



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report PL14.247105

Development	Demolition of structures and buildings, construction of a single storey discount retail unit with off-licence, new distributor road and all associated works
Location	Former Longford Creamery site, Connaught Road, Longford
Planning Authority	Longford County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	15/222
Applicant(s)	Ruby Way Limited
Type of Application	Planning Application
Planning Authority Decision	GRANT
Type of Appeal	Third Party
Appellant(s)	Tesco Ireland Ltd.
Observer(s)	Beatrice Barry
Date of Site Inspection	16 th November 2016
Inspector	Niall Haverty

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The appeal site, which has a stated area of 0.893 ha, is located on the northern side of Connaught Road, and forms part of the former Longford Creamery site. The site is situated towards the western end of Longford Town Centre, c. 300m west of Main Street.
- 1.2. The site is bounded by Connaught Road to the south, residential and commercial development to the east, Little Water Street to the north and undeveloped lands which are the subject of recent development proposals by the applicant to the west. The River Camlin is located c. 115m to the north of the appeal site. A number of commercial and light industrial premises are located on the southern side of Connaught Road opposite the appeal site, and similarly on the northern side of Little Water Street to the rear of the proposed development. The vacant Longford Town Centre Shopping Centre is located c. 300m to the north east.
- 1.3. The site is currently undeveloped, with the exception of a number of small derelict structures.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposed development consists of:
 - Demolition of all structures on the site.
 - Construction of single storey convenience discount retail unit with off-licence (1,593 sq m GFA), including loading bay, external plant area and signage (including totem pole signage).
 - 79 surface car parking spaces and 6 bicycle parking spaces.
 - ESB substation (14 sq m).
 - Construction of new distributor road, cycle lane and footpath to connect the site with Connaught Road to the south and Little Water Street to the north.
- 2.2. The planning application was accompanied, *inter alia*, by a Masterplan, Traffic Impact Assessment, Road Safety Audit, Retail Impact Statement, Planning Support Statement and Appropriate Assessment Screening Report.

2.3. As outlined in more detail below, the remainder of the development within the Masterplan area was the subject of three other concurrently lodged planning applications. The reports submitted with this planning application generally relate to the overall Masterplan development rather than to the appeal site alone.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

3.1.1. Longford County Council decided to grant planning permission and the following Conditions are relevant to this appeal:

- C2: Archaeological monitoring.
- C3(1): Boundary wall along Connaught Road to be set back min. 3m from road kerblines at south east corner of site.
- C3(2): Vertical alignment of Little Water Street at junction with link road to be raised above CFRAM flood level.
- C3(7): Road Safety Audit to be undertaken on completion of development.
- C3(10): Detailed requirements for link road and requirement for it to be taken in charge.
- C3(21): Special contributions of €30,000 towards improving Little Water Street, and €20,000 footpaths on Richmond Street.
- C5: Materials, plant and machinery, security shutters etc. to be agreed prior to commencement.
- C10: Link road and car parking to be completed prior to occupation.
- C13: Management scheme for maintenance of landholding to be agreed prior to opening.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. The report of the area planner can be summarised as follows:

- Design has taken cognisance of Chapter 4.3.8 of the Longford Town Development Plan 2009-2015 in terms of scale, layout and materials.
- Longford Town is a Tier 1 Principal Town under the retail hierarchy, and Development Plan states that it is suitable for major convenience and comparison retail developments.
- County Retail Strategy indicated additional floor space requirement of 2,000 – 3,000 sq m across the lifetime of the plan. Proposal is in keeping with policies and aims of Strategy.
- Roads and water services issues have been addressed to the satisfaction of the relevant departments on foot of further information.
- Development will not have a significant environmental impact or a significant impact on any designated Natura 2000 site.
- Development will have negligible impact on surrounding residential amenity.

3.3. Other Technical Reports

- **Water Services Section:** No objection subject to Conditions.
- **Road Design:** No objection subject to Conditions.
- **Fire Department:** No objection subject to Conditions.
- **Environmental Health Officer:** No objection subject to Conditions.

3.4. Prescribed Bodies

- **Irish Water:** No objection subject to Conditions.
- **Inland Fisheries Ireland:**
 - River Camlin is an important resource which must be protected.
 - Building on appeal site may increase flood risk in other areas or result in ingress of wastewater into the river during flood events.
 - Flooding is a regular occurrence on the site and in the surrounding areas.
 - Current foul network on north east of site has insufficient capacity.

- Extensive foundations will be required to stabilise wetlands resulting in potential for displacement of marshy ground and impacts on river.
- An **Taisce**: Planning Authority should ensure: site suitability due to flood risk; that development does not detract from vitality and viability of town centre; and that safe access for pedestrians and cyclists is provided.

3.5. **Third Party Observations**

3.5.1. Two third party observations were made. The issues raised were generally as per the third party appeal, as well as the following issues:

- Proposed development is one of several concurrent applications. No information on phasing and delivery provided leading to concern of piecemeal development.
- Plot ratio of 0.18 is low for town centre zoned lands.
- Little Water Street is inadequate and unsafe for traffic movements.
- Impact on viability of town centre.

4.0 **Planning History**

4.1. **Subject Site**

4.1.1. ABP Ref. PL68.218750; Reg. Ref. 06/21

Planning permission was granted for a three storey shopping centre comprising an anchor store and 14 retail units (total GFA of 16,433 sq m) with a link road between Connaught Road and Little Water Street. This permission was not implemented and expired in 2012.

4.2. **Neighbouring Sites**

4.2.1. Three concurrent planning applications were made for the remainder of the units within the Masterplan area and final grants of permission have issued in respect of all three applications.

4.2.2. I note that the red line site boundary for the appeal site overlaps with the red line boundaries for Reg. Refs. 15/221 and 15/224, and that the same link road between Connaught Road and Little Water Street forms part of the proposed development in all three planning applications.

4.2.3. Reg. Ref. 15/221

Planning permission granted to Ruby Way Ltd. for mixed use development comprising a two storey café/coffee shop, a two storey restaurant/take-away (including drive-thru), a two storey retail unit and associated car parking, link road, services etc. This comprised Units 2, 3, and 4 of the overall masterplan area.

4.2.4. Reg. Ref. 15/223

Planning permission granted to Ruby Way Ltd. for a single storey retail and commercial unit, including retail area, coffee shop, off-licence, deli area, forecourt, fuel pumps, car wash and associated signage, tanks, car parking etc. This comprised Unit 8 of the overall masterplan area.

4.2.5. Reg. Ref. 15/224

Planning permission granted to Ruby Way Ltd. for two single storey units, comprising a car sales showroom and a car repair/service unit (a third unit was omitted in response to a request for further information). The development also included associated car parking, link road, services etc. This comprised Units 5 and 6 of the overall masterplan area.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022

5.1.1. Longford is designated as a principal town within the Northern Development Area, and the MRPG states that the orderly and sequential development of Longford Town is a key priority. It also states that the sequential provision of retail will promote the vitality and viability of existing centres.

5.2. Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021

- 5.2.1. Longford Town is identified in the Development Plan's Retail Hierarchy as a Tier I Principal Town and major convenience and comparison retail are considered to be suitable in the town. Annex 2 of the Development Plan comprises the *Longford County Retail Strategy 2015-2021*.
- 5.2.2. The Retail Strategy notes that the overall vacancy level within the county is currently 17.73%, but it identifies a requirement for an additional convenience retail floor space of 2,000 – 3,000 sq m and an additional comparison retail floor space of 1,500 – 2,500 sq m for the County for the period 2015-2021. The majority of this additional retail floor space is to be delivered in Longford Town in accordance with its status as the Principal Town in the County.
- 5.2.3. The Retail Strategy seeks to redefine the Core Retail Area as a smaller area centred around Main Street, in order to reverse previous trends for retail activity to extend outwards. The Core Retail Area is stated to be the focus and preferred location for retail development during the plan period. The use of the sequential approach for assessing retail development proposals is supported. The appeal site is located outside of the 'Town Commercial Core', but is partially within the 'Centre' and partially within the 'Edge of Centre' area.
- 5.2.4. A series of General Policies relating to retail are included. These include:
- GP 1: Ensure compliance with Retail Planning Guidelines and Retail Strategy.
 - GP 2: Permit retail development of a size and scale appropriate to the level of the town.
 - GP 4: Discourage new retail development where it would damage vitality and viability of existing retail centres.
 - GP 6: Encourage development which promotes Longford Town's Core Shopping Area as the primary location for large scale convenience retail. Proposals in other areas not precluded where mitigating circumstances apply.
 - GP 12: Requirement for RIA.

5.3. Longford Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2016-2022

- 5.3.1. The *Longford Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2016-2022* has been adopted subsequent to the lodgement of the appeal and has been incorporated into the County Development Plan by way of Variation.
- 5.3.2. The site is located within the LAP's 'Town Core Character Area', with the majority of the site also within an indicative flood zone/constrained land use area. The LAP notes that indicative flood zones supersede all other zoning provisions on site. The LAP lists CDP zonings that are deemed to be appropriate to the Character Area, but the zoning are not applied to discrete parts of the Character Area. The LAP instead states that zonings, while primarily based on the Character Areas, will also be subject to compatibility with existing adjacent land-uses, the Core Strategy and the Retail Strategy.
- 5.3.3. It is the Planning Authority's Policy for the Town Core Character Area to promote economic development and enhance the public realm, in particular, to promote a pedestrian focused environment in the context of permeability, scale, legibility, activity and accessibility.
- 5.3.4. Relevant Objectives:
- **OBJ CA2:** Proposals for development will be assessed in terms of potential impact on existing adjacent developments, existing land uses and/or the surrounding landscape.
 - **OBJ TC 1:** Proposed development in the Town Core area will be encouraged where this is compatible with and/or supports existing adjacent uses. Development that is incompatible with town core use or that has the potential to negatively impact on the vitality of the area will be resisted.
 - **OBJ CLU2/OBJ CLU3:** The Indicative Flood Risk Zone will be protected from inappropriate development. Justification Test and site-specific Flood Risk Assessment required.
- 5.3.5. The area to the north, from the northern side of Little Water Street to the River Camlin is designated as Strategic Site 5, with an indicative link road shown through the appeal site, for the stated purpose of providing enhanced vehicular access to the shopping centre site which is currently severely restricted.

5.4. Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012

- 5.4.1. These Guidelines state that enhancing the vitality and viability of town centres through sequential development is an overarching objective in retail planning. There are 5 key policy objectives – ensuring plan led development; promoting town centres through sequential development; promoting a competitive market place; encouraging sustainable travel by located shops in locations accessible by such modes; and realising high quality urban design. The guidelines supports town centre locations for new development in the interests of maintaining vitality and viability.
- 5.4.2. Longford Town falls within the Sub-Regional tier within the national retail hierarchy.

5.5. Retail Design Manual 2012

- 5.5.1. This is a companion document to the Retail Planning Guidelines which highlights the need for high quality design that is appropriate to the character location and configuration of the site and its environs improving the urban grain, pedestrian permeability and using high quality design/finishes. The manual utilises 10 principles of urban design as a benchmark for suitable development.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

- 6.1.1. A third party appeal was lodged on behalf of Tesco Ireland Ltd. The grounds of appeal can be summarised as follows.
- Proposed materials and designs are not in keeping with the requirements of the Retail Design Manual or local planning framework.
 - Condition 5 indicates that Planning Authority is not satisfied with design, and compliance submission could dramatically affect the appearance of the structure.
 - Proposed development fails to address the streetscape as per best practice set out in Retail Design Manual. Road frontages are dominated by car parking to both Connaught Road and Little Water Street.

- Proposed development is underutilisation of zoned town centre lands. Previously permitted scheme was more appropriate.
- Access to the proposed development will cause traffic congestion. Matter only became a concern following submission of further information when the proposed right-turning lane was omitted.
- Concern that site is subject to flood risk, as designated in Draft Longford Town and Environs LAP. Appellant queries whether there is a more suitable zoned site for the development. Longford Town Development Plan 2009-2015 states that development will not be permitted in area with a 1:100 year flood risk.
- Questionable whether development would be permitted under Draft Longford Town LAP due to flood risk.

6.2. First Party Response to Third Party Appeal

6.2.1. A response to the third party appeal was submitted on behalf of the applicant, which is summarised as follows:

- Proposed development forms part of an overall Masterplan, with planning permission granted for the other three developments within the Masterplan area.
- Proposed development is part of Phase 1 of Masterplan, and is imperative for the viability of the scheme.
- Proposed roads and footpaths will improve connectivity and linkages within the area.
- Condition 5 is a standard condition to allow detailed finishes to be agreed. Planner's Report indicates that design was satisfactory to the Planning Authority.
- Proposed retail unit will be located between three different roads, and therefore has an unavoidable site constraint that requires surface car parking addressing some road frontage.

- Proposed development in conjunction with other proposals within Masterplan area is an improvement on the previous permission for the site, for which the Inspector had recommended refusal.
- Development is in accordance with Development Plan policies and guidance and will provide a significantly improved streetscape to Connaught Road and Little Water Street.
- Traffic and Transportation Assessment determined that a right-turning lane into the proposed development was not required. Layout was discussed with Roads Dept. who have no objection to it.
- Comprehensive Flood Risk Assessment and design changes at further information stage, including additional attenuation storage will protect the development from flooding while not increasing flood risk elsewhere. Justification test has been passed, as retail is recognised as a less vulnerable form of development.
- Appellant is a commercial competitor to the future occupant of the proposed retail unit.

6.3. Planning Authority Responses

6.3.1. No response to appeal on file.

6.4. Observations

6.4.1. An observation was made by Beatrice Barry. The observation principally relates to the petrol station within the masterplan area, known as unit 8, which does not form part of the proposed development. The petrol station was the subject of a separate planning application (Reg. Ref. 15/224) for which a final grant of planning permission has been issued by Longford County Council.

7.0 Planning Assessment

7.1. I consider the key issues in determining the appeals are as follows:

- Design and layout.

- Retail Impact.
- Flood Risk.
- Roads and Traffic.
- Car Parking Provision.
- Requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment.

7.2. Design and Layout

- 7.2.1. The appellant contends that the design and layout of the proposed development is not compliant with the statutory plans for the area or the Retail Design Manual due to its failure to address the street and that it represents underutilisation of zoned lands. They also state that Condition 5, which requires details of the development to be agreed with the Planning Authority indicates that the Planning Authority was not satisfied with the design and that compliance with this Condition could result in significant changes to the appearance of the structure. The applicant has responded by stating that both the proposed development and the overall masterplan development will improve the streetscape and increase the vitality and animation of the area.
- 7.2.2. The design of the proposed discount retail unit is a conventional single storey box-type structure of generic design and detailing with no apparent attempt to customise it for the site context or to provide visual interest through the use of high quality/local materials, innovative design features etc. It features a glazed front (southern) elevation, and mostly blank pre-cast concrete panels to the other three elevations, with a high-level strip of glazing on the western elevation. The only architectural feature of note is a protruding aluminium canopy. The Retail Design Manual notes that wherever generic building types are proposed, their designs should be adapted to ensure that they contribute to the character and quality of the area. While that has not occurred in this instance, I do not consider that the design of the structure itself is sufficiently poor as to warrant a refusal of planning permission.
- 7.2.3. However, I consider that the layout of the proposed development is more problematic from an urban design perspective. The retail unit is significantly set back from the site boundary on all four sides, and is surrounded by surface car

parking on its three street-facing elevations. It fails to provide a defined street edge or to reinforce the weak building lines in this area of the Town, particularly on Connaught Road, which is one of the main approach routes to Longford Town from the west and which links the appeal site to Main Street. The set-back of the retail unit from Connaught Road is 25-30m. The layout is overly dominated by car parking, and I consider that this does not uphold the provisions of the Retail Design Manual which state that surface parking should be sited out of view so as not to dominate the street frontage or create negative impacts on the public realm.

7.2.4. The appeal site is located within the Town Core Character Area, as defined in the Longford Town and Environs LAP 2016-2022, and it is the Policy of the Planning Authority in this area to enhance the public realm and promote a pedestrian focused environment in the context of permeability, scale, legibility and activity. In this regard I note that while this appeal solely relates to the discount retail unit and link road, the development must be considered in the context of the wider Masterplan development for which permission has already been granted.

7.2.5. Having regard to the detailed provisions of the Retail Design Manual, I consider that the proposed development by reason of its set-back from the roads and over-dominant car parking arrangement would fail to provide a suitably active and legible frontage to Connaught Road and the new link road, would not satisfactorily integrate into the streetscape and would therefore fail to uphold the provisions of the Retail Design Manual. Therefore, while I consider the site to be suitable for a discount retail unit, I consider it necessary for such a development to be of a high quality design and layout that will enhance the streetscape and contribute to the character and quality of the locality. Since the proposed development fails to achieve this, I recommend that permission be refused on these grounds.

7.3. **Retail Impact**

7.3.1. Longford Town is the Principal Town within County Longford and falls within the Sub-Regional tier within the national retail hierarchy as set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines. The CDP Retail Strategy, noting that previous Strategies had extended the core retail area well beyond the historic town centre, seeks to address this by resetting and redefining the 'Core Retail Area' as a smaller area centred on Main Street and states that this area is to be the focus and preferred location for retail

development. The appeal site is located outside the Town Commercial Core, and is split between the Town Centre area and the Edge of Centre Area. It is, however, located within the Town Core Character Area in the LAP.

- 7.3.2. A Retail Impact Assessment (RIA) was submitted with the application, which follows the methodology set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines. A sequential test was also undertaken as part of the RIA.
- 7.3.3. The catchment area identified for the proposed development is the entire County of Longford, since it is the County Town and primary retail destination in the County. While there are Super Valu outlets in a number of other locations within the County, the RIA considers that people utilising those retail units will be balanced by an inflow of shoppers from outside the County (e.g. from Roscommon). This catchment population is estimated as 42,220 in 2016, rising to 44,987 by 2020.
- 7.3.4. The RIA notes that Longford Town is already served by five large convenience retail stores – Tesco, SuperValu, Dunnes Stores, Lidl and Aldi, with a total floor area of 8,162 sq m. With regard to discount retail units, the existing Lidl is located c. 1km to the east of the appeal site while the existing Aldi is located c. 350m to the south. The intended occupant of the proposed discount retail unit is not specified in the planning application, although a note on the floor plan drawing indicates that it is Aldi. It is not clear from the application documentation whether the proposal is a replacement unit or an additional unit, although the RIA takes account of the Aldi in its assessment of existing and available expenditure.
- 7.3.5. The RIA, utilising figures set out in the County Retail Strategy, identifies an available expenditure within the catchment area of c. €39.7 million in 2018 (year of opening), indicating that there is an underprovision of convenience floorspace in the catchment area. The estimated turnover of the proposed retail unit would be c. €13.5 million, indicating that it can be readily accommodated.
- 7.3.6. The Retail Strategy indicates a requirement for 2,000 – 3,000 sq m of additional convenience retail floorspace over the period 2015-2021. The proposed development would account for approximately half this amount, leaving a residual 500 – 1,500 sq m for the County for the period. Since Longford Town is identified as the Principal Town and the location for retail growth to be focussed, I consider this to be acceptable.

- 7.3.7. With regard to the sequential test, the applicant has considered a number of sites in town centre and edge-of-centre locations. Within the Town Commercial Core, which is a relatively small fine grained area with small plot sizes in the historic centre I am satisfied that there are no suitable sites for a development of this scale. Within the wider Town Centre, the vacant 'Longford Town Centre' development would appear to be a highly suitable location for the proposed development, although the applicant states that it is within the control of NAMA and is being considered for non-retail uses. The Planning Authority has not commented on this matter, so in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it would appear that the site is not available. Having reviewed the sequential assessment, and having regard to the appeal site's location within the Town Core Character Area, I am satisfied that the appeal site is a suitable location for a convenience foodstore of the scale proposed.
- 7.3.8. With regard to impacts on vitality and viability, the Retail Planning Guidelines note that this should be considered in relation to the town centre as a whole and not with regard to existing traders. Having regard to the available expenditure identified within the County and the location of the site within 300m of Main Street to which it is linked by footpaths and within the Town Core Character Area, I consider that the proposed development will not draw trade out of the Town Centre and will instead enhance the attractiveness of Longford Town as a retail destination, thereby increasing expenditure within the town.
- 7.3.9. In conclusion, having regard to the RIA, the CDP (including Retail Strategy) and LAP, I am satisfied that the proposed development is supported by planning policy, that it accords with the position of Longford in the retail hierarchy and the relevant zoning objectives for the site and that it will not have a significant adverse effect on the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.

7.4. Flood Risk

- 7.4.1. The appeal site is identified as being at significant risk from fluvial flooding, and the appellant expresses concern over the flood risk to the proposed development and the potential increased flooding it could cause in other areas.
- 7.4.2. The flood map in the Longford Town and Environs LAP indicates that the majority of the site is located within a flood zone and as a result is a 'constrained land use',

meaning that a site specific flood risk assessment and justification test is required. This flood mapping is based on the OPW CFRAM flood maps, which indicates that significant areas of the site are subject to flooding in both the 1% AEP (i.e. 1:100 year event) and 0.1% AEP (i.e. 1:1,000 year event). The applicant acknowledges that the site has flooded in the past and that lands to the west flood every winter.

- 7.4.3. With regard to fluvial flood risk on the appeal site, the site can be considered to be in Flood Zone A, while retail developments are identified as being a 'less vulnerable' form of development in the Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities. A Justification Test was therefore undertaken in accordance with the Guidelines.
- 7.4.4. The Civil Engineering Report submitted with the application addresses flood risk and sets out various mitigation measures. This includes raising the finished floor level of the proposed development to 0.5m above the 0.1% AEP flood level. It should be noted that the Report addresses the flood risk associated with the masterplan development as a whole, and it was submitted with each of the four concurrent planning applications.
- 7.4.5. The Planning Authority was not satisfied that the proposed development would not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere and requested additional information. The applicant subsequently submitted revised proposals, omitting one of the retail units in order to utilise the area as an overground flood storage area which is stated to be equivalent in volume to the amount of water that the masterplan area would currently store during the 0.1% AEP. This flood storage area will be provided in two phases in accordance with the phased implementation of the masterplan development. It is also proposed to raise roadways, car parking areas and manholes (including an existing foul manhole) above the flood level and to provide lockable manhole covers and non-return valves to control the risk of surcharging. I note that the proposed overground flood storage area is outside of the appeal site boundary. However, the same information was submitted in response to a request for further information under Reg. Ref. 15/224 and a final grant of permission has already been issued by the Planning Authority in respect of that application.
- 7.4.6. With regard to pluvial flooding, a mix of interception and attenuation storage is proposed. Interception storage will be provided through the use of permeable paving

for the car parking spaces, with attenuation storage provided by a 750 cubic metre surface water attenuation tank with petrol interceptor and hydrobrake outflow proposed under the car parking area to the north of the proposed discount retail unit. This will allow surface water to be discharged to the existing public drainage system at greenfield run-off rates.

- 7.4.7. Having regard to the town centre/edge of centre location and zoning of the appeal site, the nature of the proposed development which is considered 'less vulnerable' to flooding, the flood risk assessment undertaken and the mitigation and control measures proposed, I am satisfied that the applicant has adequately addressed the issue of flood risk on the site and the potential for increased flooding elsewhere. If the Board is minded to grant permission, I recommend that suitable pre-commencement Conditions be attached requiring the specific details of the flood management proposals to be agreed with the Planning Authority.

7.5. Roads and Traffic

- 7.5.1. The third party appellant contends that the proposed development will cause traffic congestion, particularly as a result of the omission of the proposed right-turning lane into the site from Connaught Road which was originally proposed but subsequently removed on foot of the request for further information. The applicant responded that the Traffic and Transport Assessment submitted with the application clearly demonstrates that the right-turning lane is not required, that the proposed development will not result in congestion and that the Roads Department has accepted this position.
- 7.5.2. Firstly, with regards to the provision of the link road between Connaught Road and Little Water Street, while this forms part of the proposed development it was also included in two separate planning applications by the same applicant on the adjacent lands. Final grants of planning permission have issued in respect of both those applications and planning permission is therefore already in place for the construction of the link road. Notwithstanding this, I consider the provision of the link road to be a positive element of the proposed development that will serve to improve permeability and interconnectivity in Longford Town Centre. The width of the road is 7m, which is wider than would typically be required for such a link road, but which I

consider to be consistent with the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets standards for roads which will frequently be used by larger vehicles.

- 7.5.3. With regard to the TTA, I note that it assesses the traffic impact of the overall masterplan development, including the petrol station, café, drive thru restaurant etc. I also note that the sizes of the various units referenced in the TTA, and upon which its analysis is based, do not match the stated unit sizes set out in the other documentation. However, since the unit sizes are generally overestimated in the TTA, this results in a slightly more conservative assessment and I consider it to be acceptable.
- 7.5.4. A 12 hour traffic survey was undertaken at four junctions in the vicinity of the appeal site on a Thursday, which is stated to be a period of peak flow for discount retail units. A PICADY analysis was then undertaken, utilising survey results and TRICS data for the various types of unit and for three different years – 2017 (year of opening), 2022 (design year 1) and 2032 (design year 2).
- 7.5.5. The analysis shows a ratio of flow to capacity (RFC) of 0.11 for traffic entering the link road from Connaught Road with a right turn in the peak PM period in design year 2 (2032), and a queue length of 0.1. On this basis I am satisfied that a dedicated right-turning lane is not required in this instance, as right turning vehicles will not cause significant congestion or queueing on Connaught Road. With regard to the wider issue of traffic congestion, I note that the overall masterplan development will generate less than 2 vehicles entering and 2 vehicles exiting per minute in the PM peak. The junctions at either end of the proposed distributor road operate satisfactorily in both design years with the appropriate NRA growth rates applied, with a maximum RFC of 0.45 and queue lengths never exceeding one vehicle length.
- 7.5.6. Having reviewed and assessed the TTA, RSA and Roads Department Report I am satisfied that the proposed development will not result in significant traffic congestion or impact on road safety and that a dedicated right-turning lane into the link road is not required.

7.6. Car Parking Provision

- 7.6.1. The gross floor area of the proposed retail unit is 1,593 sq m and it is proposed to provide 79 car parking spaces and 6 bicycle parking spaces. The Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021 requires 1 car parking space per 25 sq m of GFA but does not set out prescriptive bicycle parking standards. This results in a requirement for 64 car parking spaces and there is therefore an overprovision of 15 car parking spaces. This overprovision of car parking serves to exacerbate the car dominated appearance of both the proposed development and the overall masterplan development. I consider that the mix of uses within the masterplan area would allow for a degree of dual use of spaces and I consider that the amount of car parking proposed is therefore excessive.
- 7.6.2. If the Board is minded to grant permission, I recommend that the twelve car parking spaces to the north of the retail unit, adjacent to Little Water Street, be omitted and replaced with landscaping.

7.7. Requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment

- 7.7.1. While the proposed development solely relates to a discount retail unit, distributor road and associated development, it forms part of a larger masterplan development, and was one of four concurrently lodged planning applications. I therefore consider it necessary to address the issue of whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for the development. The relevant threshold of development in this instance is class 10(b)(iv) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). This class relates to urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 ha in the case of a business district, 10 ha in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere. A “business district” is defined as a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use.
- 7.7.2. I consider that the appeal site and overall masterplan area do not currently comprise part of the business district of Longford Town, due to their edge of centre location. There are a variety of land uses in the surrounding area, including agriculture, residential and commercial, and it could not be said that retail or commercial land use is predominant. I therefore consider the relevant threshold to be 10 ha. Since

the masterplan area has an area of 2.837 ha, the development is sub-threshold and does not require a mandatory EIS.

- 7.7.3. In considering any requirement for a sub-threshold EIS, I have had regard to the criteria for determining whether a development would or would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment as set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and development Regulations 2001 (as amended). I have also had regard to the documentation submitted with the planning application, including the AA Screening, Civil Engineering Report, Traffic Impact Assessment and Planning Statement.
- 7.7.4. Considering the nature, scale and extent of the proposed development, the location of the site in a suitably zoned and serviced area which is close to Longford's Main Street and not particularly environmentally sensitive and the resultant lack of potential significant effects on the environment, I consider that an EIA of the proposed development is not required.

8.0 Appropriate Assessment

- 8.1. The closest Natura 2000 sites that could be impacted on by the proposed development are as follows:
- Brown Bog SAC (Site Code 002346): 2.75km to the west.
 - Lough Forbes Complex SAC (Site Code 001818): 4.65km to the west.
 - Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA (Site Code 004101): 4.65km to the west.
 - Clooneen Bog SAC (Site Code 002348): 9.55km to the north west.
 - Lough Ree SAC (Site Code 000440): 14.4km to the south west.
- 8.2. An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report was submitted with the planning application. The Report addresses the potential impact of the entire masterplan development (i.e. the four concurrently lodged planning applications) on the Natura 2000 sites. The AA Screening Report concludes that no significant impacts on the qualifying interests of the SPA and cSAC are likely as a result of the proposed development.
- 8.2.1. I note that the proposed development will be connected to the public water supply and the public surface and foul drainage networks. I consider that the potential

impact of the proposed development on the Natura 2000 sites is primarily related to surface water run-off and construction stage impacts. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and its distance from the Natura 2000 sites, I consider that the only potential pathway is the River Camlin, located c. 115m to the north of the appeal site, which flows through Lough Forbes Complex SAC and Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA.

- 8.3. With regard to surface water, it is proposed to manage surface water through the SuDS process. Interception storage will be provided with permeable paving in car parking areas, and attenuation storage will also be provided on site, with the attenuated flow discharged to the existing public surface water sewer which traverses the site. This sewer will be diverted as part of the development to avoid conflict with the building footprint.
- 8.4. With regard to construction stage impacts, I note that no construction management plan (CMP) was submitted with the application although the AA Screening Report does state that development will be undertaken utilising all necessary best practice measures, including compliance with an agreed CMP. While the site is mostly undeveloped, it is surrounded by developed land to three sides, and is in close proximity to Longford Town Centre. Having regard to this, the distance from the River Camlin and the absence of drains/watercourses within the appeal site connecting to the River, I consider that standard best practice construction management measures would suffice in preventing any construction-related material entering the River Camlin.
- 8.5. It is reasonable to conclude that on the basis of the information on the file, which I consider adequate in order to issue a screening determination, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to have a significant effect on any European sites, in view of the sites Conservation Objectives, and a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and submission of a NIS is not therefore required.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1. I recommend that planning permission should be refused for the reason set out below.

10.0 Reasons

1. The proposed development is located at a prominent location on Connaught Road, which is one of the principal approaches to Longford Town Centre from the west and it is also within the Town Core Character Area as defined in the Longford and Environs Local Area Plan 2016-2022. It is considered that the proposed development by reason of its set-back from Connaught Road and over-dominant car parking arrangement would fail to provide a suitably active and legible frontage to the street at this location, would not satisfactorily integrate into the streetscape or surroundings, and would therefore fail to uphold the design principles set out in the "Retail Design Manual" issued by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2010). The proposed development would therefore be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Niall Haverty
Planning Inspector

7th December 2016