



## Comhairle Contae Chill Mhantáin Wicklow County Council

16no. residential units at:

Former Central Garage site,  
Parnell Rd., Bray, Co. Wicklow

### Visual Impact Assessment



*16no Units at former Central Garage Site, Parnell Road, Bray*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose of the Assessment

This Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared in support of the proposed redevelopment of the former Central Garage site on Parnell Road, Bray, County Wicklow.

The purpose of the assessment is to examine the likely visual effects arising from the proposed development and to establish whether the proposed building can be appropriately integrated into its existing urban and architectural context.

Particular attention is given to the relationship between the proposal and the surrounding historic townscape, including Brighton Terrace, Old Brighton Terrace, Main Street and Brighton Hall.

The assessment considers both the visual change arising from the redevelopment of the existing site and the potential effect of that change upon the character and appreciation of the surrounding built environment.

### 1.2 Scope of the Assessment

The assessment considers:

- the existing visual character of the site;
- the existing character of the surrounding townscape;
- the architectural and heritage sensitivity of the surrounding buildings;
- the proposed building's scale and massing;
- the proposed roof forms;
- the proposed materials and architectural expression;
- the proposed landscape and boundary treatment;
- views from the surrounding public realm;
- the relationship with Brighton Terrace;
- the relationship with Brighton Hall;
- the relationship with Old Brighton Terrace;
- the wider townscape relationship; and
- the overall magnitude and significance of the visual change.

The assessment is intended to be read in conjunction with the architectural drawings, landscape proposals and accompanying Heritage & Conservation Report.

### 1.3 Assessment Approach

The assessment considers visual effects in terms of the relationship between the existing environment and the proposed development. Emphasis is placed on the proximity and sensitivity of visual receptors, the degree of visibility of the proposed development, its perceived scale and massing, and the extent to which the architectural and landscape design assists integration.

The assessment also takes account of the distinction between visual change and visual harm. A development may result in a noticeable visual change without necessarily resulting in an adverse effect upon the character or quality of the townscape.

## 2.0 SITE AND VISUAL CONTEXT

### 2.1 Existing Site

The site comprises the former Central Garage site on Parnell Road. As noted, the site of the proposed development is a previously developed back-land site accommodating a warehouse building and ancillary structures associated with its former commercial use. The existing structures are utilitarian in character.

The site is therefore visually distinct from the more architecturally coherent historic buildings within the surrounding townscape. Redevelopment provides an opportunity to replace the existing utilitarian structures with a more considered architectural and landscape response. The existing condition provides an important consideration in assessing the proposal because the development involves the redevelopment of an established urban site rather than development of an undeveloped landscape.



Fig. 1 – Existing Site

### 2.2 Existing Urban Setting

The surrounding area contains a mixture of architectural periods and building types. The historic development includes Victorian and earlier residential terraces, while the wider area also contains commercial and more utilitarian buildings.

The Conservation Report identifies Brighton Terrace immediately west of the site and Brighton Hall in proximity, with Old Brighton Terrace and Main Street forming part of the wider historic context. These historic elements are set within an evolving urban environment that includes more recent contemporary development of varying scale, massing and architectural form. The resulting townscape is therefore characterised by a diverse architectural language, incremental development and a changing pattern of building scale, massing and form, rather than a uniform or consistently historic architectural character.

The proposed development should therefore be assessed as part of an established and evolving urban environment.





### 2.3 Visual Receptors

The principal visual receptors are:

- pedestrians using Parnell Road;
- road users;
- residents of neighbouring properties;
- residents and users of Brighton Terrace;
- users of Brighton Hall;
- residents and users of Old Brighton Terrace;
- users of the wider Parnell Road/Main Street area; and
- people experiencing the wider Bray townscape.

The sensitivity of each receptor depends upon proximity, duration of view and the architectural or heritage importance of the receptor.

## 3.0 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

### 3.1 Description of Proposed Development

The proposal comprises 16 no. age-friendly residential apartments.  
The accommodation consists of:

- 12 no. one-bedroom apartments; and
- 4 no. two-bedroom apartments.

The development also provides associated communal and private open space, entrances, circulation, landscaping, services and ancillary site development works. The development constitutes the regeneration of an existing urban site and introduces a residential use in place of the existing commercial/garage-related structures.

### 3.2 Site Layout and Building Position

The proposed building is positioned towards the rear of the site. The building has been set back within the site as far as reasonably possible within the general footprint of the existing building. This reduces visual prominence from Parnell Road and provides separation from the historic properties towards the front of the site. The setback also assists in retaining the visual presence and legibility of the surrounding historic buildings.



### 3.3 Proposed Architectural Response

The design does not attempt to reproduce the Victorian architecture of Brighton Terrace or the other historic buildings.

Instead, it takes appropriate contextual references from:

- roof form;
- building scale;
- vertical proportions;
- materiality;
- façade rhythm; and
- the established residential character of the area.

This allows the development to be clearly identifiable as a contemporary addition while remaining visually compatible with its surroundings.



## 4.0 HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

### 4.1 Historic Development of the Area

The surrounding area has developed incrementally. Historic mapping indicates changes in the pattern and scale of development, including the evolution of the subject site into a consolidated commercial site. This history is relevant to the visual assessment because the proposed redevelopment represents another stage in the continuing evolution of the urban area. The proposal therefore does not represent an isolated intervention into an otherwise unchanged historic environment.

### 4.2 Existing Townscape Character

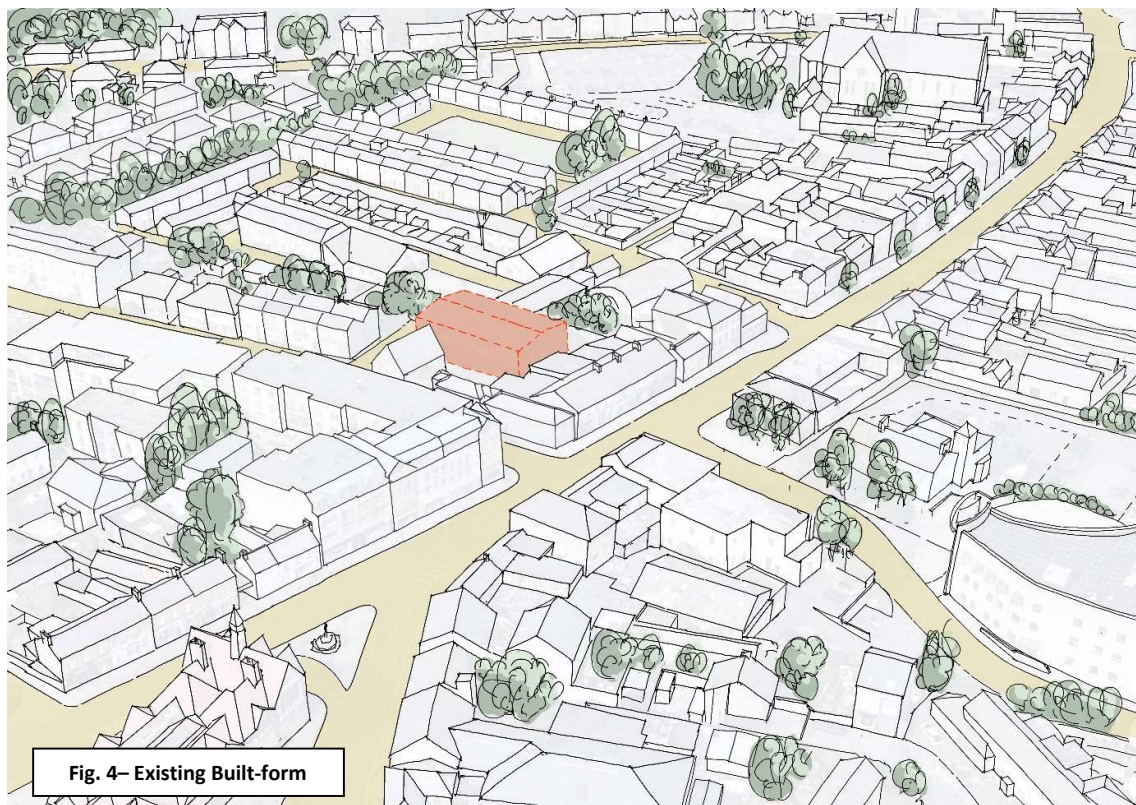
The surrounding townscape contains a number of distinct architectural characteristics. Historic terraces along Parnell Road provide areas of strong architectural coherence, particularly Brighton Terrace and Old Brighton Terrace. Elsewhere, the urban fabric contains buildings of differing periods, uses and architectural quality.

The proposal responds to this condition through a contemporary architectural language which is informed by, but does not imitate, the historic environment.

### 4.3 Relationship with the Historic Urban Fabric

The relationship between the proposal and the historic urban fabric is based upon compatibility, scale, materiality and visual distinction. The proposal does not seek to disguise itself as historic development.

This approach is supported by the Conservation Report, which identifies the use of contemporary architecture as appropriate to respond sensitively to the surrounding heritage context.



## 5.0 ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND VISUAL RECEPTORS

### 5.1 Brighton Terrace

Brighton Terrace comprises four Victorian-era residential properties immediately west of the site.

The buildings date from approximately 1875 and have a coherent architectural character comprising two-storey forms over basements, pitched slate roofs, rendered elevations, projecting canted bays and Gothic-influenced detailing. The visual sensitivity of the terrace is therefore considered high. The principal issue is whether the proposed development would compete with, obscure or otherwise diminish the architectural presence of the terrace. The proposed setback and articulated form are important measures in addressing this issue.



Fig. 5– Brighton Terrace

### 5.2 Old Brighton Terrace

Old Brighton Terrace comprises an earlier group of historic properties dating from approximately 1855. The Conservation Report identifies Nos. 2–4 as being recorded on the NIAH and included within the Wicklow County Record of Protected Structures.



Fig. 6– Site Entrance

Given their wider relationship with the site, their visual assessment is primarily concerned with the effect upon the wider historic townscape rather than a direct immediate interface.

### 5.3 Main Street

Main Street contains a distinctive architectural character. The proposed development is not expected to materially affect the visual appreciation of the streetscape

### 5.4 Brighton Hall

Brighton Hall is an important nearby visual receptor. The Conservation Report identifies the building as being of architectural interest and contributing positively to the local streetscape. Because of its



proximity, the relationship between Brighton Hall and the proposed development is assessed separately later within this report.

## 6.0 EXISTING SITE AND SETTING

### 6.1 Existing Visual Character

The existing site is utilitarian and commercial in character. The former Central Garage building and ancillary structures do not form part of a coherent historic architectural group. Redevelopment provides an opportunity to replace the existing utilitarian structures with a more considered architectural and landscape response. The proposed building will introduce a more carefully composed architectural form together with landscape and public-realm improvements.

### 6.2 Existing Views and Visual Containment

The urban context means that views of the site are influenced by existing buildings, boundaries and the established street pattern. The development is not located within an open landscape where long-distance views would be expected. Its visual effects are therefore principally local in nature.

### 6.3 Visual Sensitivity

The highest sensitivity is associated with the immediate historic buildings and their occupants/users. Public views from Parnell Road are also important because they represent the principal public appreciation of the site. The sensitivity reduces as the distance from the site increases and the proposed building becomes integrated into the surrounding urban fabric.



Fig.7–Proposed Elevation – Parnell Road

## 7.0 VISUAL DESIGN AND CONSERVATION RESPONSE

The design has been developed with consideration of the surrounding architectural heritage. No buildings on the site are being retained as part of the development. The existing structures are not identified as Protected Structures or NIAH buildings. The principal conservation issue is therefore the effect of the new building upon the setting and visual appreciation of nearby heritage buildings.

The setback is one of the principal visual mitigation measures. By placing the development towards the



rear of the site, the building is less prominent when viewed from Parnell Road. The setback also creates visual separation between the proposed building and Brighton Terrace/Brighton Hall. The proposed development sits within the wider setting and allows the historic buildings to retain their own architectural identity. This distinction is important in preserving the authenticity of the historic townscape.

## 8.0 SCALE, MASSING AND FORM

The scale of the proposal is considered in relation to the established urban environment. The development is residential in character and is articulated to avoid an institutional or monolithic appearance. The building is broken into smaller architectural elements. Changes in façade treatment, roof form and building articulation assist in reducing perceived bulk. This is particularly important when the building is viewed obliquely from the surrounding streets. The use of pitched roof form provides a clear reference to the established residential character with the stepped roof arrangement assists in breaking down the building's overall volume. It also creates a more varied roofscape than would be achieved by a single large roof or flat-roofed block. Although the proposed development introduces a significant new built element, the perception of its height is moderated by:

- the setback
- the roof articulation
- the separation of building elements
- the existing surrounding urban form.

The building is therefore intended to read as a series of articulated residential elements rather than one large vertical mass.



## 9.0 MATERIALS AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

The material palette is deliberately restrained. The principal external material is light-toned brick, complemented by dark-framed windows and metal balcony railings. The palette provides a coherent architectural identity while maintaining a visual relationship with the surrounding built

Variation in the brickwork is achieved through:

- texture;
- coursing;
- depth;
- recessed elements; and
- subtle changes in façade treatment.

This avoids excessive reliance upon multiple materials and provides visual interest through shadow and articulation. The windows are vertically proportioned and provide rhythm across the elevations. Projecting balconies introduce depth and provide additional visual articulation. Metal balcony railings provide a contemporary element while remaining visually lightweight.

The material treatment establishes a visual relationship with the surrounding urban environment without attempting to recreate the rendered façades and decorative detailing of Brighton Terrace.

## 10.0 LANDSCAPE AND SETTING

Landscape and public realm design is an integral part of the development. The proposal incorporates planting, communal open space, pedestrian areas and associated landscape treatments. The Conservation Report identifies the landscape strategy as contributing to the visual integration of the development.

Boundary treatments provide an important interface between the proposed development, shared boundaries and neighbouring residential properties. The design will incorporate appropriate secondary boundary treatments within the constraints of the site to retain and reinforce existing levels of residential privacy, whilst safeguarding the residential amenities of adjoining properties.

The approach will seek to maintain the character and function of existing boundary structures wherever practicable, with the structural integrity and condition of existing walls to be considered as part of the detailed design and implementation of any associated boundary works.

Where additional screening or boundary treatment is required, this shall be integrated to provide an appropriate degree of privacy and visual separation without creating an undue sense of enclosure or adversely affecting the amenity of neighbouring properties.



The car-free approach allows the frontage to be more pedestrian-oriented. A dedicated drop-off area is incorporated within a shared-surface environment. This reduces the visual dominance of parking and vehicular infrastructure.

Planting will soften views of the building and assist in integrating the development with the surrounding urban environment. The landscape proposal also contributes to the setting of Brighton Hall and the overall visual quality of the site.

## 11.0 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### 11.1 Assessment Methodology

The visual effects are considered having regard to:

- receptor sensitivity
- distance from the development
- degree of visibility
- existing visual character
- magnitude of change
- duration of effect
- mitigation incorporated into the design.

The assessment distinguishes between the magnitude of visual change and the overall significance of the resulting visual effect.

### 11.2 Views from Parnell Road

Parnell Road represents the primary public viewpoint. The proposed development will be visible from portions of the road, resulting in a change from the existing utilitarian site to a residential architectural form. The setback, roof articulation and landscape treatment will moderate this change.

|                     |                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Magnitude:          | Low–Moderate                                                                                                                                    |
| Visual sensitivity: | Medium–High                                                                                                                                     |
| Overall effect:     | Moderate. The effect is considered acceptable in the context of the existing urban environment and the mitigation incorporated into the design. |

### 11.3 Views towards Brighton Terrace

Brighton Terrace is a sensitive architectural receptor. The proposed development will be visible in certain oblique and elevated relationships but will not replace or physically alter the terrace. The historic terrace will remain visually legible.

|                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Magnitude:          | Low             |
| Visual sensitivity: | High            |
| Overall effect:     | Minor–Moderate. |

### 11.4 Views towards Brighton Hall

The proximity of Brighton Hall means that the development will form part of its immediate visual setting. The change is therefore more noticeable. However, the removal of the existing utilitarian structures and introduction of a coherent architectural and landscape response has the potential to improve the visual quality of the immediate setting.

|                     |                                                              |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Magnitude:          | Moderate                                                     |
| Visual sensitivity: | High                                                         |
| Overall effect:     | Moderate, with potential for a positive visual contribution. |

### 11.5 Views from Old Brighton Terrace

The greater separation reduces the prominence of the proposal. The development will form part of the wider urban backdrop.

|                     |             |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Magnitude:          | Low         |
| Visual sensitivity: | Medium–High |
| Overall effect:     | Minor.      |

### 11.6 Wider Townscape Views



At greater distances, the building will be perceived as part of the existing urban roofscape. Its articulated form and pitched roofs assist integration.

Magnitude: Low

**Table 11.1 – Summary of Visual Effects**

| Viewpoint / Visual Receptor | Sensitivity of Receptor | Existing Visual Context                                                               | Visibility of Proposed Development                     | Magnitude of Visual Change | Nature of Effect                                                                           | Overall Visual Effect                                    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| VP01 Parnell Road           | Medium–High             | Existing utilitarian commercial/garage structures within an established urban setting | Partial to substantial, depending on exact position    | Low–Moderate               | Introduction of a new residential building and associated landscaping                      | Moderate / Acceptable                                    |
| VP02 Brighton Terrace       | High                    | Historic Victorian terrace with strong architectural coherence                        | Partial/oblique views towards the proposed development | Low                        | Contemporary development visible within the wider setting of the terrace                   | Minor–Moderate                                           |
| VP03 Brighton Hall          | High                    | Historic building of architectural interest in close proximity to the site            | Moderate to substantial locally                        | Moderate                   | Replacement of existing utilitarian structures with a new articulated residential building | Moderate, with potential for positive visual enhancement |
| VP04 – St. Kevin's Square   | Medium–High             | Established urban environment with varied building forms and roofscape                | Moderate to substantial locally                        | High                       | Proposed building assimilates into the existing urban roofscape                            | Moderate/Acceptable                                      |

**Source: Visual Impact Assessment; assessment informed by the architectural and heritage context identified in the accompanying Heritage & Conservation Report.**

**Table 11.2 – Design Measures Reducing Visual Impact**

| Design / Mitigation Measure     | Visual Purpose                                                                                   | Effect on Visual Impact                                             |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Setback of proposed building    | Reduces prominence from Parnell Road and provides separation from surrounding historic buildings | Reduces visual prominence                                           |
| Articulated building massing    | Breaks down the overall building volume and avoids a monolithic appearance                       | Reduces perceived scale and bulk                                    |
| Pitched roof forms              | Relate to the established residential roofscape and provide visual articulation                  | Improves townscape integration                                      |
| Light-toned brickwork           | Provides a restrained and coherent material treatment                                            | Supports visual integration                                         |
| Vertical façade rhythm          | Provides proportion and scale to the elevations                                                  | Reduces perceived bulk                                              |
| Recessed openings and balconies | Introduce depth, shadow and architectural articulation                                           | Improves façade composition                                         |
| Landscape planting              | Softens views of the proposed building                                                           | Reduces visual prominence                                           |
| Appropriate boundary treatment  | Creates a considered interface with adjoining properties                                         | Improves visual transition                                          |
| Car-free approach to frontage   | Reduces visual dominance of parking and vehicular infrastructure                                 | Improves streetscape quality Protects legibility of historic fabric |

These measures are consistent with the design and conservation principles described in the Conservation Report, including the setback, articulated massing, pitched roof forms, brick materiality and landscape strategy.

Table 11.1 summarises the anticipated visual effects of the proposed development from the principal visual receptors identified within the surrounding townscape. The assessment demonstrates that the

most notable visual change will occur within the immediate vicinity of the site, particularly from Parnell Road and in views associated with Brighton Hall. The effects become progressively less pronounced with increasing distance from the site.

The proposed setback, articulated massing, pitched roof forms, restrained material palette and landscape treatment are integral components of the visual mitigation strategy. Collectively, these measures reduce the perceived bulk and prominence of the proposed development and assist in integrating the new building within the established urban context.

In relation to the surrounding architectural heritage, the proposal does not physically alter any of the identified heritage assets. The principal consideration is therefore the effect upon their setting and visual appreciation. The assessment concludes that the proposal will not result in an unacceptable adverse effect upon the architectural character or significance of the surrounding heritage assets.

## 12.0 IMPACT ON ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The proposal does not physically alter the identified surrounding heritage buildings. The assessment therefore focuses upon their setting and visual appreciation. The setback of the building and its articulated form reduce the potential for visual dominance. The proposal does not create a direct physical intervention into the historic fabric. The historic buildings will retain their architectural character and remain distinguishable from the new development. The contemporary architectural response avoids creating confusion between historic and new fabric.

The Conservation Report concludes that the proposal is unlikely to result in an adverse impact upon the architectural character or significance of the surrounding heritage buildings. The visual assessment supports that conclusion.

## 13.0 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT MEASURES

The visual impact has been addressed through the design itself.

The principal measures are:

|                            |                                                                                                |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Setback</b>             | The building is positioned towards the rear of the site.                                       |
| <b>Articulated Massing</b> | The building is divided into smaller elements to reduce perceived bulk.                        |
| <b>Roofscape</b>           | Pitched roofs break down the building form and provide contextual reference.                   |
| <b>Materiality</b>         | The light-toned brick provides a restrained and coherent material treatment.                   |
| <b>Façade Articulation</b> | Recessed openings, balconies and changes in brickwork provide depth.                           |
| <b>Landscape</b>           | Planting assists in softening views and integrating the development.                           |
| <b>Boundary Treatment</b>  | The boundaries provide a considered interface with adjoining properties.                       |
| <b>Car-Free Frontage</b>   | The reduction of surface parking allows greater emphasis on landscape and pedestrian movement. |

## 14.0 OVERALL VISUAL EFFECT

The proposal will result in a noticeable change to the visual character of the former Central Garage site. That change is not, however, considered inherently negative. The existing site is characterised by utilitarian commercial structures. The proposed development introduces:

- a coherent architectural form;
- improved material quality;
- articulated massing;
- pitched roof forms;
- residential-scale detailing;
- landscape planting;

- improved pedestrian environment; and
- a more ordered relationship with adjoining buildings.

The principal visual effects are localised. The development is not anticipated to become a dominant feature of the wider Bray townscape. The surrounding historic buildings will remain identifiable and architecturally distinct.

## 15.0 CONCLUSION

The proposed development represents the redevelopment and regeneration of a previously developed urban site at Parnell Road, Bray. The proposal introduces 16 age-friendly residential apartments within a contemporary architectural form which has been designed having regard to the surrounding townscape and architectural heritage.

The visual strategy is based upon the setback of the building, articulated massing, pitched roof forms, restrained material palette, façade articulation, landscape treatment, boundary treatment and the car-free frontage.

The Conservation Report identifies that the proposal is unlikely to result in an adverse impact upon the architectural character or significance of the surrounding heritage buildings. The relationship with Brighton Terrace is considered appropriate, with the terrace retaining its visual prominence and architectural legibility. The relationship with Brighton Hall is more immediate but is considered capable of resulting in an improved visual environment through the replacement of the existing utilitarian structure and introduction of a coordinated architectural and landscape response.

At the wider townscape level, the proposal is considered to constitute an appropriate contemporary intervention within an evolving urban environment. The proposal does not seek to replicate historic architecture. Instead, it establishes a contemporary architectural identity informed by the scale, proportions, materials, roofscape and rhythm of the surrounding townscape.

As stated within the Conservation Report, the proposed development can coexist successfully with the surrounding historic buildings and contribute positively to the regeneration and architectural quality of the area.

Overall, the proposed development will result in a noticeable but predominantly localised visual change. The design measures incorporated into the proposal, including the setback, articulated massing, pitched roof forms, restrained material palette, landscape treatment and boundary measures, assist in reducing visual prominence and integrating the development within its established urban context.

The assessment therefore concludes that the proposed development represents an appropriate contemporary intervention within the evolving townscape of Parnell Road and Bray and will not result in an unacceptable adverse visual effect upon the surrounding townscape or the setting and visual appreciation of the identified historic buildings.