

An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

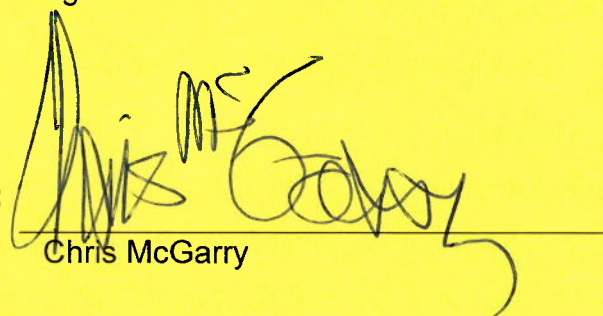
Direction
CD-020425-25
ABP-320164-24

The submissions on this file and the Inspector's report were considered at meetings held on 30/07/2025 and 06/08/2025.

The Commission decided to grant permission generally in accordance with the Inspector's recommendation, for the following reasons and considerations, and subject to the following conditions.

Planning

Commissioner:


Chris McGarry

Date: 06/08/2025

DRAFT WORDING FOR ORDER

Reasons and Considerations

The Commission performed its functions consistent with:

- (a) Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended by Section 17 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, and the requirement to, in so far as practicable, perform its functions in a manner (consistent with Climate Action Plan 2024 and Climate Action Plan 2025 and the national long term climate action strategy, national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans set out in those

Plans and in furtherance of the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State).

- (b) Directive 2000/60/EC, the Water Framework Directive and the requirement to exercise its functions in a manner which is consistent with the provisions of the Directive, and which achieves or promotes compliance with the requirements of the Directive.

The Commission also had regard to the following in coming to its decision:

- (c) European legislation, including of particular relevance:

- The relevant provisions of EU Directive 2014/52/EU amending Directive 2011/92/EU (EIA Directive) on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment,
- Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive) and Directive 79/409/EEC as amended by 2009/147/EC (Birds Directives) which set the requirements for Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora throughout the European Union, and
- Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy 2020 (EU Commission 2020).

- (d) National planning and related policy, including:

- the National Development Plan 2021-2030,
- Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework, as revised April 2025,
- the Department of Transport National Sustainable Mobility Policy, 2022,
- The objectives and targets of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
- All-Island Strategic Rail Review, July 2024

- (e) Regional level policy, including:

- the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2022-2042,
- Regional Spatial Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region

- (f) local planning policy, including:

- Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028,
 - Draft Dublin City Centre Transport Plan 2023
 - Dublin City Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2025,
 - Dublin City Strategic Heritage Plan 2024-2029
- Fingal County Development Plan 2023-2029
 - Donabate Local Area Plan (LAP 7.A) (extended to 2026)

- Flemington Local Area Plan (LAP 4.B) (adopted in 2024)
 - Fingal Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
 - Fingal Heritage Plan 2024-2030
 - Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, as varied
 - Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027, as varied
 - Louth Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 – 2026
- (g) the nature, scale extent and design of the proposed development as set out in the planning application and the characteristics and pattern of development of the railway corridor and in the vicinity,
- (h) the entirety of the documentation submitted by the Coras Iompair Éireann (applicant) in support of the proposed scheme, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and the Natura Impact Statement, the range of mitigation and monitoring measures proposed and the response to submissions, received by the Commission in January 2025.
- (i) the submissions made to An Coimisiún Pleanála in connection with the planning application, under the initial statutory consultation in 2024 and a subsequent submission period in 2025,
- (j) the likely consequences for the environment and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which it is proposed to carry out the proposed scheme and the likely significant effects of the proposed development on European Sites, and
- (k) the report and recommendation of the Inspector, including the examination, analysis and evaluation undertaken in relation to planning and sustainable development, environmental impact assessment, appropriate assessment and, water framework directive assessment and the compulsory acquisition.

Environmental Impact Assessment

The Commission completed an Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed development taking into account:

- (i) the nature, scale and extent of the proposed development,
- (ii) the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and associated documentation submitted in support of the application,
- (iii) the submissions made in the course of the application; and
- (iv) the inspector's report.

The Commission considered that the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, supported by the documentation submitted by the applicant, adequately considers alternatives to the proposed development and identifies and describes adequately the direct, indirect, secondary and cumulative effects of the proposed development on the environment.

The Commission agreed with the examination, set out in the inspector's report, of the information contained in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and associated documentation submitted by the applicant and submissions made in the course of the application.

The Commission considered, and agreed with the inspector's reasoned conclusions, that the main significant direct and indirect effects of the proposed development on the environment are as follows:

Population and Human Health

- The electrification of the railway line and the increased services for this public transport service would have a long term, positive impact on population and human health in that it would aid in improving sustainable connectivity, support compact growth, reduce transport congestion and emissions, and reduce reliance on private vehicle trips, with consequent reductions in vehicle emissions, thus assisting in the delivery of climate change goals. The project follows and expands the potential capacity of an existing operational railway, is aligned with national, regional and local policy objectives and is regarded as acceptable in principle in terms of planning and transportation policy.
- The increase in level crossing closures on the Howth Branch, to facilitate the potential future peak timetable, would improve train efficiencies, enhance rail safety, and remove delays caused by congestion on the railway, which is necessary to facilitate the intended enhanced level of service. The proposed changes to infrastructure at Howth Junction & Donaghmede Station, including the

provision of turnback facilities does not give rise to any direct significant impacts in terms of population or residential amenity between Howth Junction & Donaghmede Station and Howth Station. While the changes to infrastructure may, in time, facilitate the realisation of changes to timetabling of trains and the operation of a shuttle service between Howth Junction & Donaghmede Station and Howth Station, it is considered that the associated environmental impacts in terms of traffic and transportation (i.e. increased level crossing closure, traffic congestion, access and convenience) population (i.e. residential amenity, commercial / tourist / industrial activity, property devaluation) noise and vibration (i.e. increased frequency and passing of trains) and cultural heritage (i.e. loss of direct service dating to circa 1847) would not be significant.

- The proposed upgrades of the Howth Junction & Donaghmede Station and Drogheda (MacBride) Station as well as turnbacks at Clongriffin and Malahide would constitute a significantly improved railway infrastructure and would enhance rail services for this area and would make a positive contribution to the delivery of enhanced public transport services. The proposed design and security provisions at Howth Junction & Donaghmede Station in particular would aid in minimising and monitoring the effects of anti-social behaviour.
- There would be potential significant, negative short-term impacts on population from the construction phase of the proposed project in terms of noise, vibration, dust, access restrictions and traffic including night-time works. These will be mitigated through compliance with a Construction Environmental Management Plan, a Construction Traffic Management Plan, and best practice construction methods. Temporary rehousing may be offered to eligible owners/occupiers where the construction causes, or is expected to cause, a measured or predicted airborne construction noise level that exceeds specified parameters.
- An extensive list of options was considered as part of the reasonable consideration of alternatives through a multi-criteria analysis process for option selection including for:
 - design solutions in respect of the mainline and Howth branch;
 - station infrastructure at Donaghmede & Howth Junction, Clongriffin and Platform 4 at Drogheda (MacBride) station;
 - turnbacks at Malahide;

- works around bridge structures including track lowering, modification of bridges, parapet modification,
- substations at Donabate, Rush and Lusk, Skerries South, Skerries North, Balbriggan, Gormanston, Bettystown and Drogheda.

With due regard to the degree of assessment of alternatives undertaken, the full range of infrastructure proposed for DART+ Coastal North is acceptable and the optimum reasonable alternatives were chosen with regard to economic, technical, environmental, social and deliverability criteria.

Biodiversity

- Negative impacts on biodiversity relate to the removal of habitat, largely in the form of hedgerows and other vegetation. Such impacts are not considered significant and can adequately be mitigated for within the scheme. Vegetation will be planted in the vicinity to bolster existing treelines and hedgerow, where possible and with regard to the safe operation of the railway. Significant impacts are therefore not expected in this regard. Preconstruction surveys will ensure that no mammals, bats, birds or invasive species are present within the works areas. Adequate mitigation measures are proposed to ensure the protection of such mammals, bats and birds encountered and to prevent the spread of invasive species. Significant impacts to biodiversity can therefore be ruled out.
- The proposed mitigation measures to protect water and aquatic and marine environments at river and estuary crossings are reasonable and necessary to minimise construction phase impacts, while accepting that disturbance is unavoidable for key ecological receptors for a construction project of this nature and scale. The proposed development would not add in any significant manner to the disturbance arising for wildlife and the habitats.

Air and Climate

- Temporary negative impacts from dust during the construction phase will be mitigated through compliance with a Construction Environmental Management Plan and a Dust Minimisation Plan.

Noise

- Significant noise impacts arise in relation to construction noise during nighttime and weekend hours when lower thresholds arise. Works carried out in daytime hours will cause no significant effects. In the event that works are required during nighttime or weekend hours, liaison with residents in this regard and the use of noise abatement will reduce the level of impacts. Should the need arise, under defined criteria, temporary accommodation may be offered to eligible owners/occupiers (EIAR section 14.6.11). No likely significant effect will arise from noise disturbance during the operation of the development.

Water

- Negative impacts on Water could arise as a result of accidental spillages of chemicals, hydrocarbons or other contaminants entering watercourses, the sea or groundwater via piling activities during the construction phase of the development. These impacts will be mitigated by measures outlined within the application and can therefore be ruled out.

Material Assets

- Road closures and diversions will be required during the construction period to facilitate the proposed bridge works including replacement works. The potential predicted impacts cannot be fully mitigated by way of a Construction Traffic Management Plan and there will be short term, negative impacts on the carrying capacity of roads and junctions in the wider vicinity which will result in increased traffic and traffic congestion.
- Permanent and temporary negative impacts will arise from land take from various individual residential and commercial properties required to facilitate the proposed scheme.

Cultural Heritage

- The demolition of the bridge at McGrath's Lane which is not a protected structure and not on the NIAH shall be recorded by means of photographs and, written description which is a standard and appropriate approach in the provision of this railway infrastructure and is an impact which is acceptable having regard to the overall positive impact of the realisation of the project.

Landscape

- Due to the nature of the works proposed, the relatively narrow rail corridor, and the proximity of established residential areas material changes to existing views from residential properties will arise. The nature of the works and the need to maintain clearance for engineering and safety requirements necessitates the removal of existing trees and mature vegetation which, in many locations, cannot be replaced. Whilst views will be materially altered these must be assessed in the context of the existing railway infrastructure in the prevailing views. Subject to mitigation and monitoring measures, the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on landscape and visual amenity

The Commission completed an environmental impact assessment in relation to the proposed development and concluded that, subject to the implementation of the mitigation measures set out in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, and subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the effects on the environment of the proposed development, by itself and in combination with other development in the vicinity, would be acceptable. In doing so, the Commission adopted the report and conclusions of the inspector.

Appropriate Assessment

The Commission agreed with and adopted the screening assessment and conclusion carried out in the inspector's report that *Malahide Estuary SAC [000205]*, *Rogerstown Estuary SAC [000208]*, *River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [002299]*, *Baldoyle Bay SAC [000199]*, *Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC [001957]*, *Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC [003000]*, *Lambay Island SAC [000204]*, *North Dublin Bay SAC [000206]*, *South Dublin Bay SAC [000210]*, *Codling Fault Zone SAC [003015]*, *River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA [004158]*, *River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA [004232]*, *Boyne Estuary SPA [004080]*, *South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA [004024]*, *Howth Head Coast SPA [004113]*, *North Bull Island SPA [004006]*, *Baldoyle Bay SPA [004016]*, *Dalkey Island SPA [004172]*, *Malahide Estuary SPA [004025]*, *Rogerstown Estuary SPA [004015]*, *Dundalk Bay SPA [004026]*, *Skerries Islands SPA [004122]*, *Ireland's Eye SPA [004117]*, *Lambay Island SPA [004069]*, *Rockabill SPA [004014]*, *The Murrough SPA [004186]*, *Stabannan-Braganstown SPA [004091]*, *the North-West Irish Sea SPA [004236]* *the Seas Off Wexford SPA [004237]*, *Wicklow Head SPA [004127]*, and *Saltee Islands SPA [004002]* are the European sites for which there is a likelihood of significant effects.

The Commission considered the Natura Impact Statement and all other relevant submissions and carried out an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposed scheme for the *Malahide Estuary SAC [000205]*, *Rogerstown Estuary SAC [000208]*, *River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [002299]*, *Baldoyle Bay SAC [000199]*, *Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC [001957]*, *Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC [003000]*, *Lambay Island SAC [000204]*, *North Dublin Bay SAC [000206]*, *South Dublin Bay SAC [000210]*, *Codling Fault Zone SAC [003015]*, *River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA [004158]*, *River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA [004232]*, *Boyne Estuary SPA [004080]*, *South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA [004024]*, *Howth Head Coast SPA [004113]*, *North Bull Island SPA [004006]*, *Baldoyle Bay SPA [004016]*, *Dalkey Island SPA [004172]*, *Malahide Estuary SPA [004025]*, *Rogerstown Estuary SPA [004015]*, *Dundalk Bay SPA [004026]*, *Skerries Islands SPA [004122]*, *Ireland's Eye SPA [004117]*, *Lambay Island SPA [004069]*, *Rockabill SPA [004014]*, *The Murrough SPA [004186]*, *Stabannan-Braganstown SPA [004091]*, *the North-West Irish Sea SPA [004236]* *the Seas Off Wexford SPA [004237]*, *Wicklow Head SPA [004127]*, and *Saltee Islands SPA [004002]* in view of the Sites Conservation Objectives. The Commission considered that the information before it was adequate to allow the carrying out of an appropriate assessment.

In completing the assessment, the Commission considered, in particular, the

- Likely direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposed scheme both individually or in combination with other plans or projects, specifically upon the *Malahide Estuary SAC [000205]*, *Rogerstown Estuary SAC [000208]*, *River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [002299]*, *Baldoyle Bay SAC [000199]*, *Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC [001957]*, *Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC [003000]*,

Lambay Island SAC [000204], North Dublin Bay SAC [000206], South Dublin Bay SAC [000210], Codling Fault Zone SAC [003015], River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA [004158], River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA [004232], Boyne Estuary SPA [004080], South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA [004024], Howth Head Coast SPA [004113], North Bull Island SPA [004006], Baldoyle Bay SPA [004016], Dalkey Island SPA [004172], Malahide Estuary SPA [004025], Rogerstown Estuary SPA [004015], Dundalk Bay SPA [004026], Skerries Islands SPA [004122], Ireland's Eye SPA [004117], Lambay Island SPA [004069], Rockabill SPA [004014], The Murrough SPA [004186], Stabannan-Braganstown SPA [004091], the North-West Irish Sea SPA [004236] the Seas Off Wexford SPA [004237], Wicklow Head SPA [004127], and Saltee Islands SPA [004002]

and

- Mitigation measures which are included as part of the current proposed scheme,
- Conservation Objective for these European Sites, and
- Views of prescribed bodies in this regard.

In completing the appropriate assessment, the Commission accepted and adopted the appropriate assessment carried out in the Inspector's report in respect of the potential effects of the proposed scheme on the integrity of the aforementioned European Sites, having regard to the sites' conservation objectives.

In overall conclusion, the Commission was satisfied that the proposed scheme, by itself or in combination with other plans or projects, would not adversely affect the integrity of the European Sites, in view of the site's conservation objectives.

Proper Planning and Sustainable Development

It is considered that the proposed development, subject to modifications as set out in the conditions below, incorporating the electrification of the railway corridor and associated works including works to stations and bridges, would accord with European, national, regional and local planning and related transport policy, would not have an unacceptable impact on the landscape or biodiversity of the area, would not seriously injure the visual or residential amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity, and would result in improvements to railway services, safety, capacity and reliability and would constitute a significant public benefit. It is considered that the proposed development would be acceptable in respect of its likely effects on the environment and would be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Conditions

1. The proposed scheme shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the proposed scheme shall be carried out in accordance with the agreed particulars.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. The following modifications are made to the Railway Order:
 - (a) The Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth Schedules shall be omitted. An amended Eleventh Schedule, entitled 'Explanatory Notes in relation to the decision of and Conditions imposed by An Coimisiún Pleanála' shall be added to the Railway Order and shall consist of the Commission's reasoned conclusion and the conditions hereby attached to the grant of the Railway Order.
 - (b) The following Land Acquisition References: DCN.5015.4T.2(A), DCN.5015.T.2(A), DCN.5015.T1(A) and DCN.5015.4P1(A) as identified on Property Plan No. 15 shall be omitted from the relevant schedules of the Railway Order.

Reason: In the interests of clarity and the proper planning and sustainable of the area.

3. All mitigation, environmental commitments and monitoring measures identified in the EIAR shall be implemented in full as part of the proposed scheme.

Reason: In the interest of clarity and the protection of the environment during the construction and operational phases of the development.

4. All mitigation, environmental commitments and monitoring measures identified in the Natura Impact Statement shall be implemented in full as part of the proposed scheme.

Reason: In the interest of clarity and the protection of the environment during the construction and operational phases of the development.

5. Prior to the commencement of development a finalised Construction Environmental Management Plan, including a Construction Traffic Management Plan, shall be prepared in consultation with the planning authorities. The plan shall incorporate all mitigation measures as set out in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, the Natura Impact Statement and the conditions set out herein and shall include details of compliance and details and schedules of monitoring supervision and reporting to the planning authorities. In finalising the Construction Environmental Management Plan the applicant shall liaise with Transport Infrastructure Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and Inland Fisheries Ireland.

Reason: To protect amenities, public health and safety.

6. Drainage arrangements, including the attenuation and disposal of surface water, shall comply with the requirements of the planning authorities for such works in respect of both the construction and operation phases of the proposed development.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and public health.

7. Prior to the commencement of development, the applicant shall submit for the written agreement of the planning authority, a detailed method statement covering all works proposed to be carried out on all bridge features and other protected structures, including:

- (i) the design of all interventions including railings and IP2X panels to bridge parapets and proposed finishes.
- (ii) proposals, if necessary, for the underpinning of historic walls arising from the lowering of the railway track.

- (iii) Details of proposed interventions and/or repair of the abutments and associated retaining walls.
 - (a) a full specification, including details of materials and methods, to ensure the development is carried out in accordance with current Conservation Guidelines issued by the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht,
 - (b) methodology for the recording and/or retention of concealed features or fabric exposed during the works,
 - (c) details of features to be temporarily removed/relocated during construction works and their final re-instatement,
 - (d) protection of built heritage features during the construction works,
 - (e) materials/features of architectural interest to be salvaged,
 - (f) details of the replacement of any brickwork or any works of re-pointing which shall be undertaken so that it matches the original existing finish,
- In the event of agreement not being reached between the developer and the planning authority, the matter may be referred to An Coimisiún Pleanála for determination, and all works shall be carried out in accordance with any determination made resulting from such referral.

Reason: In the interest of the protection of architectural heritage.

8. A full architectural and photographic survey of the unroofed block structure in the townland of Irishtown, Co Meath (as identified on Property Plan No. 31 on Land Acquisition References: DCN.5031.P.1(A)) for demolition shall be carried out, and drawings and photographs indicating details of these buildings, shall be submitted to the planning authority prior to the commencement of development.

Reason: In order to facilitate the preservation by record and/or recording of the architectural heritage of the site.

9. The developer shall engage a suitably qualified archaeologist to monitor (licensed under the National Monuments Acts) all site clearance works, topsoil stripping, groundworks, dredging and/or the implementation of agreed preservation in-situ measures associated with the development. The use of appropriate machinery to ensure the preservation and recording of any

surviving archaeological remains shall be necessary. Should archaeological remains be identified during the course of archaeological monitoring, all works shall cease in the area of archaeological interest pending a decision of the planning authority, in consultation with the National Monuments Service, regarding appropriate mitigation. The developer shall facilitate the archaeologist in recording any remains identified. Any further archaeological mitigation requirements specified by the planning authority, following consultation with the National Monuments Service, shall be complied with by the developer. Following the completion of all archaeological work on site and any necessary post-excavation specialist analysis, the planning authority and the National Monuments Service shall be furnished with a final archaeological report describing the results of the monitoring and any subsequent required archaeological investigative work/excavation required. All resulting and associated archaeological costs shall be borne by the developer.

Reason: To ensure the continued preservation of places, caves, sites, features or other objects of archaeological interest.

10. Howth Junction & Donaghmede Station, and Drogheda (MacBride) stations, shall be finished in accordance with the comprehensive scheme submitted. Final details of which shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development. In addition, prior to the commencement of development, the applicant shall submit to, and agree in writing with, the relevant planning authority, the provision of additional surface works and landscaping in the public realm areas within the overall red line, adjoining platform 4 (car park area) at Drogheda (McBride) Station and at the pedestrian arrival points to Howth Junction and Donaghmede Junction station. In addition, the final details of cladding at Howth Junction and Donaghmede Junction station, fencing at Clongriffin, the Maintenance Compound Building at Rush and Lusk Station and Signalling Equipment Building (SEB) at Malahide Station shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of residential and visual amenity.

11. (a) All lighting shall be operated in such a manner as to prevent light overspill to areas outside of compounds and works areas.
- (b) Prior to the commencement of development, the applicant shall submit a detailed lighting plan to be held by the planning authority. The plan shall include the type, duration, colour of light and direction of all external lighting to be installed within the site compounds of the development site.

Reason: In the interests of clarity, and of visual and residential amenity and protection of local biodiversity.

12. Prior to the commencement of development, a finalised design for an otter tunnel at Kilcrea shall be prepared in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The final details shall be placed on the file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interest of wildlife protection.

13. Prior to the commencement of development at each section of the proposed works, pre-construction surveys shall be carried out to determine the presence of protected mammal, bird or bat species.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection.

14. Details of the proposed temporary construction compounds at Quay Street Car Park (Balbriggan) and identified as DCN.5027.T.2(A) DCN.5027.T.2(B) DCN.5027.T.12(A), DCN.5027.T.18(A) and DCN.5027.T.52(A) under the relevant schedule of the Railway Order shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with the planning authority prior to the commencement of works at those locations. Following the works, the developer shall ensure that the public realm is fully reinstated in line with the requirements of the planning authority.

Reason: In the interests of clarity and the proper planning and sustainable of the area.

15. (a) Noise monitoring shall be carried out at all times during the construction phase of the development. In the event of exceedances all relevant works shall cease until appropriate mitigation is implemented.
- (b) The applicant shall provide, at the expense of CIÉ/IÉ, a scheme of temporary rehousing / alternative accommodation for eligible owners/occupiers in accordance with the detail set out at Table 14-4 and section 14.3.6.2 of the EIAR.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and public health.