

5.6 Landscape and Visual

5.6.1 Landscape Description of Randalstown to Toome

Between Randalstown and Toome, the proposed route corridors would all pass through two Landscape Character Areas, namely the Long Mountain (Randalstown) Ridge and the North Lough Neagh Shores. Approximately 85% of the route corridor lengths (near Randalstown) are within the southerly part of the Long Mountain Ridge Character Area, while the remaining approximate 15% of the corridors length (near Toome), is in the north-westerly corner of the North Lough Neagh Shores Character Area (Figure 5.6.1).

Near Randalstown the Long Mountain Ridge Character Area comprises a landscape with flat terrain or very gentle hills and large fertile grass fields bounded by hawthorn hedgerow. Near the ridgeline there are exceptional long distant views, which include views towards Lough Neagh. The westerly slopes of the Long Mountain Ridge are more undulating with smaller field sizes and views constantly changing. There are frequent and regular distributed houses and farms in the area. The settlement of Moneynick is situated along the A6 between Randalstown and Toome.

The North Lough Neagh Shores Character Area near Toome consists of lower lying, flat pasturelands with large field sizes. The hedgerows vary in condition.

Trees are prevalent in the hedges and as small clusters in both Character Areas. Mature beech avenues line some drives to prominent houses and Scots pines can be seen in clusters near houses or in field corners.

5.6.2 Designated Areas of Landscape Importance of Value

There are no landscape designations in the vicinity of the three route corridors, however as noted in Section 5.5, Lough Neagh has several habitat designations including an ASSI, SPA and Ramsar site. The Lough fringes are particularly sensitive to change.

5.6.3 Key Landmarks

The mature beech avenue and Scots pines are often visible from several viewpoints along local and main roads.

5.6.4 Potential landscape and Visual Impacts of the Proposed Route Corridors

The potential impacts of a new road within the three identified route corridors are described briefly below (see Figure 5.6.1).

North Corridor

The landscape to the north of the A6 is more undulating than to the south. The north corridor route options are unlikely to be visible from the Lough area. With careful siting, the rolling landform could better accommodate these two options, however, a poorly sited road, with for example straight cuttings through local hills, would be very intrusive.

Option 1 would cut the drumlin at chainage 1800-2000. Option 2 would be on or near the existing A6 alignment from chainage 0-3000.

Central Corridor

Route options 3 and 5 would require a degree of widening and upgrading of the existing A6. The existing road has been absorbed into the landscape and is only visible in selected views. The upgrading of the road would make it more visible, particularly in the panoramic views from the Long Mountain Ridge; however,

all route options would be visible in these views. The existing road is unlikely to be visible from the area around Lough Neagh. These two options are also likely to infringe on some gardens, dwellings and/or forecourts of businesses, particularly at Moneynick.

Route options 3 and 5 would have the clear advantage of avoiding new disruption and fragmentation of the surrounding landscape. Option 3 follows the existing alignment from chainage 0 to 4500 and from a landscape perspective, would be the lowest impact route if there were a slight realignment to avoid the creation of a cutting in the drumlin at chainage 1800-2000.

Route option 4 would veer to the north of the existing A6 near Randalstown and then south near Toome, crossing the existing road just west of Moneynick.

South Corridor

The landscape to the south of the existing road is flatter and has been less disrupted by scattered developments and individual dwellings than north of the A6. The route options in this corridor are likely to be visible in the panoramic views towards Lough Neagh from the ridgeline and in long distant views from the Lough area towards the Long Mountain Ridge.

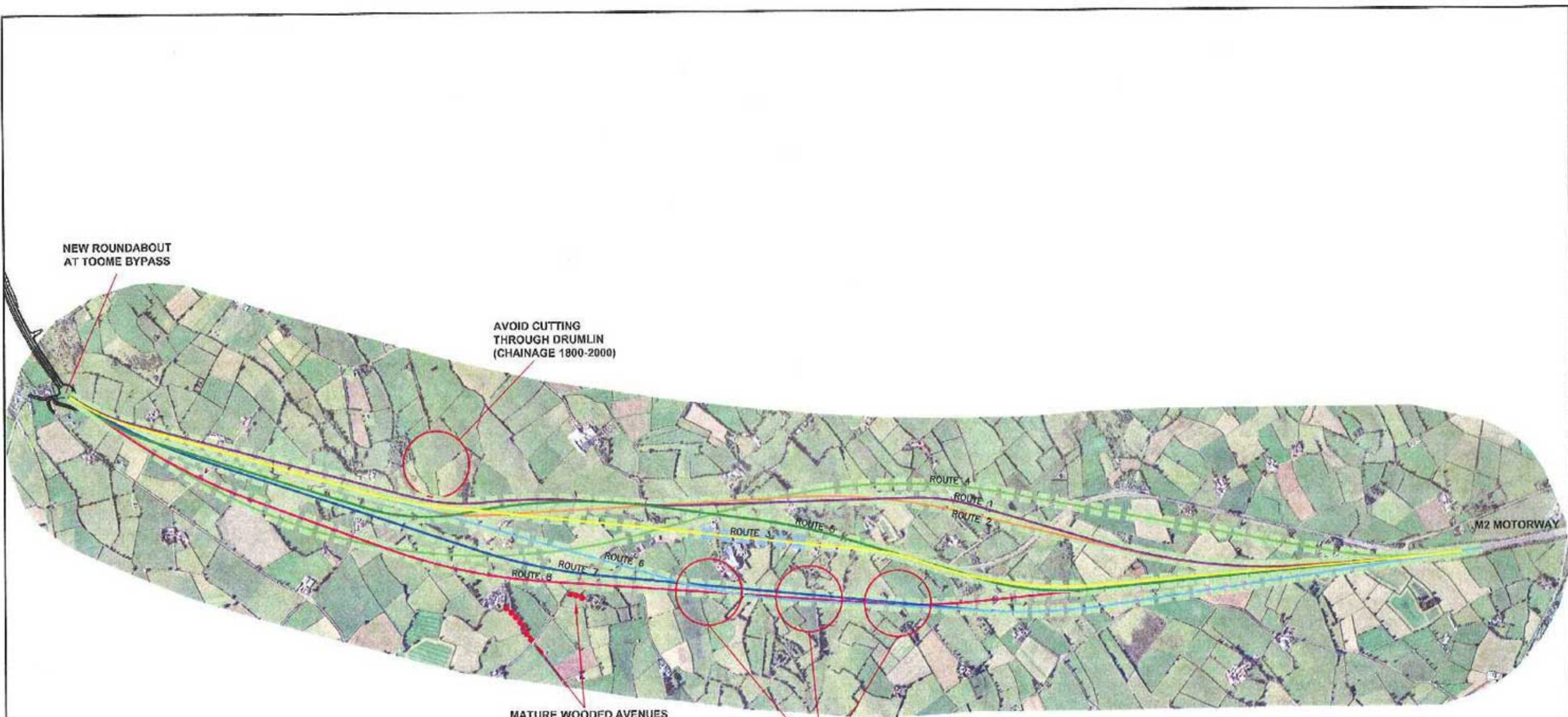
Options 7 and 8 are located 80-220m south of the existing A6 for their entire length. Option 6 would follow the existing A6 to chainage 1900. All south corridor route options cut through three or four drumlins. These three options would also have an adverse landscape and visual impact, with the introduction of a large-scale road to a small-scale rural landscape in which there are no major roads.

5.6.5 Recommendation for All Route Options

The improvement of the existing alignment would be the preferred option from a landscape perspective, as it concentrates works in an already disturbed environment. All alignments away from the existing A6 would have the negative landscape and visual impact of introducing a main road in to a rural landscape in which there are no major roads at present.

By way of mitigation for all route options, the following issues should be considered:

- Alignments to follow contours and minimise disruptions to local landforms by following natural breaks of slopes and avoiding straight cuts through hills.
- Landscape planning to be an integral part of the proposal to ensure sensitive detailed alignment development, reduction of visual impacts and creation / retention of key views.
- Retain important, mature tree features such as avenues, woodland and prominent clusters and single stands.
- Planting proposal to include hedgerow and tree planting in order to strengthen the existing landscape character and for the provision of screen planting.
- Signage to be located sensitively and ideally no gantries in rural areas.
- The use of tensile cable vehicle barriers, which are less visually intrusive.



NEW ROUNDABOUT AT TOOME BYPASS

AVOID CUTTING THROUGH DRUMLIN (CHAINAGE 1800-2000)

M2 MOTORWAY

MATURE WOODED AVENUES

AVOID CUTTING THROUGH DRUMLIN / LANDFORM

**FERGUSON
McILVEEN**



Notes:

- ROUTE OPTION 1
- ROUTE OPTION 2
- ROUTE OPTION 3
- ROUTE OPTION 4
- ROUTE OPTION 5

- ROUTE OPTION 6
- ROUTE OPTION 7
- ROUTE OPTION 8
- MATURE AVENUE
- SENSITIVE LOCATION

- LANDSCAPE QUALITY
- HIGHEST QUALITY
 - VERY ATTRACTIVE
 - GOOD
 - ORDINARY
 - POOR

Scale 1:20,000

A6 RANDALSTOWN TO TOOME DUALLING

**LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL
LANDSCAPE IMPACTS**

Figure 5.6.1