

# Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal

**Proposed Amendment to  
Permitted Strategic Housing Development  
ABP-311190-21  
Cross Avenue, Blackrock**

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**.MODEL  
WORKS**

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# 1.0 Introduction

This report assesses the potential townscape visual impacts of a proposed amendment to a permitted Strategic Housing Development (planning reference ABP-311190-21) at Cross Avenue, Blackrock. The proposed amendment would increase the number of apartments in the development by five, from 241 no. to 246 no.

The report has been prepared to accompany a set of verified photomontages, showing the permitted development and the proposed amendment, in views from 18 no. locations in the receiving environment. It should be read in conjunction with the photomontage report.

## 1.1 The Accompanying Photomontage Report

In the accompanying report, verified views are provided for 18 no. viewpoints around the site.

Viewpoints 01-17 are the same viewpoints that were assessed in the Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment submitted with the original SHD planning application (ABP-311190-21) in 2021.

A further viewpoint (No. 18) has been added for this assessment. This is a position directly across Cross Avenue from the two buildings that are proposed to be amended.

**Figure 1: Viewpoints for visual impact appraisal**



For each of the 18 no. viewpoints the following views are provided:

- 1. Existing view:** This the baseline photograph taken at the viewpoint, towards the subject site.  
In those views where the proposed amendment would make no material difference to the development's visibility/visual impact (e.g. distant views, or views in which the development is screened by foreground elements), the same baseline photograph that was used for the 2021 photomontages has been used for the new photomontages. These are Viewpoints No. 01-05, 07, 09-11, 14-17.  
For five views in which the proposed amendment has the *potential* to make a material difference to the development's visual impact, new photographs have been taken, so that the baseline against which the proposed amendment is assessed is current. These are Viewpoints 06, 08, 12, 13, 18.
- 2. Permitted view:** These photomontages show the permitted development ABP-311190-21. Where the development is screened in the view by other buildings or vegetation in the intervening landscape, the permitted buildings are outlined in yellow.
- 3. Proposed view:** These photomontages show the proposed amendment. Where the development is screened in the view, the proposed buildings are outlined in red.
- 4. Comparison view:** These photomontages show the proposed amendment (red outline) overlaid on the permitted development (yellow outline). Where there is a difference in the permitted and proposed developments' outline/profile, this is shaded yellow, to highlight the change.

**Figure 2a, b, c: Depiction of the permitted and proposed developments in the photomontages**



## 2.0 Proposed Amendment

The permitted development is comprised of three buildings (Blocks A, B, C) of rectangular plan form (comprised of off-set interlocking volumes to disaggregate the massing), positioned side by side, presenting their narrow elevations to Cross Avenue. The buildings are set back from Cross Avenue behind a green strip in which a number of mature trees will be retained.

**Figure 3: Layout of permitted development**



The buildings are different heights, with their height adjusted in response to the varying context, which presents different constraints and opportunities.

- **Block A** in the western part of the site is up to five storeys tall. This part of the site is constrained by its proximity to St Margaret's, a street lined with large, detached houses, some of which back onto the site's western boundary.
- **Blocks B and C** in the central and eastern part of the site are up to eight storeys tall. This part of the site shares boundaries with two school – Blackrock College to the north and Sion Hill to the east. These institutional lands are themselves less sensitive than low density residential properties, and they also are characterized by mature trees, which provide screening for new development on the site.

In addition to the differing height between the three buildings, each building has setbacks at different levels, to (a) disaggregate the massing, and (b) reduce the apparent height when seen from close up (upper floors being hidden by the shoulders of the lower volumes).

The proposed development seeks to adjust the northern setback of the top floor of Block A, and the southern setback of the top floor of Block B. By reducing the setbacks, additional floorspace would be created at these levels, allowing for the provision of five additional apartments on the site with no increase in the building footprints or height. No changes are proposed to Block C.

It should be noted – as shown on the elevations below – that the proposed amendments would retain a substantially deep, and therefore effective, setback in the top floor of both buildings.

**Figure 4: Permitted and proposed north and west elevations of Block A (proposed amendment in dashed red line)**



1 **BLOCK A - EXISTING PLANNING NORTH ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200



3 **BLOCK A - EXISTING PLANNING WEST ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200



2 **BLOCK A - PROPOSED PLANNING NORTH ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200



4 **BLOCK A - PROPOSED PLANNING WEST ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200

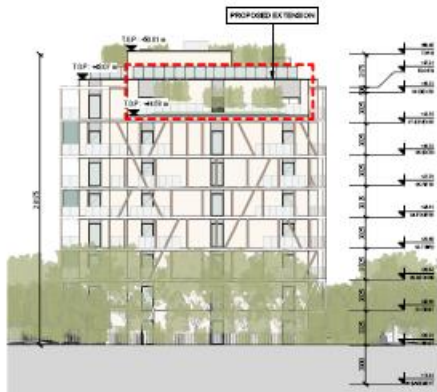
**Figure 5: Permitted and proposed south and east elevations of Block B (proposed amendment in dashed red line)**



3 **BLOCK B - EXISTING PLANNING SOUTH ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200



4 **BLOCK B - EXISTING PLANNING EAST ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200



1 **BLOCK B - PROPOSED PLANNING SOUTH ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200



2 **BLOCK B - PROPOSED PLANNING EAST ELEVATION 1:200**  
Scale: 1:200

## 3.0 Visual Impact Appraisal

The 18 no. viewpoints are individually assessed below. The assessment should be read in conjunction with the verified photomontages provided under separate cover.

The assessment makes reference to the 2021 Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (TVIA) submitted with the original SHD planning application – specifically the classifications of significance if the impact on the viewpoints (1-17). Viewpoint 18 is a new viewpoint included specifically for the amendment application.

### 3.1 View 01 – Cross Avenue near junction with Pinehaven

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Imperceptible/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The entire development is hidden by the trees in the intervening landscape. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Imperceptible/Neutral</b>  |

### 3.2 View 02 - N31/Mount Merrion Avenue by junction with Cross Avenue

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Slight/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | From this angle there would be a very minor <i>reduction</i> in height of a small part of Block B (due to the removal of a glass balustrade from part of the roof). However, the affected part of the building is screened by trees. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Slight/Neutral</b>  |

### 3.3 View 03 – N31/Mount Merrion Avenue by junction with ‘The Elms’

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral  |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | Both Blocks A and B are screened by the foreground houses in this view. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral</b>   |

### 3.4 View 04 - N31/Mount Merrion Avenue by junction with Rock Road/R118

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Imperceptible/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The entire development is hidden by buildings and trees in the intervening landscape. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Imperceptible/Neutral</b>  |

### 3.5 View 05 – Rock Road/R118 by junction with Booterstown Avenue

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Imperceptible/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The entire development is hidden by buildings and trees in the intervening landscape. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Imperceptible/Neutral</b>  |

### 3.6 View 06 - Cross Avenue by Sion Hill secondary Dominican College

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Moderate-Slight/Neutral  |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | From this angle there would be a very minor <i>reduction</i> in height of a small part of Block B (due to the removal of a glass balustrade from part of the roof). However, the affected part of the building is screened by trees. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Moderate-Slight/Neutral</b>   |

### 3.7 View 07 – Blackrock College playing grounds

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Slight/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | From this angle of view the proposed amendment to Block A is <i>theoretically</i> visible. However, Block A is hidden from view behind the school buildings. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Slight/Neutral</b>  |

### 3.8 View 08 - St. Margaret's

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Imperceptible/Neutral  |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The proposed amendment to Block A is seen against a backdrop of the taller Block B from this angle. <u>Therefore the Block A amendment does not alter the profile of the buildings in this view.</u><br>The proposed amendment to Block B is theoretically visible from this angle. However <u>the building is largely screened/filtered by trees so the change to the view would be negligible.</u><br>(Also shown in the photomontages for Viewpoint 08 is the permitted housing development (D22A/0582) on the plot neighbouring the site.) |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Not significant/Neutral</b><br>The amendment would be perceptible but would cause no significant change to the composition, character or quality of the view.   |



### 3.9 View 09, 09a – Rock Road/R118 by Blackrock College

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral-Negative   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | <p>In the winter view (09a) with the foreground trees out of leaf, the permitted Block A is visible in the distance through a gap between two of the Blackrock College buildings (Castledawson House to the left and a modern block to the right). This view is typically seen fleetingly when passing along Rock Road. The magnitude of change is Low/Negligible, and the significance of the impact was thus classified Slight/Negative at worst.</p> <p><u>The proposed amendment would slightly increase the height of the small part of Block A that can be seen between the Blackrock College buildings. Importantly, the roofline of Block A would remain substantially below the roofline of Castledawson House to the left – so it would have no impact on the legibility of the historic building. This is a negligible change given that it is typically seen fleetingly and from a distance of 400m (the distance between Rock Road and Block A).</u></p> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <p><b>Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral-Negative</b></p> <p>The amendment would be perceptible but would cause no significant change to the composition, character or quality of the view.</p>   |

### 3.10 View 10 - Grounds of St. Philip and St. James' Church

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Imperceptible/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | <p>Apart from a small part of Block A protruding to the left side of the church, the development is hidden from view. <u>The small changes to the profile of the buildings would therefore cause no change to the view.</u></p> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Imperceptible/Neutral</b>  |

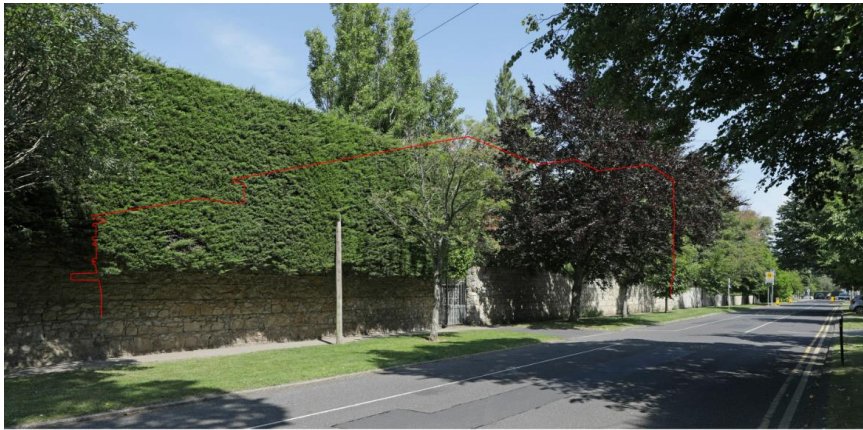
### 3.11 View 11 – Southern access road into the Blackrock College campus

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Imperceptible/Neutral  |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | <p>Block C screens both Blocks A and B from view at this location. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u></p> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Imperceptible/Neutral</b>   |

### 3.12 View 12 - Southern access road near Blackrock College car park

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Moderate-Slight/Neutral-Negative   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | <p>Blocks A and B are both prominent in the view, framed by the tall hedges either side of the access road. Block B (eight storeys) is considerably taller than Block A, which is five storeys but which appears four storeys tall due to the deep setback of the top floor.</p> <p><u>The proposed amendment would bring the top floor of Block A into view, although it would sit well back from the four storey shoulder. The setback of the top floor would be similar in depth to the setback of the top floor of Block B. It thus fits comfortably into the composition of form. Additionally, Block A would remain considerably lower than Block B, so the articulation and stepping of the built form would be maintained.</u></p> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <p><b>Moderate-Slight/Neutral-Negative</b></p> <p>The amendment would make a minor change to the composition of built form <i>on the site</i>, but would cause no change to the character or quality of the view overall, and the design concept of the development would be uncompromised.</p>  |

### 3.13 View 13 – Cross Avenue near western end of site

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | <p>At the time the previous TVIA was carried out there was a tall hedge behind the wall to the left (outside of the subject site), which largely screened the development from view. Hence the Slight-Imperceptible classification of the visual impact in 2021.</p>  <p>That hedge has now been removed (as part of the redevelopment of the neighbouring site) and this exposes Block A and a part of Block B to view. Block A is five storeys tall fronting Cross Avenue, and steps down to four storeys to the rear of the site. <u>The proposed amendment would extend the 5<sup>th</sup> storey further back along the building. The extended top floor would still be set back from the four storey shoulder on its west and north sides.</u></p> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <p><b>Moderate/Positive</b></p> <p>Despite the significant change in <i>character</i> caused by the introduction of the development, it sits comfortably in the view – <u>an attractive composition of contemporary architecture and the trees that characterise Cross Avenue.</u></p>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p><u>Due to (a) the quality of the architecture, (b) the moderation of the scale of Block A, and (c) the retained and supplemented vegetation in the view, the visual impact can be classified positive.</u></p> <p>The amendment does not change this. The building retains an articulated form, and the three-dimensional and textured façade treatment contributes further to reducing the perceived massing. Importantly, the amendment would not increase the built/visual enclosure of Cross Avenue, nor the residential properties to the west of the site (due to a combination of separation distance and the setback from the western shoulder).</p> |
|--|---|

### 3.14 View 14 - Rear grounds of Sion Hill secondary Dominican College

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Moderate-Slight/Neutral-Negative   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | From this angle of view the proposed amendment to Block A is <i>theoretically</i> visible. However, Block A is hidden from view by vegetation in the intervening landscape. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u>  |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <p><b>Moderate-Slight/Neutral</b></p> <p>In the author's opinion, while the development undoubtedly changes the <i>character</i> of the view, the simple presence of the higher density typology does not detract from the <i>quality</i> of the view. The built form is attractively articulated, and the façade design and materials are of appreciably high quality. The proposed amendment makes no change to the view, but the classification of the development's impact is changed to neutral (from neutral-negative in the 2021 TVIA).</p> |

### 3.15 View 15 - Waltham Terrace

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral  |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The development protrudes only marginally above the roofs and tree line in the foreground. <u>The amendments affect a part of the development that is screened from view. Therefore there would be no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral</b>   |

### 3.16 View 16 - Booterstown Avenue near junction with South Hill Avenue

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Imperceptible/Neutral   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The entire development is hidden from view. <u>The amendment would cause no change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | <b>Imperceptible/Neutral</b>  |

### 3.17 View 17 – Williamstown Castle within the Blackrock College campus

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral  |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The permitted development is largely hidden from view. Only the top corner of Block C protrudes, and this has no effect on the character or quality of the view. Most importantly, it has no effect on Williamstown Castle in the view.<br><br>The amendment would slightly increase the height of Block A. This would raise it just above the distant tree line, but it would be even less conspicuous than the corner of Block C. <u>The amendment would cause no material change to the view, and would have no effect on Williamstown Castle.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral  |

### 3.18 View 18 – Cross Avenue opposite Blocks A and B

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2021 TVIA assessment of SHD impact on view</b>             | n/a (This viewpoint was not assessed for the 2021 TVIA.)   |
| <b>2024 Proposed amendment/change</b>                         | The amendment to Block A would not be visible.<br><br>The amendment to Block B is <i>theoretically</i> perceptible in that a corner of the extended top floor would be visible over the street-front shoulder. <u>Even if this were not screened by the retained trees, it would be a negligible change to the view.</u> |
| <b>2024 TVIA assessment of SHD + amendment impact on view</b> | Slight-Imperceptible/Neutral   |

## 4.0 Conclusions

The proposed amendments are minor, and have been designed to avoid causing any significant change to the building's prominence or appearance.

Since the amendments would not increase the footprint or height of the buildings (only causing slight changes to the buildings' form), the development's zone of visual influence (the area from which the buildings could be seen) would be effectively unchanged.

In those views in which the amendments would be perceptible, they would not significantly increase the prominence of the buildings, nor significantly change their appearance. The amendments retain the overall design concept, and the architectural quality of the buildings.

Importantly, the proposed amendments retain a substantially deep, and therefore effective, setback in the top floor of both Blocks A and B (this is clearly shown by the photomontage for Viewpoint 18).

In conclusion, the proposed amendments would cause no negative townscape or visual impacts.