what are considered to be the significant and non-significant effects."*

Landscape and Visual Assessments are separate, though linked processes which GLVIA3 notes are *"related but very different considerations"*. The assessment of the potential effect on the landscape is carried out as an effect on the environmental resource (i.e. the landscape). Visual effects are assessed as an inter-related effect on people.

Landscape effects derive from changes in the physical landscape elements which may give rise to changes in its distinctive character and how this is experienced, including consideration of aesthetic and perceptual aspects.

Visual effects relate to changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people's responses to the changes and to the overall effects with respect to visual amenity.

A.2 Establishing the Baseline

The **baseline** for consideration of landscape and visual effects is evaluated through desk study and site work and is the current situation at the time of the assessment, unless noted otherwise. Operational developments and those under construction are considered as part of the baseline and included as part of the assessment of landscape and visual effects.

The **future baseline** is considered to be changes to the landscape which are considered certain or likely to happen – including consented proposals which are not yet present in the landscape but are expected to be constructed. These may or may not be included as part of the landscape and visual baseline depending on individual project circumstances and the approach and reasoning is set out within the assessment.

A.3 Landscape Effects

The starting point for any assessment is a desk-based assessment of published landscape studies, which may include landscape character assessments, sensitivity and capacity studies and/or landscape designation reviews. These documents are listed in the assessment references and relevant extracts may be included as appendices where this is judged appropriate.

The landscape effects of the proposed development are considered against the key characteristics of the receiving landscape. The degree to which the proposed development changes *"distinct and recognisable pattern of elements, or characteristics, in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse"* ('An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', Natural England, 2014), enables a judgement to be made as to the significance of the effect in landscape character terms.



Direct and indirect landscape effects are defined in GLVIA3. Direct effects may be defined as *resulting “directly from the development itself”* (paragraph 3.22). An indirect (or secondary) effect is one that results *“from consequential change resulting from the development”* (paragraph 3.22) and is often produced away from the site of the proposed development or as a result of a complex pathway or secondary association. The direct or physical landscape effects of the proposed development would generally be limited to within the planning application boundary. The indirect landscape effects are concerned with the visual effects and relate to effects associated with the introduction of the development seen in the context of the existing landscape and visual character of the view.

In order to reach an understanding of the effects of development upon the landscape resource it is necessary to consider different aspects of the landscape baseline including:

- **Landscape Fabric/Elements:** The individual features of the landscape, such as hills, valleys, woods, hedges, tree cover, vegetation, buildings and roads for example which can usually be described and quantified.
- **Landscape key characteristics:** The particularly notable elements or combinations of elements which make a particular contribution to defining or describing the character of an area, which may include experiential characteristics such as wildness and tranquillity.

The **sensitivity** (high, medium, low) of the landscape to a particular development is considered on a case-by-case basis and considers the susceptibility of the landscape, which varies depending on the type of development proposed and the particular site location, and the landscape value (identified as national, regional, or community). As stated in GLVIA3, *“LVIA sensitivity is similar to the concept of landscape sensitivity used in the wider arena of landscape planning, but is not the same”*.

Landscape value: The importance attached to a landscape, often used as a basis for designation or recognition which expresses national or local authority consensus, because of its special qualities/attributes. The factors which are considered in landscape include aesthetic or perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness or cultural associations as well as recreational/community value, conservation interests, landscape character and condition and representativeness/rarity.

Landscape susceptibility according to GLVIA3 means *“the ability of the landscape to accommodate the proposed Development without undue consequences for maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies”*. Judgements on landscape susceptibility (high, medium, low) include references to both the physical and aesthetic characteristics and the potential scope for mitigation.

Susceptibility of landscape character areas are influenced by their characteristics and are often considered (though often recorded as ‘sensitivity’ rather than susceptibility) within landscape character assessments and capacity studies.

Susceptibility of designated landscapes is influenced by the nature of the special qualities and purposes of designation and/or the valued elements, qualities or characteristics, indicating the degree to which these may be unduly affected by the development proposed.

Sensitivity is judged taking into account the component judgements about the value and susceptibility of the receptor as illustrated by the table below. Where sensitivity is judged to lie between levels, an intermediate assessment will be adopted.

Table 1: Landscape Sensitivity

		Susceptibility		
		High	Medium	Low
Value	National	High	High/Medium	Medium
	Regional	High/Medium	Medium	Medium/Low
	Community	Medium	Medium/Low	Low



The **magnitude of landscape change** arising from the proposed development at any particular location is assessed in terms of its size or scale, geographic extent of the area or receptor that is influenced and its duration and reversibility.

The **scale** of the change takes account of:

- degree of loss or alteration to key landscape features/elements; characteristics; and for designated areas – special qualities and/or purposes of designation;
- distance from the development; and
- landscape context to the development.

The approach to assessing effects on landscape character is to consider the key characteristics for the Landscape Character Type (LCT) within which the proposed development is located (host) and the adjacent LCT's (non-host) and identify which of these the proposed development would affect. For the host LCTs, a large scale change in landscape character is likely to occur where key characteristics would be lost or substantially changed. Where particular views are a key characteristic of a landscape type, large or medium scale landscape character effects may occur where the proposed development becomes a key feature of those views. A similar approach applies to designated landscapes, for which the effects on the defined purposes of designation and special qualities are considered.

Having established the size/scale of change (large, medium, small, negligible) to the landscape baseline, the geographic **extent** of the change can be identified (wide, intermediate, localised or limited) and a judgement made as to the degree of change for each landscape receptor.

Duration and reversibility can be linked depending on the nature of the development. Reversibility is a judgement about the ability and practicality of the proposed development to be reversible (such as wind farms which are predominantly reversible), partially reversible to something similar (such as mineral extraction¹) or a permanent change in the landscape (such as housing). Duration reflects how long the change will last. The duration of the change would be considered short term when lasting less than 2 years; medium term when lasting between 2 and 10 years; or long term when lasting between 10 and 25 years, and permanent for more than 25 years.

Magnitude is considered taking into account the three contributory factors as illustrated by the diagrams included in section A.5 below.

A.4 Visual Effects

In order to identify the significance of a visual effect it is necessary to establish the relative sensitivity of the viewers and the magnitude of the change they experience. In this case sensitivity is a combination of both susceptibility of the viewer to the proposed change and the value of the views.

Those living within view of the scheme are usually regarded as the highest susceptibility group as well as those engaged in outdoor pursuits for whom landscape experience is the primary objective. The susceptibility of potential visual receptors will also vary depending on the activity of the receptor. For visual receptors susceptibility and value are closely linked - the most valued views are also likely to be those where viewer's expectations will be highest.

The **value** of public views, which is the focus of GLVIA3, is identified as national, regional or community and will vary depending on the nature, location and context of the view and the recognised importance of the view. Considerations include cultural associations; designation or policy protection; views of or from landmarks; and/or the scenic quality of the view. The value attributed relates to the value of the view, e.g. a National Trail is nationally valued for access, but not always for the available views from every section.

Visual receptor **susceptibility** is defined as in accordance with the criteria below.

¹ GLVIA3 page 91, paragraph 5.52



- High - Local residents; users of outdoor recreation focussed on the appreciation of views including footpaths, beauty spots and picnic areas; people experiencing views to or from important features of physical, visual, cultural or historic interest.
- Medium - Local road users and travellers on trains. People engaged in outdoor recreation with some appreciation of the landscape e.g. road cycling, nature conservation, golf and water based recreation.
- Low - Workers, users of facilities and commercial buildings (indoors) experiencing views from buildings. Road and rail users on fast moving commuting or trunk routes. Visual receptors where views are incidental to the activity and/or location.

Sensitivity is judged taking into account the component judgements about the value and susceptibility of the receptor as illustrated by the table below. Where sensitivity is judged to lie between levels, an intermediate assessment will be adopted.

Table 2: Visual Sensitivity

		Susceptibility		
		High	Medium	Low
Value	National	High	High/Medium	Medium
	Regional	High/Medium	High/Medium	Medium/Low
	Community	High/Medium	Medium	Low

The **magnitude of visual change** arising from the proposed development at any particular location is assessed in terms of its size or scale (large, medium, small, negligible), geographic extent of the area or receptor that is influenced (wide, localised, limited) and its duration (short, medium, long, permanent).

The representative viewpoints are used as ‘samples’ on which to base judgements of the scale of effects on visual receptors. The wider extent of the effect and its duration are not captured in the viewpoint analysis (as a viewpoint cannot capture these factors for an entire route or area). As duration and extent are necessary considerations in determining magnitude of change; magnitude and significance judgements are provided for visual receptors and not for all representative viewpoints. The exceptions to this are specific viewpoints – where people visiting that location to look at the view are assessed as a visual receptor group.

With the exception of specific viewpoints, each route and receptor group will encompass a range of possible views, which might vary from no view of the development to very clear, close views. Therefore effects are described in such a way as to identify where views towards the development are likely to arise and what the scale and duration and **extent** (wide, intermediate, Localised, Limited) of those views are likely to be. In some cases this will be further informed by a nearby viewpoint and in others it will be informed with reference to ZTV studies, aerial photography and site visits. Each of these individual effects are then considered together in order to reach a judgement of the effects on the visual receptors along that route, or in that place.

The **scale of effect** arising from the proposed development at any particular viewpoint reflects the degree to which the nature of the views from that location would be changed and is taking into account:

- The distance of the viewpoint from the development;
- the degree to which the development is visible or screened;
- the angle of view in relation to main receptor activity or main focus of the view;
- the horizontal and vertical field of view occupied by the development; and
- the extent and nature of other built development visible.



The approach to assessing effects on views is to consider the full 360 degree view from any given receptor – not just those towards the development and/or shown in visualisations. It is assumed that the change would be seen in clear visibility and the assessment is carried out on that basis. Where there are operational (and consented) developments considered as part of the baseline, the visual effects consider the effects of adding the proposed development to that baseline. Where appropriate, comment may be made on lighting and weather conditions.

Duration reflects how long the change will last and are rated in the same way as described above for landscape effects. The effects as a result of the proposed development would be considered short term when lasting less than 2 years; medium term when lasting between 2 and 10 years; or long term when lasting between 10 and 25 years, and permanent for more than 25 years. For visual receptors moving through the landscape (e.g. road and rail users), the length of their journey during which they would see the development is reflected in the judgement of the geographic extent of effects.

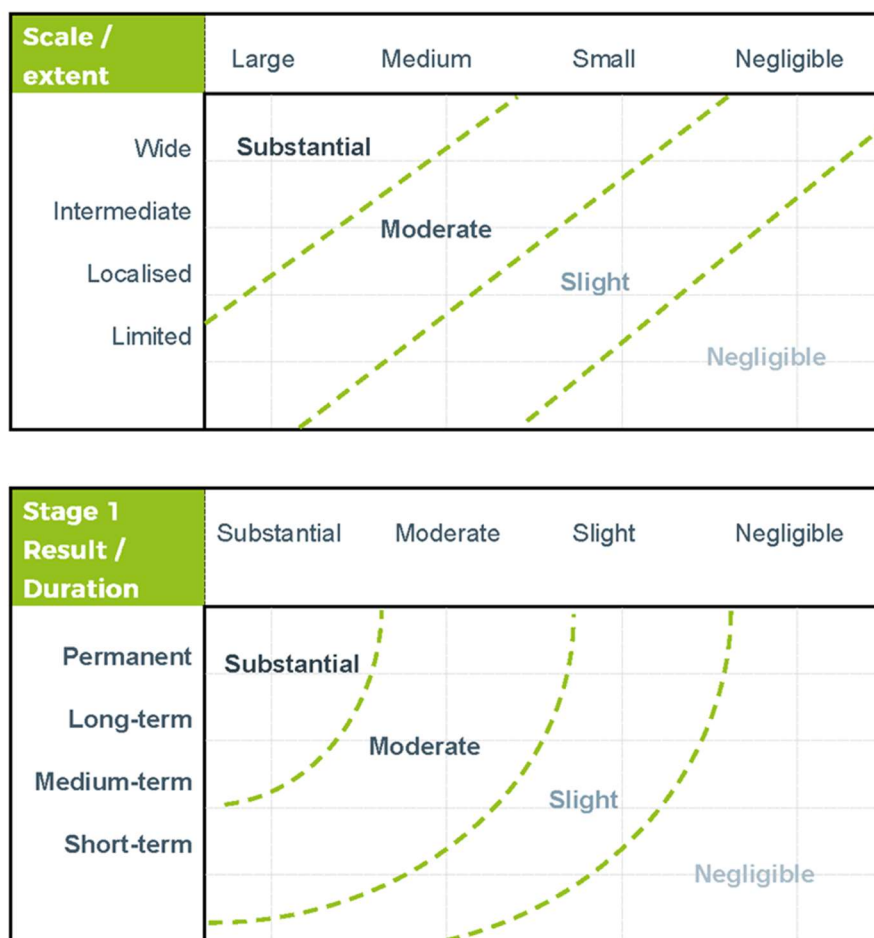
Magnitude is considered taking into account the three contributory factors as illustrated by the diagrams included in section A.5 below.

A.5 Magnitude of Landscape and Visual Change

Scale of effect is the first factor in determining magnitude; which may be higher if the effect is particularly widespread and/or long lasting, or lower if it is constrained in geographic extent and/or timescale. The tables below illustrate how this judgement is considered as a two-step process. Firstly, scale and extent are considered, for which the outcomes are illustrated by the first part of the table; the second part of the table illustrates the influence of duration on this initial judgement. Where magnitude is judged to lie between levels, an intermediate assessment will be adopted.



Table 3: Magnitude of Change



A.6 Significance of Landscape and Visual Effects

The significance of any identified landscape or visual effect is assessed as major, moderate, minor or negligible. These categories are based on the consideration of sensitivity with the predicted magnitude of change. The table below is not used as a prescriptive tool and illustrates the typical outcomes, allowing for the exercise of professional judgement. In some instances a particular parameter may be considered as having a determining effect on the analysis.

Table 4: Significance

		Magnitude of Change			
		Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Receptor Sensitivity	High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Minor
	Medium	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor/Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Negligible

Where the effect has been classified as Major or Major/Moderate this is considered to be equivalent to likely significant effects referred to in the EIA Regulations. Where 'Moderate' effects are predicted, professional judgement will be applied to ensure that the potential for significant effects arising has been thoroughly considered.



A.7 Beneficial /Adverse

Landscape and visual effects can be beneficial or adverse and in some instances may be considered neutral. Neutral effects are those which overall are neither adverse nor positive but may incorporate a combination of both. Whether an effect is beneficial, neutral or adverse is identified based on professional judgement. GLVIA 3rd edition indicates at paragraph 2.15 that this is a “*particularly challenging*” aspect of assessment, especially in the context of a changing landscape.

A.8 Cumulative Effects

In a broad generic sense, cumulative impacts “*result from the incremental changes caused by other past, present or reasonably foreseeable actions together with the project*”². However, an assessment of cumulative effects should focus on whether there are any potential cumulative impacts which are reasonably foreseeable and which are likely to influence the decision making of the proposed development, rather than an assessment of every potential cumulative effect³, which in practice means focussing on other nearby development proposals and the effects that might arise from the combined influence of those developments on landscape and visual receptors.

As recommended by the NatureScot cumulative guidance, this assessment focusses on the “*additional cumulative change which would be brought about by the proposed development*”⁴.

As noted above, operational developments are included in the baseline, consented developments which are expected to be constructed, form part of the future baseline and will be included as such in the main assessment. However, where there is some uncertainty regarding the future construction of consented developments, they may be considered as the first scenario of the cumulative assessment. For this project all of the consented wind farms in the study area for the project are considered likely to be built.

Proposals in planning are considered where there is good reason to assume that the timing of decisions may be similar and significant cumulative effects are likely. The assessment of effects is considered within the cumulative assessment.

Unless there is good reason to include them, proposals in scoping are usually noted but not considered within the cumulative assessment, as there is no certainty that these proposals will progress to planning submissions and the nature of the proposed schemes may be subject to change. For this assessment Teindland wind farm is considered in the cumulative assessment due to its proximity to the site.

The assessment is based on the same landscape and visual baseline and receptor groups as the main LVIA, and the methodology is also the same in terms of forming and expressing judgements.

Cumulative effects on landscape receptors arise from combined direct and/or indirect effects on the same receptor – such as two developments within the same character area; or one development within, and one visible from, a designated area.

Cumulative effects on visual receptors arise either from two (or more) developments both being visible from the same place; or from sequential views as people travel.

In order to simplify what may otherwise be a complex assessment, the following approaches are also used:

- The cumulative assessment considers scenarios within which developments may be ‘grouped’ - for instance two nearby cumulative proposals may be considered in one scenario if it is considered that the cumulative effects arising if one or both are developed are likely to be similar.

² GLVIA3 page 120, paragraph 7.1 quoting Hyder, 1999 ‘*Guidelines for the assessment of indirect and cumulative impacts as well as impact interactions*’

³ GLVIA3 page 121 paragraph 7.5.

⁴ Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments, NatureScot, 2021.



- Receptors judged to receive Negligible or Slight-Negligible magnitude effects are not considered for cumulative effects on the basis that any significant effects arising would primarily be caused by the cumulative developments and would be unlikely to be contributed to by the proposed development.
- Only those receptors judged likely to experience effects from the cumulative development(s) being considered within a given scenario are described within that scenario.

Development scenarios considered within the cumulative assessment are set out in the LVIA chapter.

Qualitative assessment of design and aesthetic considerations arising as a result of cumulative development, and/or considerations set out within local guidance provided in relation to cumulative development, is also provided where relevant.

A.9 Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
CLVIA	Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
Cumulative Effects	Cumulative effects are the additional effects arising from changes caused by a development in conjunction with other past, present or reasonably foreseeable actions.
Direct Effect	A direct (or primary) effect may be defined as an effect that is directly attributable to the development. ⁵
GLVIA3	'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition', published jointly by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2013.
Indirect Effect	An indirect (or secondary) effect is an effect that results indirectly from the proposed project as a consequence of the direct effect, often occurring away from the site, or as a result of a sequence of interrelationships or a complex pathway. They may be separated by distance or in time from the source of the effects. ⁶
Key Characteristics	Those combinations of elements which are particularly important to the current character of the landscape and help to give an area its particularly distinctive sense of place.
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
Landscape Capacity	The amount of change which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate without significant detrimental effects on its character. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of change proposed.
Landscape Character	The distinct and recognisable pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. ⁷
Landscape Character Areas	These are single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. ⁸
Landscape Character Types	These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of

⁵ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p155

⁶ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p156

⁷ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p156

⁸ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p157



Term	Definition
	geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement pattern, and perceptual and aesthetic attributes.
Landscape Effects	Effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right. ⁹
Landscape Elements	Individual components which make up the landscape such as trees and hedges.
Landscape Features	Particularly prominent or eye-catching elements, like tree clumps, church towers or wooded skylines.
Landscape Quality or Condition	This is a measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which a typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements. ¹⁰
Landscape Receptor	Defined aspects of the landscape resource that have the potential to be affected by a proposal.
Landscape Resource	The combination of elements that contribute to landscape context, character and value.
Landscape Value	The relative value or importance attached to different landscapes by society on account of their landscape qualities. ¹¹
Level of Effect	Determined through the combination of sensitivity of the receptor and the proposed magnitude of change brought about by the development.
Magnitude (of effect)	A term that combines judgements about the size and scale of the effect, the extent of the area over which it occurs, whether it is reversible or irreversible and whether it is short or long term in duration.
Mitigation	Measures including any process, activity or design to avoid, reduce, remedy or compensate for adverse environmental impact or effects of a development.
Photomontage	A visualisation which superimposes an image of a proposed development upon a photograph or series of photographs.
Residential Visual Amenity	A collective term describing the views and visual amenity from a residential property, relating to the type, nature, extent and quality of views that may be experienced from the property and its 'domestic curtilage' including gardens and access driveway. Residential Visual Amenity is only one component of the overall Residential Amenity, others being for example noise, shadow flicker and access amongst others.
Residual Effects	Potential environmental effects remaining after mitigation.
Sense of Place	The essential character and spirit of an area: <i>genius loci</i> literally means 'spirit of the place'.
Sensitivity	A term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor. ¹²
Significant Effects	It is a requirement of the EIA Regulations to determine the likely significant effects of development on the environment which should relate to the level of an effect and the type of effect. Where possible significant effects should be mitigated. The significance of an effect gives an indication as to the degree of importance (based on the magnitude of the effect and sensitivity of the receptor) that should be attached to the impact described.

⁹ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p157

¹⁰ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p157

¹¹ The Landscape Institute; Technical Guidance Note 02/21 Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations

¹² The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p157



Term	Definition
	Whether an effect should be considered significant is not absolute and requires the application of professional judgement.
Type or Nature of Effect	Whether an effect is direct, indirect, temporary or permanent, positive (beneficial), neutral or negative (adverse) or cumulative.
Visual amenity	Value of a particular place in terms of what is seen by visual receptors taking account of all available views and the total visual experience.
Visual Effect	Effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people. ¹³
Visual Receptors	Individuals and/or defined groups of people who have the potential to be affected by a proposal.
Visualisation	Computer simulation, photomontage or other technique to illustrate the appearance of a development. ¹⁴
Wildness	A quality of appearing to be remote, inaccessible and rugged with little evidence of human influence.
Wireframe or Wireline	A computer generated line drawing of the DTM (Digital Terrain Model) and the proposed development from a known location.
Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)	Area within which a proposed development may have an influence or an effect on visual amenity. ¹⁵

¹³ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p158

¹⁴ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p158

¹⁵ The Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*; Spon; 2013; p158

