



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Commission Order ACP-322958-25

Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended

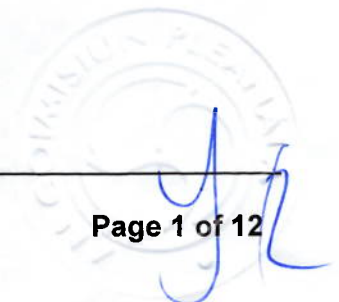
Planning Authority: Westmeath County Council

Application by Westmeath County Council for approval under section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in accordance with plans and particulars, including a Natura Impact Statement, lodged with An Coimisiún Pleanála on the 7th day of July 2025, as amended by the further information received on the 30th day of March 2026.

Proposed development: The proposed development will consist of the following:

- New link road with active travel facilities including segregated cycling facilities joining the Crescent Junction (R915) to Coosan Point Road/Southern Station Road Junction.
- New two-way segregated facility on Southern Station Road (West side).
- A three-metre-wide shared surface from the Crescent Junction linking to Athlone train/bus station.
- A reconfiguration of, and an extension to, the existing Athlone Bus Éireann depot yard, boundary treatments, signage, drainage, and all associated ancillary works to be completed.

All located in Athlone, County Westmeath.



Decision

APPROVE the above proposed development based on the reasons and considerations set out under and subject to the conditions set out below.

Reasons and Considerations

The Commission performed its functions in relation to the making of its decision, in a manner consistent with 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 function in a manner consistent with the Climate Action Plan 2024 and Climate Action Plan 2025 and the national long term climate action strategy, the Long-term Strategy on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions 2024, the National Adaptation Framework; Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland June 2024 and the relevant sectoral adaptation plans in particular the Electricity and Gas Networks Sector Climate Change Adaption Plan, 2019 and in furtherance of the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State.

In coming to its decision, the Commission also had regard to the following:

- (a) the European Union Habitats Directive (32/43/EEC),
- (b) the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended,
- (c) 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 development and the likely significant effects of the proposed development on European Sites,
- (d) the conservation objectives and qualifying interests for the River Shannon Callows Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 000216) and Middle Shannon Callows Special Protection Area (Site Code: 004096);

- (e) the policies and objectives of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027,
- (f) the provisions of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) issued by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2019,
- (g) the nature and extent of the proposed works, as set out in the application for approval,
- (h) the information submitted in relation to the potential impacts on habitats, flora and fauna, including the Ecological Impact Assessment and the Natura Impact Statement,
- (i) the submissions received in relation to the proposed development, and
- (j) the report and recommendation of the person appointed by the Commission to make a report and a recommendation on this matter.

Appropriate Assessment: Stage 1:

The Commission agreed with and adopted the screening assessment and conclusion arrived at in the Planning Inspector's report that the River Shannon Callows Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 000216) and Middle Shannon Callows Special Protection Area (Site Code: 004096) are the only European Sites in respect of which the proposed development has the potential to have a significant effect.

Appropriate Assessment: Stage 2:

The Commission considered the Natura Impact Statement and the associated documentation submitted with the application for approval, the mitigation measures contained therein, the submissions on file, and the Planning Inspector's assessment and carried out an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposed development for the River Shannon Callows Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 000216) and Middle Shannon Callows Special Protection Area (Site Code: 004096), 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 appropriate assessment, the Commission considered, in particular, the following:

- (i) the likely direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposed development, both individually or in combination with other plans or projects,
- (ii) the mitigation measures that are included as part of the current proposal, and
- (iii) the conservation objectives for the European Sites.

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

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

Environmental Impact Assessment Screening:

The Commission completed an environmental impact assessment screening of the proposed development and considered that the Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report and other documents and drawings submitted by the local authority identifies and describes adequately the direct, indirect, secondary and cumulative effects of the proposed development on the environment.

Having regard to:

1. The criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as revised;
 - (a) the design of the proposed transport infrastructure and the proposals to address drainage channels traversing the site,
 - (b) the policy objectives contained in the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027, which the subject proposals would not conflict with,

and the results of the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027,

- (c) the location of the development, which would not result in any significant effects on any sensitive location specified in Article 109(4)(a) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as revised, and
 - (d) the absence of any potential for significant cumulative effects,
2. The results of relevant surveys and assessments submitted by the local authority of the effects of the proposed development on the environment, and
 3. The features and measures embedded in the design of the proposed development or proposed by the applicant to avoid or prevent what might otherwise be significant effects on the environment, including features and measures identified in the project Preliminary Construction Environmental Management Plan, the Natura Impact Statement, the Outline Surface Water Management Plan, the Drainage Report, March 2026, and the Ecological Impact Assessment.

It is considered that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and that the preparation and submission of an environmental impact assessment report would not, therefore, be required.

Proper Planning and Sustainable Development/Likely effects on the environment

It is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development would provide transport infrastructure benefitting access and services at the Athlone railway/bus station and enhancing active travel infrastructures connecting with the wider network. The proposed development would address known flooding that occurs on the site and would alleviate the risk of flooding downstream. The proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment, would not seriously injure the visual amenities of the area or the amenities of property in the area, would be acceptable in terms of traffic and pedestrian safety, would not adversely affect the cultural heritage of the area, would constitute an appropriate form of development at this location and would

be in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Conditions

1. The proposed development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, as amended by the further plans and particulars received by An Coimisiún Pleanála on the 30th day of March, 2026, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where any mitigation measures set out in the Natura Impact Statement or any conditions of approval require further details to be prepared by or on behalf of the local authority, these details shall be placed on the file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interests of clarity and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and to ensure the protection of the environment.

2. The mitigation and monitoring measures outlined in the Natura Impact Statement submitted with the application, shall be carried out and implemented in full. Prior to the commencement of the development, details of a time schedule for implementation of the mitigation measures and associated monitoring shall be prepared by the local authority, placed on file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interest of protecting the environment and the protection of European Sites.

3. A suitably qualified ecologist shall be retained by the local authority to oversee the site set up and construction of the proposed development, including implementation of mitigation measures relating to ecology. The ecologist shall be present during the works. Within two months of the completion of works, an ecological report of the site works shall be prepared by the appointed ecologist, placed on file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interest of nature conservation and biodiversity.

4. Prior to the commencement of development, the local authority, or any agent acting on its behalf, shall prepare in consultation with the project ecologist and relevant statutory agencies, an updated Construction Environmental Management Plan for the development, demonstrating the proposals adhere to best practice and protocols. The Construction Environmental Management Plan shall be placed on file, retained as part of the public record and shall include:
 - (a) All mitigation and monitoring measures to be implemented under condition 2.
 - (b) The locations and extent of silt-control measures to be installed on the site.
 - (c) Specific proposals as to how the measures outlined in the Construction Environmental Management Plan will be measured and monitored for their effectiveness.
 - (d) A Construction Traffic Management Plan.

Reason: In the interest of protecting the environment, European Sites, public health and road safety.

5. The following nature conservation requirements shall be complied with:
- (a) Prior to the commencement of development, details of measures to protect water quality of the catchment shall be outlined and placed on file. Full regard shall be had to Inland Fisheries Ireland 'Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and adjacent to Waters' (2016). A programme of water-quality monitoring shall be prepared in consultation with the project ecological clerk of works and relevant statutory agencies, and the programme shall be implemented in full thereafter, placed on file and retained as part of the public record.
 - (b) Vegetation removal shall not take place during the period between the 1st day of March and the 31st day of August, inclusive, without the written approval of the project ecologist. Any approval arising shall be placed on file and retained as part of the public record.
 - (c) The results of pre-construction surveys for mammals, which shall be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist, shall be placed on file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity and nature conservation.

6. The site shall be landscaped in accordance with a comprehensive scheme of landscaping, which shall be prepared by a suitably qualified landscape architect, prior to commencement of development. This scheme shall include the following:
- (a) A plan to scale of not less than 1:500 showing –
 - (i) Existing trees and hedgerows, specifying which are proposed for retention as features of the site landscaping;
 - (ii) The measures to be put in place for the protection of these landscape features during the construction period;
 - (iii) Proposals for a row of roadside trees along the entire length of the northern side of the new link road;

- (iv) Proposals for additional tree planting in the embankment to the south of the Southern Station Road (in the area identified as 'Existing vegetation to remain' in drawing titled 'Vegetation to be removed', drawing number 120278-5001 reference PL1 submitted with the application);
- (v) Proposals for additional tree planting, shrub planting and landscaping in the green areas at the western and eastern end of proposed new link road (as indicated in drawing titled 'Vegetation to be removed', drawing number 120278-5001 reference PL1 submitted with the application);
- (vi) Landscaping proposals for the area identified as 'Bus Depot Extension' in the drawing titled 'Site Layout Plan', drawing number 120278-4001 reference PL4;
- (vii) The species, variety, number, size and locations of all proposed trees and shrubs [which shall comprise predominantly native species such as mountain ash, birch, willow, sycamore, pine, oak, hawthorn, holly, hazel, beech or alder];
- (viii) Hard landscaping works, specifying surfacing materials, furniture and finished levels.

The landscaping scheme shall be retained as part of the public record and shall be carried out within the first planting season following substantial completion of the construction works.

Reason: In the interest of the visual amenity of the area, to mitigate the visual impact of the new link road and extended bus depot, to improve the pedestrian user experience in the interests of sustainable modes of transport and to improve the urban public realm

7. A quality audit (which shall include a road safety audit, an access audit, a cycle audit and a walking audit) shall be carried out at Stage 2 for the detailed design stage and at Stage 3 for the post-construction stage. All audits shall be carried out at the local authority's expense in accordance with the Design Manual for

Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) standards. Details of the independent audit team(s) shall be prepared, placed on the file and retained as part of the public record and all measures recommended by the auditor(s) shall be implemented unless there are exceptional circumstances allowing for deviation. The Stage 2 Audit reports shall be prepared, placed on the file and retained as part of the public record prior to the commencement of development.

Reason: In the interests of traffic safety and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

8. All mitigation measures in relation to archaeology and cultural heritage as set out in the Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by Moore Group and dated the 25th day of March 2026, shall be implemented in full.

The local authority shall engage a suitably qualified archaeologist to carry out an archaeological impact assessment following consultation with the National Monument Service in advance of any site preparation works and groundworks, including site investigation works, topsoil stripping, site clearance and excavation works.

The archaeological impact assessment shall involve an examination of all development layout / design drawings, completion of documentary / cartographic / photographic research and fieldwork, the latter to include, where applicable metal detection survey and archaeological testing (consent / licensed as required under the National Monuments Act). The archaeologist shall prepare a comprehensive report, including an archaeological impact statement and mitigation strategy, to be placed on the file and retained as part of the public record in advance of any site preparation works, groundworks and/or construction works.

Where archaeological remains are shown to be present, preservation in-situ, establishment of 'buffer zones', preservation by record (archaeological excavation) or archaeological monitoring may be required and mitigatory

measures to ensure the preservation and / or recording of archaeological remains shall be included in the archaeological impact assessment. Any further archaeological mitigation requirements specified following consultation with the National Monuments Service, shall be complied with by the local authority.

The National Monuments Service shall be furnished with a final archaeological report describing the results of any subsequent archaeological investigative works and / or monitoring following the completion of all archaeological work on site and the completion of any necessary post-excavation work. All resulting and associated archaeological costs shall be borne by the local authority.

Reason: To ensure the continued preservation either in situ or by record of places, caves, sites, features or other objects of archaeological interest.

9. Prior to commencement of development, the local authority shall enter into water and wastewater connection agreement(s) with Uisce Éireann.

Reason: In the interest of public health

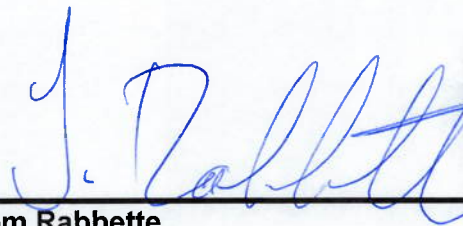
10. (a) Prior to commencement of development the local authority shall prepare a Stage 2 - Detailed Design Stage Storm Water Audit, which shall be placed on the file and retained as part of the public record.
- (b) Upon Completion of the development, a Stage 3 Completion Stormwater Audit to demonstrate Sustainable Urban Drainage System measures have been installed and are working as designed and that there has been no misconnections or damage to storm water drainage infrastructure during construction, shall be prepared, placed on the file and retained as part of the public record.

- (c) Prior to the operation of the development, a maintenance policy to include regular operational inspection and maintenance of the Sustainable Urban Drainage System infrastructure and the fuel interceptors shall be prepared, placed on the file, retained as part of the public record and implemented in full.

Reason: In the interests of public health and surface water management.

11. Site development and building works shall be carried out only between the hours of 0800 to 1900 Mondays to Fridays inclusive, between 0800 to 1400 hours on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays and public holidays. Deviation from these times will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances.

Reason: In the interest of clarity and in order to safeguard the residential amenities of property in the vicinity.



Tom Rabbette

**Planning Commissioner of An Coimisiún
Pleanála duly authorised to authenticate the
seal of the Commission.**

Dated this 29th day of June 2026

