

PROPOSED BELVIDERE VIEW CONSERVANCY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, KNYSNA MUNICIPALITY, WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

Visual Statement: Site Sensitivity Verification Report

Final v_2

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Document prepared for HilLand Environmental (Pty) Ltd
On behalf of Bel Heights (Pty) Ltd



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	DFFE SPECIALIST REPORTING REQUIREMENTS	5
1.1	SPECIALIST DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE	5
2	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
3	INTRODUCTION	8
3.1	TERMS OF REFERENCE.....	8
3.2	STUDY TEAM	9
3.3	VISUAL ASSESSMENT APPROACH.....	9
3.4	VIA PROCESS OUTLINE	11
3.5	ASSUMPTIONS AND UNCERTAINTIES	12
4	PRELIMINARY FINDINGS.....	12
4.1	LANDSCAPE PLANNING FIT.....	12
4.1.1	<i>DEA&DP Visual and Aesthetic Guidelines.....</i>	<i>12</i>
4.1.2	<i>Regional and Local Planning</i>	<i>13</i>
4.1.3	<i>Conservation Planning.....</i>	<i>15</i>
4.1.4	<i>Landscape Planning Policy Fit Preliminary Findings.....</i>	<i>15</i>
4.2	VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPACITY	15
4.3	ZONE OF VISUAL INFLUENCE.....	15
4.4	RECEPTORS AND KOPS	16
4.5	SCENIC QUALITY	16
4.6	RECEPTOR SENSITIVITY.....	16
4.7	LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT SIGNIFICANCE	17
4.8	MITIGATIONS.....	17
5	PROJECT MAPPING.....	18
6	BIBLIOGRAPHY	31
7	ANNEXURE A: SITE VISIT PHOTOGRAPHS AND COMMENTS	32
8	ANNEXURE B: SPECIALIST INFORMATION	40
8.1	PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE.....	40
8.2	CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)	41
9	ANNEXURE C: LANDSCAPE SIGNIFICANCE RATING CRITERIA	43
9.1	SCENIC QUALITY ASSESSMENT	43
9.2	RECEPTOR SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENT.....	44
9.3	IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY FOR LANDSCAPE SIGNIFICANCE	45

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: ASSESSMENT LOCALITY MAP.....	8
FIGURE 2: KNYSNA FINAL SDF PLANNING FOR BRENTON-ON-LAKE WITH THE PROPERTY FALLING WITHIN OF THE URBAN EDGE WITH AGRICULTURE I ZONING AND SUITABLE FOR INFILL DEVELOPMENT (KNYSNA MUNICIPALITY, 2025, P. 142).	13
FIGURE 3: PROPOSED LAYOUT PLAN.....	20
FIGURE 4: VIEWSHED MAPPING.....	21
FIGURE 5: SITE PROFILE MAPPING: NORTH TO SOUTH WITH LINEAR DEVELOPMENT RISK IDENTIFIED AS SEEN FROM CR SWART DRIVE.	22
FIGURE 6: KEY OBSERVATION POINTS USED IN 3D MODELLING.....	23
FIGURE 7: PHOTOMONTAGES: CR SWART ROAD WESTBOUND WITHOUT MITIGATION OF BLOCKS 8M IN HEIGHT (VISUAL PREFERENCE LAYOUT)	24
FIGURE 8: PHOTOMONTAGES: CR SWART ROAD WESTBOUND WITH MITIGATION OF BLOCKS 8M IN HEIGHT (VISUAL PREFERENCE LAYOUT)	25

FIGURE 9: PHOTOGRAPH DEPICTING THE EXISTING SCREENING ALONG CR SWART ROAD (NORTHBOUND) USED AS MOTIVATION FOR SCREENING BUFFER.	25
FIGURE 10: KOP: VIEW FROM KNYSNA ROAD WITH THE GOOGLE EARTH BLOCK MODEL BELOW.	26
FIGURE 11: PHOTOMONTAGES: MARGARETS VIEWPOINT WITH PHOTOGRAPH TOWARDS THE SITE.....	27
FIGURE 12: PHOTOMONTAGES: MARGARETS VIEWPOINT WITH 3D BLOCK MODEL VIEWS FROM THE SITE (EXTRUDE 8M).	28
FIGURE 13: SITE PRELIMINARY MITIGATION MAPPING DEPICTING CR SWART ROAD VEGETATION SCREENING BUFFER WITH SETBACK OF GARAGE ROAD, GARAGE AND SINGLE PROPOSED ERVEN.	29
FIGURE 14: SURVEY POINT LOCALITY MAP.....	30

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. SPECIALIST DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.....	5
TABLE 2: AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS REPORT.	9
TABLE 3: VRM CLASS MATRIX TABLE	10
TABLE 4: METHODOLOGY SUMMARY TABLE	11
TABLE 5: LIST OF KEY PLANNING INFORMANTS TO THE PROJECT.	12
TABLE 6: DISTRICT PLANNING REFERENCE TABLE RELEVANT TO THE PROJECT.....	14
TABLE 7: LOCAL PLANNING REFERENCE TABLE RELEVANT TO THE PROJECT.....	14
TABLE 8. PRELIMINARY MITIGATIONS TABLE.	17
TABLE 9: VRM AFRICA PROJECTS ASSESSMENTS TABLE	42
TABLE 10: SCENIC QUALITY RATING TABLE	43
TABLE 11: RECEPTOR SENSITIVITY RATING TABLE.....	44
TABLE 12. DEA&DP VISUAL AND AESTHETIC GUIDELINE IMPACT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA TABLE	45

LIST OF ACRONYMS

<i>APHP</i>	Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners
<i>BLM</i>	Bureau of Land Management (United States)
<i>BPEO</i>	Best Practicable Environmental Option
<i>DoC</i>	Degree of Contrast
<i>EIA</i>	Environmental Impact Assessment
<i>EMPr</i>	Environmental Management Plan
<i>GIS</i>	Geographic Information System
<i>GPS</i>	Global Positioning System
<i>IDP</i>	Integrated Development Plan
<i>IEMA</i>	Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (United Kingdom)
<i>KOP</i>	Key Observation Point
<i>LVIA</i>	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
<i>MAMSL</i>	Metres above mean sea level
<i>NELPAG</i>	New England Light Pollution Advisory Group
<i>PNR</i>	Private Nature Reserve
<i>SDF</i>	Spatial Development Framework
<i>SEA</i>	Strategic Environmental Assessment
<i>VAC</i>	Visual Absorption Capacity
<i>VIA</i>	Visual Impact Assessment
<i>VRM</i>	Visual Resource Management
<i>VRMA</i>	Visual Resource Management Africa
<i>ZVI</i>	Zone of Visual Influence

GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

Technical Terms	Definition (Oberholzer, 2005)
Degree of Contrast	The measure in terms of the form, line, colour and texture of the existing landscape in relation to the proposed landscape modification in relation to the defined visual resource management objectives.
Visual intrusion	Issues are concerns related to the proposed development, generally phrased as questions, taking the form of “what will the impact of some activity be on some element of the visual, aesthetic or scenic environment”.
Receptors	Individuals, groups or communities who would be subject to the visual influence of a particular project.
Sense of place	The unique quality or character of a place, whether natural, rural or urban.
Scenic corridor	A linear geographic area that contains scenic resources, usually, but not necessarily, defined by a route.
Viewshed	The outer boundary defining a view catchment area, usually along crests and ridgelines. Similar to a watershed. This reflects the area, or the extent thereof, where the landscape modification would probably be seen.
Visual Absorption Capacity	The potential of the landscape to conceal the proposed project.

Technical Term	Definition (USDL., 2004)
Key Observation Point	Receptors refer to the people located in the most critical locations, or key observation points, surrounding the landscape modification, who make consistent use of the views associated with the site where the landscape modifications are proposed. KOPs can either be a single point of view that an observer/evaluator uses to rate an area or panorama, or a linear view along a roadway, trail, or river corridor.
Visual Resource Management	A map-based landscape and visual impact assessment method development by the Bureau of Land Management (USA).
Zone of Visual Influence	The ZVI is defined as ‘the area within which a proposed development may have an influence or effect on visual amenity.’

1 DFFE SPECIALIST REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

1.1 Specialist declaration of independence

Table 1. Specialist declaration of independence

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This document was completed by Silver Solutions 887 cc trading as VRM Africa, a Visual Impact Study and Mapping organisation located in George, South Africa. VRM Africa cc was appointed as an independent professional visual impact practitioner to facilitate this VIA. I, Stephen Stead, hereby declare that VRM Africa, an independent consulting firm, has no interest or personal gains in this project whatsoever, except receiving fair payment for rendering an independent professional service.



Stephen Stead

APHP accredited VIA Specialist

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Visual Resource Management Africa CC (VRMA) was appointed by HilLand Environmental to undertake a Visual Impact Assessment for the proposed Belvidere View Conservancy Estate on behalf of Bel Heights (Pty) Ltd (Proponent). A site visit was conducted on the 16th of August 2025. This report comprises a Site Sensitivity Verification Report (SSVR) to scope the nature of the landscape change, and to define if more detailed assessment is required. Due to the lower density of the proposed development, and the positive alignment with Knysna Municipality planning, **no further visual impact assessment would be required, but only if the proposed mitigations can be incorporated into the preferred layout plan.** The following mapped themes have been generated to inform the SSVR.

Items	Mapped Theme
Project Description	Proposed site development layout (Marike Vreken Planner).
Planning Literature Review	Knysna SDF planning proposal map (Knysna Municipality SDF).
Zone of Visual Influence	Viewshed map.
Topography	Profile map.
Visibility	- Key Observation Points (KOP) map. - KOP Photographs of existing landscape context. - Google Earth 3D Model views from CR Swart Road.
Mitigations	Development sensitivity and constraints mitigations map.
Landscape Documentation	Site survey locality map and photographic documentation.

The literature review highlights CR Swart Road as an important tourist view corridor where the existing sense of place should be carefully managed. Given the close proximity of the road and uninterrupted views towards a row of double storey dwellings without adequate screening, a **medium-high** magnitude for visual impact is anticipated where visual and scenic resources will be negatively affected. This is specifically related to the intensity of the linear alignment of the proposed houses as viewed from CR Swart Road receptors, setting a negative precedent for future development along the road where there is limited visual exposure to strong visual contrast to urban development forms. The proposed garage access road and garage, located directly adjacent to the CR Swart Road, restricts visual screening opportunities, with elevated views down the line of dwellings that run against the natural curvature of the topography. The close proximity between the row of dwellings, also limits the potential for garden plantings between the buildings, also re-enforcing the strong linear settlement pattern.

With mitigation measures including a 10 metre exclusion buffer from CR Swart Road and a re-alignment of the layout, the double storey dwellings would be positioned more within the valley, allowing for site specific landscaping around the houses to provide effective visual

screening. This would not require a loss in units, but would require the relocation of the proposed garage, its access road, and the erven directly adjacent to the road as well as minor shift to the layout to better reflect the topography.

A review of the proposed Architectural Guidelines found them to be generally suitable but recommends additional provisions. These should include a clear requirement for verandas and pergolas on the north-facing sides of dwellings, along with measures to avoid large, unbroken wall surfaces that create dominant visual forms. The architecture should present as single storey, using deep verandas and articulated design elements to break up strong forms and lines. While taking wildfire safety into account, the inclusion of larger shrubs and small tree landscaping near structures should be encouraged to help retain the nature-based sense of place characteristic of the greater Belvidere Heights and conservancy area. In term of retaining the conservancy sense of place, to ensure that there is sufficient space for landscaping/ planting between the front row of erven (as per the Belvidere Heights Estate), a 75% Development/ 25% No-Development ratio is suggested. Intensive planting of fast growing, indigenous tree in the 10m buffer along the CR Swart Road should also be a condition of authorisation.

In conclusion, the preliminary finding is that 14 units can be accommodated in the setting, but that the current layout is not supported in its current form. With the incorporation of the mitigations proposed, a positive precedent would be set for the area, adding value to the boarder Knysna economic and cultural landscape context.

3 INTRODUCTION

Visual Resource Management Africa CC (VRMA) was appointed by HillLand Environmental to undertake a Visual Impact Assessment for the proposed Belvidere View Conservancy Estate on behalf of Bel Heights (Pty) Ltd (Proponent). A site visit was conducted on the 16th of August 2025. This report comprises a Site Sensitivity Verification Report (SSVR) to scope the nature of the landscape change, and to define if more detailed assessment is required.

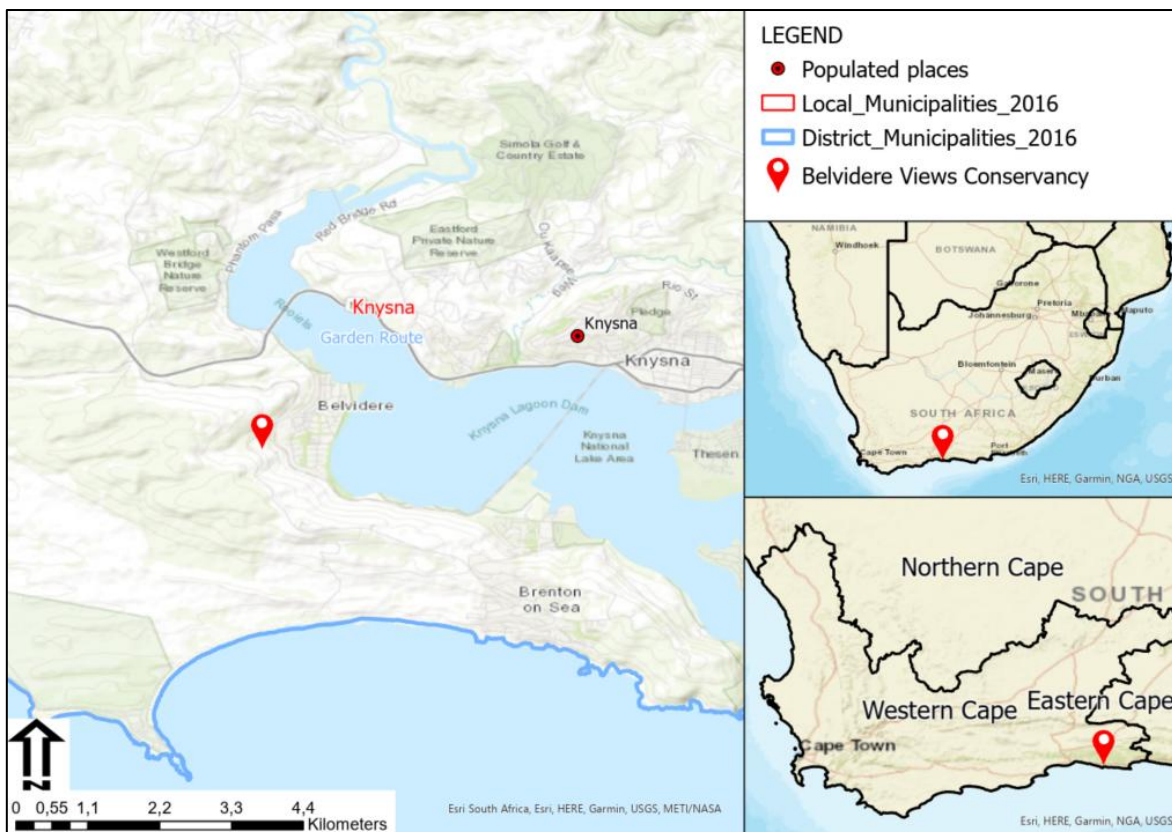


Figure 1: Assessment locality map.

3.1 Terms of Reference

The following actions informed the visual statement scope of work:

- Planning literature review to assess if any amendments to landscape based planning for the area have taken place subsequent to the previous EIAs.
- Site visit to confirm site sensitivity to landscape change.
- Make preliminary recommendations as to the suitability of the proposed landscape and possible mitigation measures that could be introduced to reduce the visual intrusion if necessary.
- Make an informed decision on the suitability of the proposed landscape change, if further information on the nature of the development is required, and the level of visual and landscape assessment that is required should a more detailed impact assessment be required.

3.2 Study Team

Contributors to this study are summarised in the table below.

Table 2: Authors and contributors to this report.

Aspect	Person	Organisation / Company	Qualifications
Landscape and Visual Assessment (author of this report)	Stephen Stead MSc Geography, 2023 (UKZN, Pietermaritzburg)	VRMA	• 20 years of experience in visual assessments including 230 large scale landscape changes in five sub-Saharan African countries. • Registered with the Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners since 2014.

3.3 Visual Assessment Approach

The full methodology used in the assessment can be found in Annexure C, with this section outlining the key elements of the assessment process. The process that VRM Africa follows when undertaking a VIA is based on the United States Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Visual Resource Management method (USDI., 2004). This mapping and GIS-based method of assessing landscape modifications allows for increased objectivity and consistency by using standard assessment criteria.

- *"Different levels of scenic values require different levels of management. For example, management of an area with high scenic value might be focused on preserving the existing character of the landscape, and management of an area with little scenic value might allow for major modifications to the landscape. Determining how an area should be managed first requires an assessment of the area's scenic values".*
- *"Assessing scenic values and determining visual impacts can be a subjective process. Objectivity and consistency can be greatly increased by using the basic design elements of form, line, colour, and texture, which have often been used to describe and evaluate landscapes, to also describe proposed projects. Projects that repeat these design elements are usually in harmony with their surroundings; those that don't create contrast. By adjusting project designs so the elements are repeated, visual impacts can be minimized" (USDI., 2004).*

Baseline Phase Summary

The VRM process involves the systematic classification of the broad-brush landscape types within the receiving environment into one of four VRM Classes. Each VRM Class is associated with management objectives that serve to guide the degree of modification of the proposed site. The Classes are derived by means of a simple matrix with the three variables being the scenic quality, the expected receptor sensitivity to landscape change, and the distance of the proposed landscape modification from key receptor points. The Classes are not prescriptive and are utilised as a guideline to determine visual carrying capacity, where they represent the relative value of the visual resources of an area. Classes I and II are the most valued, Class III represents a moderate value; and Class IV is of least value. The VRM Classes are not prescriptive and are used as a guideline to determine the carrying capacity of a visually preferred landscape as a basis for assessing the suitability of the landscape change associated with the proposed project.

Table 3: VRM Class Matrix table

		VISUAL SENSITIVITY LEVELS								
		High			Medium			Low		
SCENIC QUALITY	A (High)	II	II	II	II	II	II	II	II	II
	B (Medium)	II	III	III/ IV *	III	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV
	C (Low)	III	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV
DISTANCE ZONES		Fore/middle ground	Background	Seldom seen	Fore/middle ground	Background	Seldom seen	Fore/middle ground	Background	Seldom seen

* If adjacent areas are **Class III** or lower, assign **Class III**, if higher, assign **Class IV**

The visual objectives of each of the classes are listed below:

- The Class I objective is to preserve the existing character of the landscape and the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention. Class I is assigned when a decision is made to maintain a natural landscape.
- The Class II objective is to retain the existing character of the landscape and the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. The proposed development may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer, and should repeat the basic elements of form, line, colour and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.
- The Class III objective is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape, where the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. The proposed development may attract attention, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer, and changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape; and
- The Class IV objective is to provide for management activities that require major modifications of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the landscape can be high, and the proposed development may dominate the view and be the major focus of the viewer's (s') attention without significantly degrading the local landscape character.

Impact Phase Summary (Not undertaken)

To determine impacts, a degree of contrast exercise is undertaken. This is an assessment of the expected change to the receiving environment in terms of the form, line, colour and texture, as seen from the surrounding Key Observation Points. This determines if the proposed project meets the visual objectives defined for each of the Classes. If the expected visual contrast is strong, mitigation recommendations are to be made to assist in meeting the visual objectives. To assist in the understanding of the proposed landscape modifications, visual representation, such as photomontages or photos depicting the impacted areas, can be generated. There is an ethical obligation in the visualisation process, as visualisation can be misleading if not undertaken ethically.

3.4 VIA Process Outline

The following approach was used in understanding the landscape processes and informing the magnitude of the impacts of the proposed landscape modification. The table below lists a number of standardised procedures recommended as a component of best international practice. The process relevant to this assessment are highlighted **red** text.

Table 4: Methodology Summary table

Action	Description
Site Survey and Preliminary Statement	The identification of existing scenic resources and sensitive receptors in and around the study area to understand the context of the proposed development within its surroundings to ensure that the intactness of the landscape and the prevailing sense of place are taken into consideration.
Project Description	Provide a description of the expected project, and the components that will make up the landscape modification.
Reviewing the Legal Framework	The legal, policy and planning framework may have implications for visual aspects of the proposed development. The heritage legislation tends to be pertinent in relation to natural and cultural landscapes, while Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) for renewable energy provide a guideline at the regional scale.
Determining the Zone of Visual Influence	This includes mapping of viewsheds and view corridors in relation to the proposed project elements, in order to assess the zone of visual influence of the proposed project. Based on the topography of the landscape as represented by a Digital Elevation Model, an approximate area is defined which provides an expected area where the landscape modification has the potential to influence landscapes (or landscape processes) or receptor viewpoints.
Identifying Visual Issues and Visual Resources	Visual issues are identified during the public participation process, which is being carried out by others. The visual, social or heritage specialists may also identify visual issues. The significance and proposed mitigation of the visual issues are addressed as part of the visual assessment.
Assessing Potential Visual Impacts	An assessment is made of the significance of potential visual impacts resulting from the proposed project for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the project. The rating of visual significance is based on the methodology provided by the Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP).
Formulating Mitigation Measures	Possible mitigation measures are identified to avoid or minimise negative visual impacts of the proposed project. The intention is that these would be included in the project design, the Environmental Management Programme report (EMPr) and the authorisation conditions.

3.5 Assumptions and Uncertainties

- Digital Elevation Models (DEM) and viewsheds were generated using ASTER elevation data (NASA, 2009). Although every effort to maintain accuracy was undertaken, as a result of the DEM being generated from satellite imagery and not being a true representation of the earth's surface, the viewshed mapping is approximate and may not represent an exact visibility incidence. Thus, specific features identified from the DEM and derive contours (such as peaks and conical hills) would need to be verified once a detailed survey of the project area has taken place.
- The use of open-source satellite imagery was utilised for base maps in the report.
- Some of the mapping in this document was created using Bing Maps, Open-Source Map, ArcGIS Online and Google Earth Satellite imagery.
- The project deliverables, including electronic copies of reports, maps, data, shape files and photographs are based on the author's professional knowledge, as well as available information.
- VRM Africa reserves the right to modify aspects of the project deliverables if and when new/additional information may become available from research or further work in the applicable field of practice or pertaining to this study.
- Mapping makes use of the SANBI BGIS webmap (SANBI, 2018), as well as Google Earth Pro satellite imagery.

4 PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

4.1 Landscape Planning Fit

In order to comply with the Visual Resource Management requirements, it is necessary to relate the proposed landscape modification in terms of international best practice in understanding landscapes and landscape processes. The proposed project also needs to be evaluated in terms of 'policy fit'. This requires a review of International, National and Regional best practice, policy and planning for the area to ensure that the scale, density and nature of activities or developments are harmonious and in keeping with the planned sense of place and character of the area. The following guidelines were reviewed for relevance:

- DEA&DP Visual and Aesthetic Guidelines.
- Conservation Planning.
- Regional and Local Municipality Planning and Guidelines.

Table 5: List of key planning informants to the project.

Theme	Requirements
Province	Western Cape
District Municipality	Garden Route
Local Municipality	Knysna

4.1.1 DEA&DP Visual and Aesthetic Guidelines

Reference to the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) Guideline for involving visual and aesthetic specialists in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes is provided in terms of southern African

best practice in Visual Impact Assessment. The report compiled by Oberholzer states that the Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) should address the following:

- Ensure that the scale, density and nature of activities or developments are harmonious and in keeping with the sense of place and character of the area. The BPEO must also ensure that development must be located to prevent structures from being a visual intrusion (i.e., to retain open views and vistas).
- Long term protection of important scenic resources and heritage sites.
- Minimisation of visual intrusion in scenic areas.
- Retention of wilderness or special areas intact as far as possible.
- Responsiveness to the area's uniqueness, or sense of place.” (Oberholzer, 2005)

Of relevance to this planning guideline is the need to protect the sense of place of the Knysna Lagoon as this area is a key component of Knysna’s tourist economy and a significant landscape resource.

4.1.2 Regional and Local Planning

The following tables list key regional and local planning that has relevance to the project pertaining to landscape-based tourism, and renewable energy projects. As can be seen in the map below, the property is zoned as Agriculture Zone I and is included in the Brenton on Lake Urban Edge.



Figure 2: Knysna Final SDF planning for Brenton-on-Lake with the property falling within of the Urban Edge with Agriculture I Zoning and suitable for infill development (Knysna Municipality, 2025, p. 142).

Table 6: District Planning reference table relevant to the project.

Theme	Requirements	Page
Planning	- Specialised Coastal Areas: Urban centres with a special function (often tourism related), as well as a role in terms of servicing the surrounding areas and containing a mix of economic activities and services. - Brenton-on-Sea: Retirement and second home	130/31
Tourism	The significant scenic and cultural assets that drive growth of the service sectors have been identified for protection. These include agricultural landscapes and landscape features such as mountains, valleys, passes, estuaries, rivers and plains.	114
Landscape	The importance of the natural resource base in supporting livelihoods and its potential to improve the quality of life of all the District's residents cannot be underestimated and thus the protection and enhancement of the environment is one of the three main drivers of the spatial concept.	106

(Garden Route District Municipality SDF, 2017)

Table 7: Local Planning reference table relevant to the project.

Theme	Requirements	Page
Environment	Policy Guidelines J1: Any development that proposes to create a new sub/urban footprint in the municipal area must be assessed in terms of the Urban Growth Proposals Assessment Framework. This Framework seeks to ensure that such an assessment process adequately engages with the viability, performance and sustainability concerns from the perspective of the overall public good.	39 76
Tourism	To keep this competitive edge, it is imperative that the tourism offering in particular remains authentic, that the sense of place, and the experience of a small town embedded in its natural and forest environment is retained	14
Landscape	Policy A5: Maintain the integrity of the Garden Route landscape. View sheds over scenic landscapes and features must be safeguarded.: The CR Swart Drive from the N2 intersection to Brenton-on-Sea	33
Estuary	- In coastal zones, river- wetland-estuary catchments, critical biodiversity areas and veld fire risk areas, land use must be effectively managed to secure environmental resources, systems and ecosystem services, mitigate the risk of natural disasters to life and property and improve climate resilience - Rehabilitate and protect rivers, estuaries, wetlands and their catchments (Knysna's hydrological systems) - from pollution, increased surface run-off and siltation, unmanaged extraction and the impact of reduced run-off and/or clogging as a result of alien vegetation infestation - Settlement alongside rivers and estuaries must use sustainable urban drainage systems to avoid polluted run-off and be managed to mitigate against unsustainable water extraction	29

Theme	Requirements	Page
Planning	The urban edge services to maintain a clear “green” edge around all settlements – large and small – in the municipal area in keeping with the historical landscape pattern and the garden-like character of the Garden Route	34

(Knysna Municipality, 2025)

4.1.3 Conservation Planning

The property is part of the Knysna National Lake Area and in close proximity to the lagoon. The reduced scale of the development, the buffering from the lagoon as well as the existing development precedent of Belvidere in general, and Belvidere Heights Estate in specific, are unlikely to result in degradation of the lagoon as a landscape and visual resource.

4.1.4 Landscape Planning Policy Fit Preliminary Findings.

In terms of regional and local planning fit for planned landscape and visual related themes, the expected visual/ landscape policy fit of the landscape change is rated **High Positive** for the following reasons:

- The proposed development is located within the proposed Knysna Municipality Urban Edge.
- The reduced scale of the development does afford a visual transition from the Belvidere residential areas to the background forestry/ natural areas that are a key component of the Knysna sense of place.
- The proposed architecture is similar to that of Belvidere Heights Estate, which is noted as a suitable example, with articulation of form and roof design.
- There is an historic development precedent for development in the area. In 2017 these dwellings were raised. These footprints will be used in the new development, reducing the need for large cut and fills for the more visually exposed units, as well as from the road network which is already established.

4.2 Visual Absorption Capacity

Land use is a crucial factor in determining landscape character, especially regarding the Visual Absorption Capacity (VAC) of the landscapes. Oberholzer defines VAC as the potential of the landscape to conceal the proposed project (Oberholzer, 2005). i.e.

- High VAC – e.g., effective screening by vegetation and structures.
- Moderate VAC - e.g., partial screening by vegetation and structures.
- Low VAC - e.g., little screening by vegetation or structures.

The VAC levels are rated **Medium to Low** for the following reasons:

- While there would be an historic precedent for development from the previous built houses on the property, there is only a single built structure on the site.
- While there is some natural, thicket vegetation regrowth as well as some larger, feature trees still remaining around the old plots, this is unlikely to provide significant visual screening for the proposed development.

4.3 Zone of Visual Influence

The visible extent, or viewshed, is “the outer boundary defining a view catchment area, usually along crests and ridgelines” (Oberholzer, 2005). In order to define the extent of the

possible influence of the proposed project, a viewshed analysis was undertaken from the proposed site at a specified height above ground level (Refer Viewshed Map in Figure 4). The extent of the Zone of Visual Influence is defined as **Medium to High** (Wide Area) for the following reasons:

- While extending over a wide area, the viewshed will be contained by the Knysna Lagoon.
- Due to the higher VAC of the Belvidere built landscape, as well as the lower density of the proposed development, the Zone of Visual Influence is most likely to be contained within the 3km distance.

4.4 Receptors and KOPs

Key Observation Points (KOPs) are the people (receptors) located in strategic locations surrounding the property that make consistent use of the views associated with the site where the landscape modifications are proposed. Due the wide area zone of visual influence where the proposed landscape change is expected to be noticeable within the foreground/ mid-ground distance, the following receptors were located within the expected ZVI:

- N2 Highway/ Knysna Point area.
- CR Swart Road (East and westbound).
- Margaret's Viewpoint.

Due to the close proximity of the CR Swart and Margaret's Viewpoint receptors to the proposed landscape change, the Visual Exposure is rated as **Very High**. The proposed development will be clearly visible to these receptor locations.

4.5 Scenic Quality

Making use of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (USDI., 2004) Scenic Quality rating table (refer to Table 10, the scenic quality of the proposed development site was assessed.

The scenic quality of the site is rated as **medium to high**. Its undulating terrain enhances visual interest, and patches of indigenous vegetation among mostly alien cover add colour and texture variation. The site is not unique in the Knysna Lagoon area, where similar peri urban landscapes are common, but its position within the broader lagoon setting, framed by a continuous green vegetation fringe, greatly adds to its value. With only a single residence present, visual absorption capacity is low, yet the lack of development contributes positively to the urban edge sense of place.

4.6 Receptor Sensitivity

Making use of the BLM (USDI., 2004) Receptor Sensitivity rating table (refer to Table 11), the scenic quality of the proposed development site was assessed.

Receptor sensitivity for the site is rated as **high** due to its strong association with tourism, conservation, and high-use scenic routes. The primary users comprise recreational sightseers, leisure visitors, and eco-tourists whose experience depends on unspoiled views, intact natural vegetation, and a cohesive landscape character, making them highly sensitive to visual change. The site's proximity to CR Swart Road and visibility from the

Knysna Lagoon elevates the amount of use to high, with scenic quality experienced by both road-based travellers and water-based recreationists. As the Knysna Lagoon is a well-known tourist destination with consistently high visitor numbers—particularly in peak seasons—any alteration to its visual quality has heightened significance. Surrounding land uses, including residential areas within a conservation context and tourism facilities, rely directly on scenic value for property desirability, recreation, and visitor appeal. Although not formally a wilderness or scenic reserve, the site’s location within the Knysna National Lake Area and on the urban edge places it within a recognised special area, where planning must prioritise sensitive integration with the environmental and scenic context.

4.7 Landscape and Visual Impact Significance

Making use of the DEA&DP Visual and Aesthetic Guidelines (Oberholzer, 2005) rating table for Visual Impact Significance (Table 12), the proposed landscape change was assessed and found to be Medium (where that mitigation should inform decision making).

Due to the slightly elevated locality, within the broader Knysna Lagoon topography, the visual impact is expected to be **regional** in extent, affecting a larger metropolitan or regional area. Duration is expected to be **medium-term** duration, where the proposed dwelling will be clearly visible until the landscaping can become more established. The magnitude of impact is **medium-high with mitigation**, indicating that visual and scenic resources will be affected. This is specifically related to the views along the line of proposed houses as viewed from CR Swart Road. With mitigation, this would be reduced to Medium to Low in the medium-term. Due to the Very High Visual Exposure from the CR Swart Road, the likelihood of the impact occurring is **probable**, meaning there is a distinct possibility it will take place. Overall, the significance is assessed as **medium**, suggesting it should influence decision-making unless appropriate mitigation measures are implemented. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that the 10m setback from the CR Swart Road should be incorporated, and the layout amended accordingly as per the mitigation specified in the following table.

4.8 Mitigations

The following mitigations are proposed (Refer to Mitigations Map in Figure 13):

Table 8. Preliminary Mitigations Table.

Issue	Theme	Mitigation
Sense of place	CR Swart Road	The following specific mitigations should be included into the preferred layout plan: • 10m Setback area from the CR Swart Road. • Relocation of the proposed garage and garage access road (which limits visual screening plantings along the CR Swart Road). • The relocation of the single proposed garage located adjacent to the CR Swart to behind the front row of erven.

		• The reduce the strong linear effect of the proposed development, enable more vegetation planting areas between the proposed buildings as well as align with the existing contour informed settlement pattern of the adjacent Belvidere Heights Estate (positive local precedent), the proposed layout should be amended to reflect a slight curve. • The dwellings should not exceed 8.5m in height above avg. ground level to ensure that dwellings are not placed on the front of large fill areas, increasing visual intrusion. • Intensive planting of fast growing, indigenous tree in the 10m buffer along the CR Swart Road should also be a condition of authorisation.
Sense of place	Architectural Guidelines Amendment	A review of the proposed Architectural Guidelines found them to be generally suitable but recommends additional provisions. These should include a clear requirement for verandas and pergolas on the north-facing sides of dwellings, along with measures to avoid large, unbroken wall surfaces that create dominant visual forms. The architecture should present as single storey, using deep verandas and articulated design elements to break up strong forms and lines. While taking wildfire safety into account, the inclusion of larger shrubs and small tree landscaping near structures should be encouraged to help retain the nature-based sense of place characteristic of the greater Belvidere Heights and conservancy area. In term of retaining the conservancy sense of place, to ensure that there is sufficient space for landscaping/ planting between the front row of erven (as per the Belvidere Heights Estate), a 75% Development/ 25% No-Development ratio is suggested.

5 PROJECT MAPPING

The following maps have been generated to inform the SSVR.

- Proposed site development layout.
- Cadastral locality map.
- Knysna SDF planning proposal map.
- Viewshed and Key Observation Point map.
- Site profile map.
- Site slopes analysis map.

- Development sensitivity and constraints map.
- Photomontages from Key Observation Points: CR Swart Drive, Margarets Viewpoint and Knysna Lagoon .
- Site survey locality map.

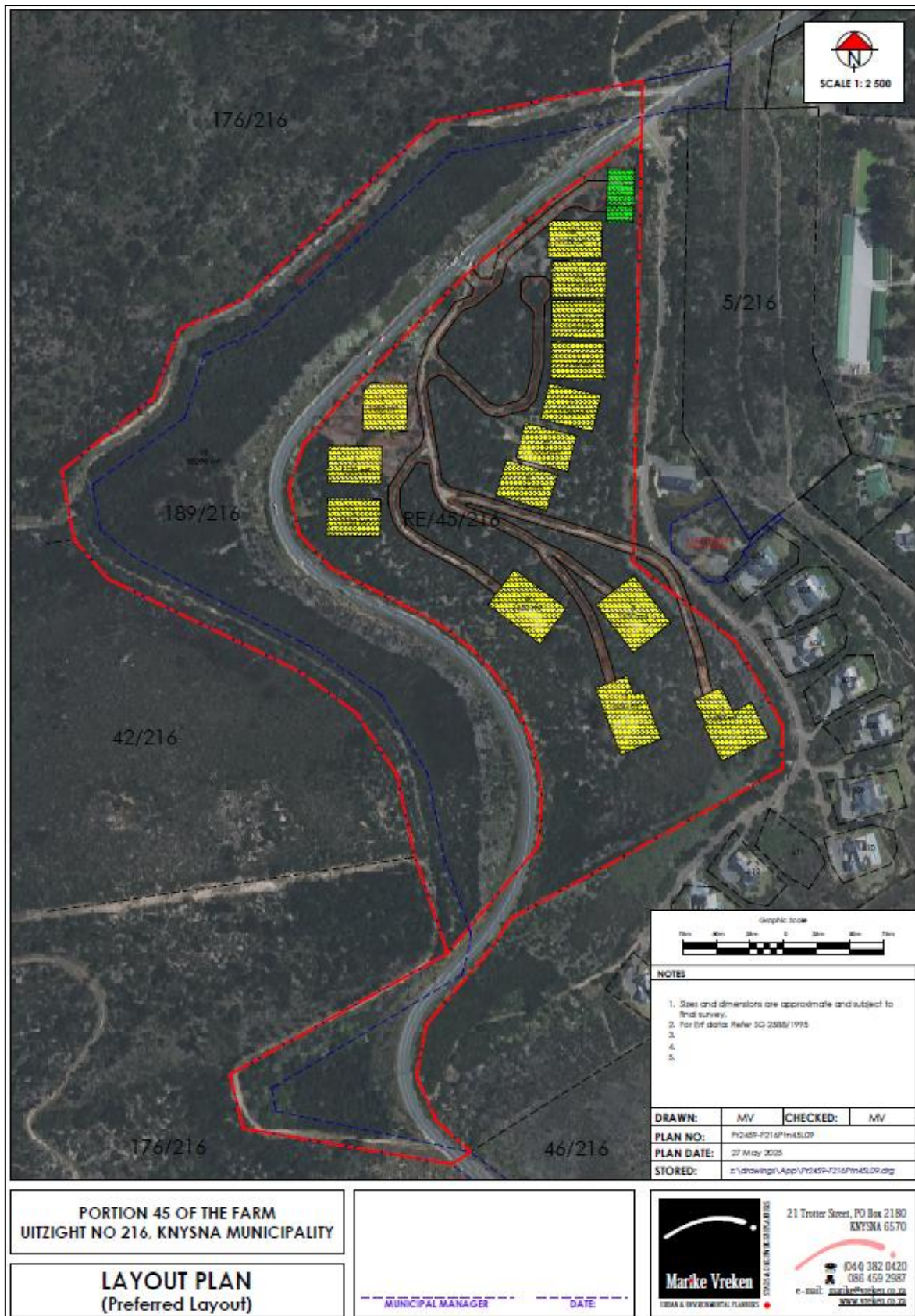


Figure 3: Proposed layout plan.

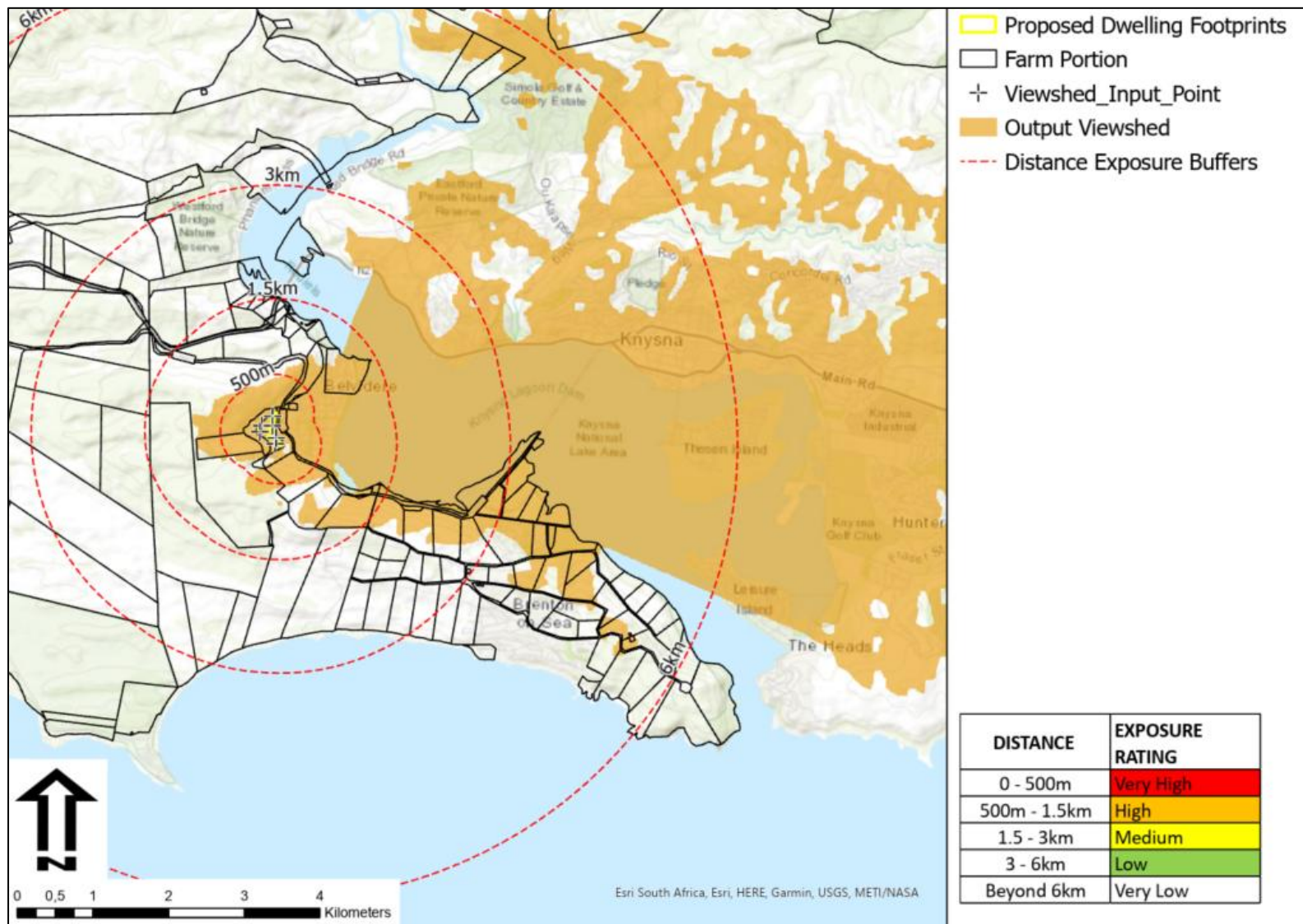


Figure 4: Viewshed mapping.



Figure 5: Site profile mapping: North to South with linear development risk identified as seen from CR Swart Drive.



Figure 6: Key Observation Points used in 3D modelling.

Existing View: Initial view from CR Swart Road Westbound



Proposed Google Earth 3D Block Model (Visual Preference)



Figure 7: Photomontages: CR Swart Road Westbound **without mitigation of blocks 8m in height** (*Visual Preference Layout*).

Proposed Google Earth 3D Block Model with planting in the No-Go 10m buffer (following existing Keurboom roadside precedent)



Figure 8: Photomontages: CR Swart Road Westbound **with mitigation of blocks 8m in height** (*Visual Preference Layout*).

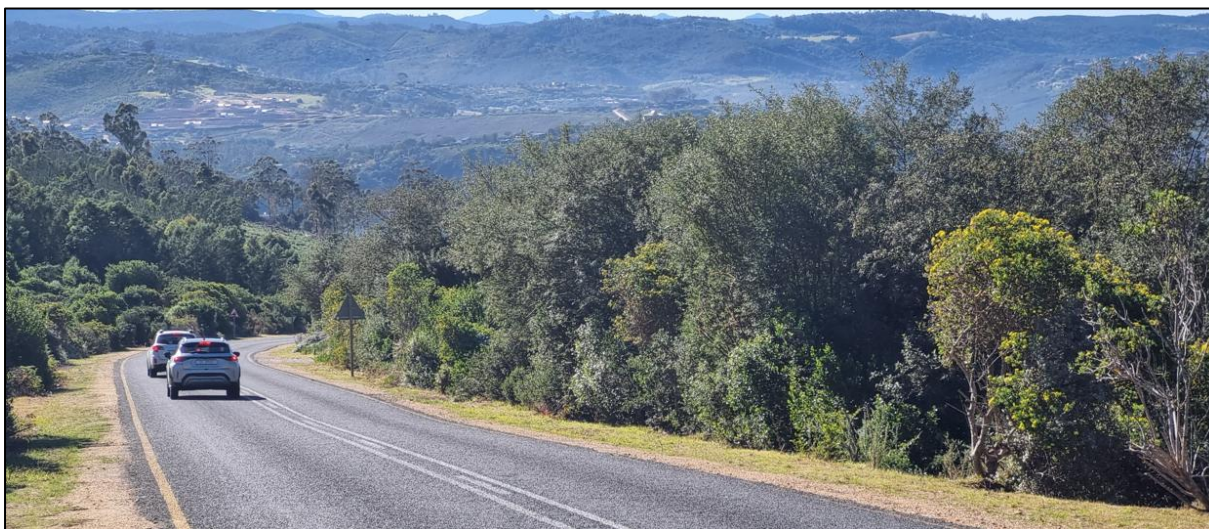


Figure 9: Photograph depicting the existing screening along CR Swart Road (northbound) used as motivation for screening buffer.

Existing View: Belvidere view from Knysna Lagoon



Figure 10: KOP: View from Knysna Road with the Google Earth block model below.



Figure 11: Photomontages: Margarets Viewpoint with photograph towards the site.

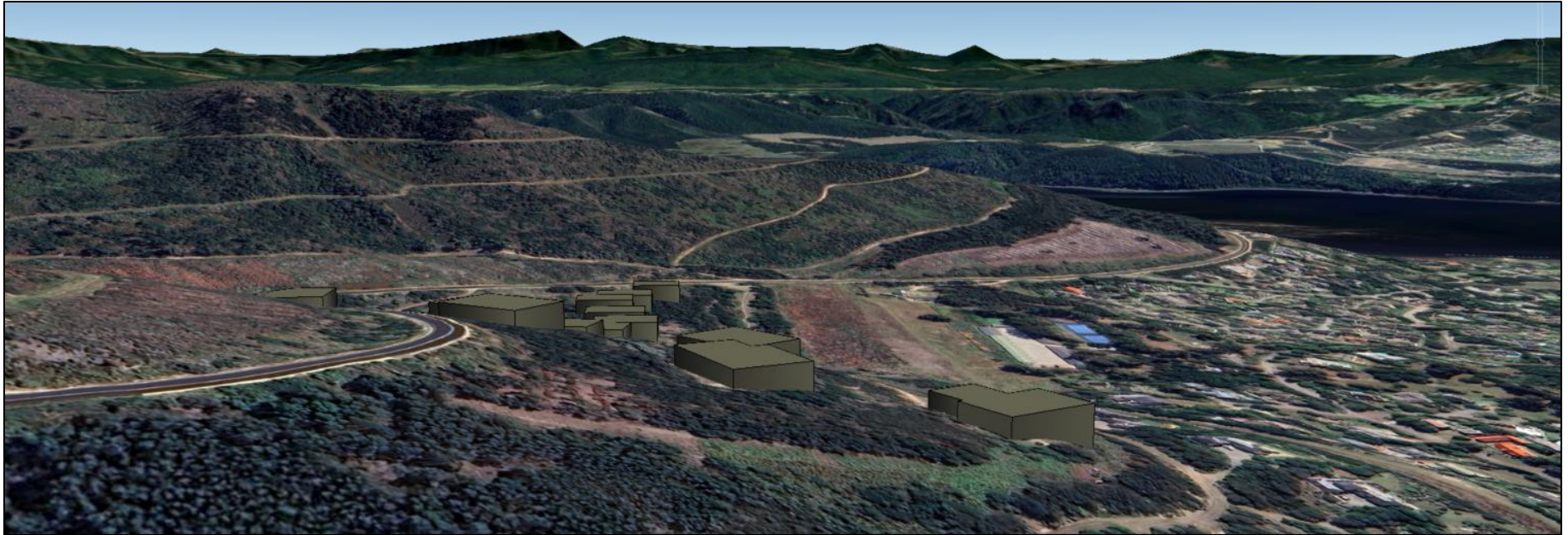


Figure 12: Photomontages: Margarets Viewpoint with 3D Block model views from the site (extrude 8m).

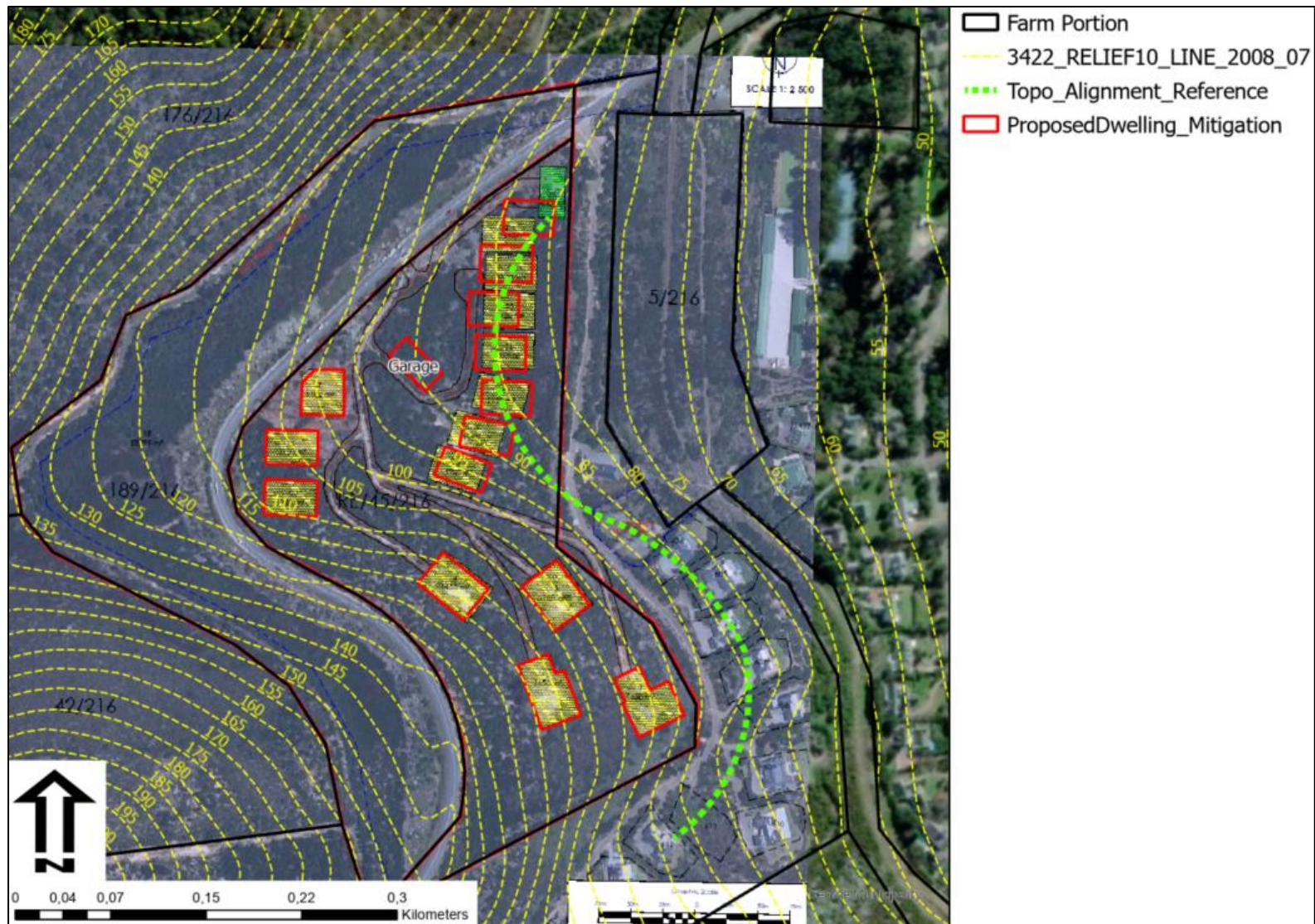


Figure 13: Site preliminary mitigation mapping depicting CR Swart Road vegetation screening buffer with setback of Garage road, garage and single proposed erven.

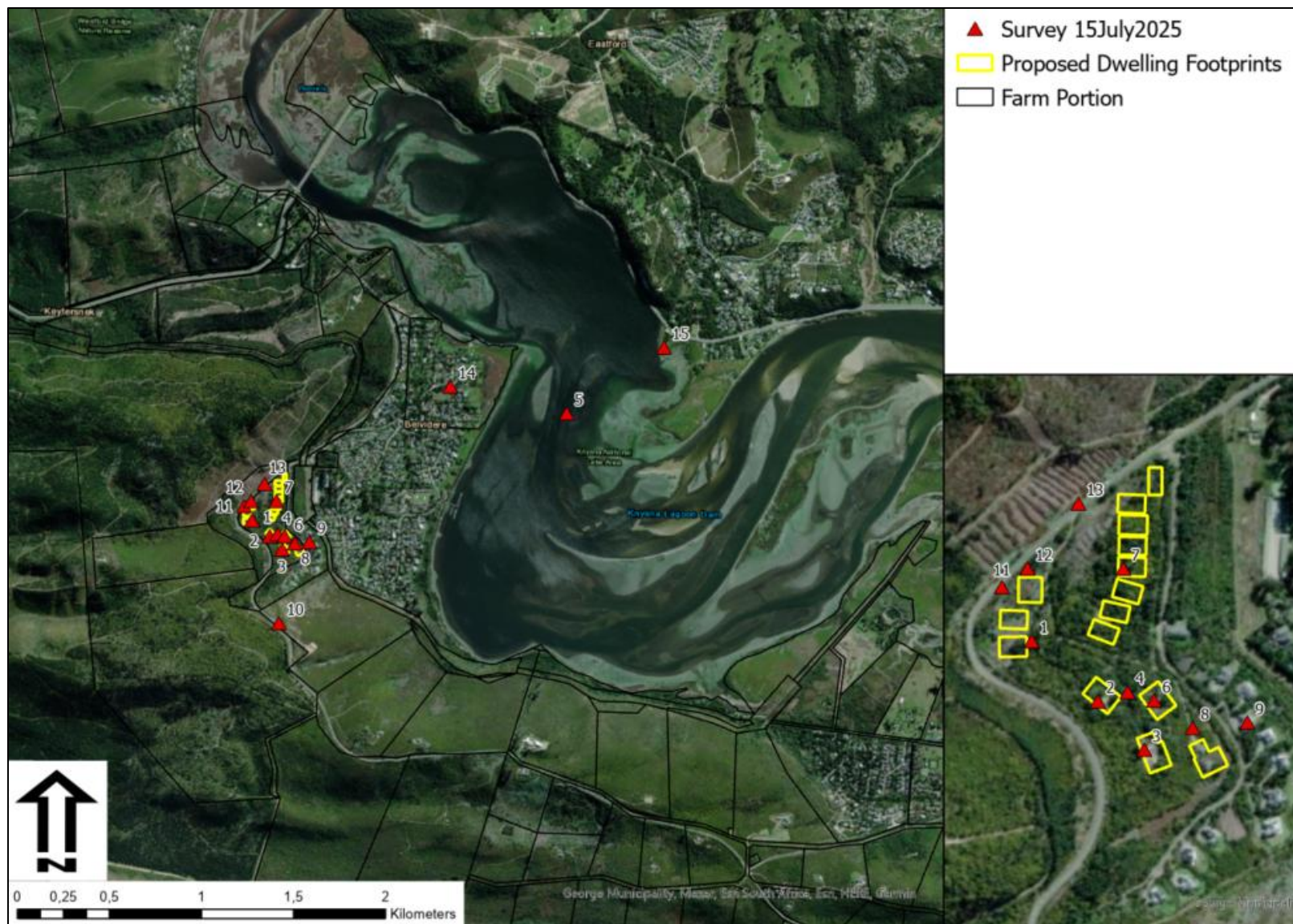


Figure 14: Survey point locality map.

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7 ANNEXURE A: SITE VISIT PHOTOGRAPHS AND COMMENTS

The following photographs were taken during the field survey as mapped below. The text below the photograph describes the landscape and visual issues of the locality, if applicable.

ID	1
PHOTO	Site
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	West
COMMENT	Well sited in concave slope with partial vegetation screening. Mitigate to Low with colour and landscaping.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_100811281.jpg



ID	2
PHOTO	Site
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	East
COMMENT	Previous development footprint within urban edge. Mitigate with architecture (broken form) with limited large front face walls, deep covered patios. Rehabilitating back cut face is important.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_101445610.jpg



ID	3
PHOTO	Site
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	East
COMMENT	As for previous. Retain front fringe of indigenous vegetation as much as possible
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_102010205.jpg



ID	4
PHOTO	Existing road upgrade
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	West
COMMENT	Existing road network depicting suitable cut fill with small berm to slope with natural rehabilitation with Bitou plants works well.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_102415813.jpg



ID	5
PHOTO	Knysna lagoon context
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	North
COMMENT	Well set back from lagoon with existing development precedent as well as suitable low density.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_102714202.jpg



ID	6
PHOTO	Site
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	East
COMMENT	As for previous old dwelling site
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_103015096.jpg



ID	7
PHOTO	Site
RISK	Medium
DIRECTION	Northwest
COMMENT	Well contained topographically with partial tree screening. High Visual Exposure to adjacent road I. Mitigate to Low with tree screening along the road.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_103638205.jpg



ID	8
PHOTO	Site upgrade
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	East
COMMENT	Existing development footprint within proposed urban edge
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_104218357.jpg



ID	9
PHOTO	Belvidere Heights suitable roof architecture
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	Northeast
COMMENT	Well screened with lower density vegetation. Broken roof architecture with slate grey colour predicting form, line and colour contrast.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_105552300.jpg



ID	10
PHOTO	Margaret's Viewpoint
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	Northwest
COMMENT	Existing precedent for low density, conservation estate development. Partial topographic screening with some existing tree vegetation for screening. Suitable with mitigation for conservation design, landscaping, and alien removal.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_110452961.jpg



ID	11
PHOTO	CR Swart Drive KOP
RISK	Medium to High
DIRECTION	East
COMMENT	Very high Visual Exposure to road receptors to double storey structure. Mitigate to Medium by retaining existing tree vegetation and planting additional indigenous trees along three road verges.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_111447553.jpg



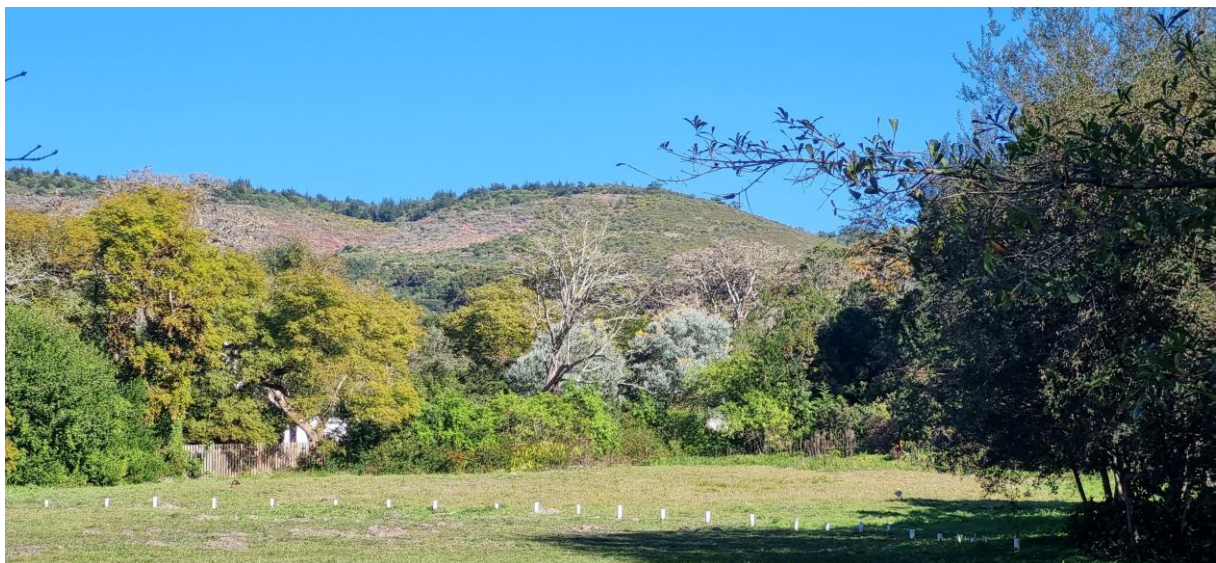
ID	12
PHOTO	CR Swart Road plantings
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	North
COMMENT	Suitable precedent using Keurboom tree as pilot species as transition to larger forest tree planting
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_111910034.jpg



ID	13
PHOTO	CR Swart KOP 2
RISK	High
DIRECTION	Northeast
COMMENT	Very High Visual Exposure to road receptor to proposed row of dwellings. suitable with mitigation and the incorporation of a 10m setback from the road to allow for the double storey structures to be more valley based, and vegetation screening to be planting along the road. This would require the shifting of the proposed garage road and a single erven.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_112323651.jpg



ID	14
PHOTO	Belvidere common
RISK	Low
DIRECTION	South
COMMENT	Vegetation screening and distance
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_121012991.jpg



ID	15
PHOTO	Knysna Lagoon The Point KOP
RISK	Medium
DIRECTION	Southwest
COMMENT	Potential to set negative precedent for block form houses on the urban edge, increasing developmental pressures around the Knysna Lagoon area. Mitigate to Low with colour, texture and design architectural design similar to Belvidere Heights Estate as the visual footprint of this development is contained.
PHOTO NO	BVC_20250715_122137472.jpg
	

8 ANNEXURE B: SPECIALIST INFORMATION

8.1 Professional Registration Certificate



Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners

MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATE

THIS CERTIFIES THAT

STEPHEN STEAD

MEMBERSHIP NUMBER: PHP0063

has been awarded membership as a
PROFESSIONAL MEMBER (PHP)

This membership is subject to the *Standards for Membership and Code of Conduct*, referred to in Sections 2 and 3 of the APHP Constitution respectively. The definition of a Professional may be found at: www.aphp.org.za/membership

Please contact us via info@aphp.org.za should further information be required.

THIS CERTIFICATE IS VALID FROM **1 JUNE 2025 – 1 JULY 2026**

CHAIRPERSON

[Issued by the Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners Executive Committee]

Watermark Image: Lydenburg-Head, circa 500 AD.
Illustration from: *Ritual Space in the Zimbabwe Culture*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/3172310317> (accessed 29 Jun 2025)

Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners
info@aphp.org.za
www.aphp.org.za

8.2 Curriculum Vitae (CV)

1. **Position:** Owner / Director
2. **Name of Firm:** Visual Resource Management Africa cc (www.vrma.co.za)
3. **Name of Staff:** Stephen Stead
4. **Date of Birth:** 9 June 1967
5. **Nationality:** South African
6. **Contact Details:** Cell: +27 (0) 83 560 9911
Email: steve@vrma.co.za
7. **Educational qualifications:**
 - University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg):
 - Bachelor of Arts: Psychology and Geography
 - Bachelor of Arts (Hons): Human Geography and Geographic Information Management Systems
 - MSc Geography, University of KwaZulu, Natal (2023)
8. **Professional Accreditation**
 - Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners (APHP) Western Cape
 - Accredited VIA practitioner member of the Association (2011)
9. **Association involvement:**
 - International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) South African Affiliate
 - Past President (2012 - 2013)
 - President (2012)
 - President-Elect (2011)
 - Conference Co-ordinator (2010)
 - National Executive Committee member (2009)
 - Southern Cape Chairperson (2008)
10. **Conferences Attended:**
 - International Geographical Congress, Lisbon (2017)
 - IAIAAsa 2012
 - IAIAAsa 2011
 - IAIA International 2011 (Mexico)
 - IAIAAsa 2010
 - IAIAAsa 2009
 - IAIAAsa 2007
11. **Continued Professional Development:**
 - Integrating Sustainability with Environment Assessment in South Africa (IAIAAsa Conference, 1 day)
 - Achieving the full potential of SIA (Mexico, IAIA Conference, 2 days 2011)

- Researching and Assessing Heritage Resources Course (University of Cape Town, 5 days, 2009)

12. Countries of Work Experience:

- South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho, Kenya and Namibia.

13. Relevant Experience:

Stephen gained six years of experience in the field of Geographic Information Systems mapping and spatial analysis working as a consultant for the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and then with an Environmental Impact Assessment company based in the Western Cape. In 2004 he set up the company Visual Resource Management Africa that specializes in visual resource management and visual impact assessments in Africa. The company makes use of the well-documented Visual Resource Management methodology developed by the Bureau of Land Management (USA) for assessing the suitability of landscape modifications. Stephen has assessed of over 150 major landscape modifications throughout southern and eastern Africa. The business has been operating for eighteen years and has successfully established and retained a large client base throughout Southern Africa which include amongst other, Rio Tinto (Pty) Ltd, Bannerman (Pty) Ltd, Anglo Coal (Pty) Ltd, Eskom (Pty) Ltd, NamSolar and Vale (Pty) Ltd, Ariva (Pty) Ltd, Harmony Gold (Pty) Ltd, Millennium Challenge Account (USA), Pretoria Portland Cement (Pty) Ltd

14. Languages:

- English – First Language
- Afrikaans – fair in speaking, reading and writing.

15. Projects:

Table 9: VRM Africa Projects Assessments Table

DESCRIPTION	COUNT	DESCRIPTION	COUNT
Dam	2	UISP	8
Mari-culture	1	Structure	8
Port	1	OHPL	12
Railway	1	Industrial	12
Power Station	3	Wind Energy	22
Hydroelectric	4	Battery Storage	14
Resort	4	Mine	20
Golf/Residential	1	Residential	45
Road Infrastructure	5	Solar Energy	62
Substation	5	TOTAL	237

9 ANNEXURE C: LANDSCAPE SIGNIFICANCE RATING CRITERIA

In terms of VRM methodology, landscape character is derived from a combination of **scenic quality**, **receptor sensitivity** to landscape change and **distance** from the proposed landscape change. (USDI., 2004) The objective of the analysis is to compile a mapped inventory of the visual resources found in the receiving landscape, and to derive a mapped Visual Resource sensitivity layer from which to evaluate the suitability of the landscape change.

9.1 Scenic Quality Assessment

The scenic quality is determined making use of the VRM Scenic Quality Checklist that identifies seven scenic quality criteria which are rated with 1 (low) to 5 (high) scale. Making use of the VRM Matrix classification of Scenic Quality for the different physiographic units, the following table depicts a summary of the combined areas to define a broad-brush appraisal of the property scenic quality.

Table 10: Scenic Quality Rating table

Landscapes	Rating	Motivation
Landform <i>Topography becomes more of a factor as it becomes steeper, or more severely sculptured.</i>	MH	The site is undulating and does increase the scenic quality.
Vegetation Primary consideration given to the variety of patterns, forms, and textures created by plant life.	ML	While much of the site depicts alien vegetation, there are patches of indigenous vegetation starting to take place that add colour and texture variation.
Water <i>That ingredient which adds movement or serenity to a scene. The degree to which water dominates the scene is the primary consideration.</i>	L	No apparent water was identified on the site.
Colour <i>The overall colour(s) of the basic components of the landscape (e.g., soil, rock, vegetation, etc.) are considered as they appear during seasons or periods of high use.</i>	M	Colour is primarily related to vegetation, and reflects a range of grey-greens from the fynbos and thicket/ alien vegetation.
Scarcity <i>This factor provides an opportunity to give added importance to one, or all, of the scenic features that appear to be relatively unique or rare within one physiographic region.</i>	M	The site is not overly significant or scarce, with similar areas around the Knysna Lagoon also depicting a similar peri-urban sense of place.
Adjacent Landscapes <i>Degree to which scenery and distance enhance, or starts to influence, the overall impression of the scenery within the rating unit.</i>	H	The Knysna Lagoon, encapsulated for much of the broader landscape, within a green vegetation fringe, does significantly add to the local scenic quality.
Cultural Modifications <i>Cultural modifications should be considered and may detract from the scenery or</i>	M	Only a single residence is located on site, reducing the visual absorption capacity, but with the lack of development offering some value to the urban edge.

<i>complement or improve the scenic quality of an area.</i>		
Scenic Quality	Medium to High	
The scenic quality of the site is rated as medium to high . Its undulating terrain enhances visual interest, and patches of indigenous vegetation among mostly alien cover add colour and texture variation. The site is not unique in the Knysna Lagoon area, where similar peri urban landscapes are common, but its position within the broader lagoon setting, framed by a continuous green vegetation fringe, greatly adds to its value. With only a single residence present, visual absorption capacity is low, yet the lack of development contributes positively to the urban edge sense of place.		

9.2 Receptor Sensitivity Assessment

Different types of receptors are likely to have different responses to the landscape change changes. The following table identified the different criteria used to evaluate a broad understanding of receptor sensitivity to landscape change.

Table 11: Receptor Sensitivity Rating table.

Landscapes	Rating	Motivation
Type of Users <i>Visual sensitivity will vary with the type of users, e.g., recreational sightseers may be highly sensitive to any changes in visual quality, whereas workers who pass through the area on a regular basis may not be as sensitive to change.</i>	H	The primary users in this area include recreational sightseers, leisure visitors, and eco-tourists who are drawn to the lagoon's natural beauty. These users are likely to be sensitive to changes in visual quality, as their experience is closely tied to unspoiled scenic views, natural vegetation, and a cohesive landscape character.
Amount of use <i>Areas seen or used by large numbers of people are potentially more sensitive.</i>	H	Due to the close proximity of the CR Swart Road, as well as views from the Knysna Lagoon, the Amount of Use is rated to High
Public interest <i>The visual quality of an area may be of concern to local, or regional, groups. Indicators of this concern are usually expressed via public controversy created in response to proposed activities.</i>	MH	The Knysna Lagoon is a well-known tourist destination with consistently high visitor numbers, particularly during peak holiday seasons. Its visual quality is experienced by both road-based travellers and water-based recreationists, increasing sensitivity to any landscape change.
Adjacent land Users <i>The interrelationship with land uses in adjacent lands. For example, an area within the viewshed of a residential area may be very sensitive, whereas an area surrounded by commercially developed lands may not be as visually sensitive.</i>	MH	The surrounding land uses include residential areas operating within a conservation context, and tourism facilities, many of which rely on the area's scenic quality for property value, recreation, and visitor appeal.
Special Areas Management objectives <i>for special areas such as Natural Areas, Wilderness Areas or Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Areas, Scenic Roads or Trails, and Critical Biodiversity Areas frequently</i>	M	While not formally designated as a wilderness or scenic reserve, the site lies within the Knysna National Lake Area and on the urban edge. For these reasons, planning for the site should incorporate the Special Area designation as a guiding theme, ensuring that development

Landscapes	Rating	Motivation
<i>require special consideration for the protection of their visual values.</i>		responds sensitively to its environmental and scenic context.
Receptor Sensitivity	High	
Receptor sensitivity for the site is rated as high due to its strong association with tourism, conservation, and high-use scenic routes. The primary users comprise recreational sightseers, leisure visitors, and eco-tourists whose experience depends on unspoiled views, intact natural vegetation, and a cohesive landscape character, making them highly sensitive to visual change. The site’s proximity to CR Swart Road and visibility from the Knysna Lagoon elevates the amount of use to high, with scenic quality experienced by both road-based travellers and water-based recreationists. As the Knysna Lagoon is a well-known tourist destination with consistently high visitor numbers—particularly in peak seasons—any alteration to its visual quality has heightened significance. Surrounding land uses, including residential areas within a conservation context and tourism facilities, rely directly on scenic value for property desirability, recreation, and visitor appeal. Although not formally a wilderness or scenic reserve, the site’s location within the Knysna National Lake Area and on the urban edge places it within a recognised special area, where planning must prioritise sensitive integration with the environmental and scenic context.		

9.3 Impact Assessment Methodology for Landscape Significance

The following impact criteria were used to assess visual impacts. The criteria were defined by the Western Cape *DEA&DP Guideline for involving Visual and Aesthetic Specialists in EIA Processes* (Oberholzer, 2005).

Table 12. DEA&DP Visual and Aesthetic Guideline Impact Assessment Criteria table

Criteria	Definition
<u>Extent</u>	The spatial or geographic area of influence of the visual impact, i.e.: • <i>site-related</i>: extending only as far as the activity. • <i>local</i>: limited to the immediate surroundings. • <i>regional</i>: affecting a larger metropolitan or regional area. • <i>national</i>: affecting large parts of the country. • <i>international</i>: affecting areas across international boundaries.
<u>Duration</u>	The predicted life-span of the visual impact: • <i>short term</i>, (e.g., duration of the construction phase). • <i>medium term</i>, (e.g., duration for screening vegetation to mature). • <i>long term</i>, (e.g., lifespan of the project). • <i>permanent</i>, where time will not mitigate the visual impact.
<u>Intensity</u>	The magnitude of the impact on views, scenic or cultural resources. • <i>low</i>, where visual and scenic resources are not affected. • <i>medium</i>, where visual and scenic resources are affected to a limited extent. • <i>high</i>, where scenic and cultural resources are significantly affected.
<u>Probability</u>	The degree of possibility of the visual impact occurring:

	• <i>improbable</i>, where the possibility of the impact occurring is very low. • <i>probable</i>, where there is a distinct possibility that the impact will occur. • <i>highly probable</i>, where it is most likely that the impact will occur. • <i>definite</i>, where the impact will occur regardless of any prevention measures.
<u>Significance</u>	The significance of impacts can be determined through a synthesis of the aspects produced in terms of their nature, duration, intensity, extent and probability, and be described as: • <i>low</i>, where it will not have an influence on the decision. • <i>medium</i>, where it should have an influence on the decision unless it is mitigated. • <i>high</i>, where it would influence the decision regardless of any possible mitigation.