



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP 309050-20

Development	Road Realignment Scheme.
Location	N63 Liss to Abbey Realignment Scheme. Co Galway
Local Authority	Galway Co. Council
Type of Application	EIA Direction (Section 50 of the Roads Act, 1993, as amended)
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	April 27 th , 2021
Inspector	Breda Gannon

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1.0 Introduction

Under the provisions of section 50(1)(c) of the Roads Act, 1993, Galway County Council is seeking a direction from An Bord Pleanála, as to whether or not, the proposed N63 Liss to Abbey realignment scheme would be likely to give rise to significant effects on the environment and thereby require the preparation of an environmental impact assessment report. The County Council has itself concluded that the proposed development has the potential to have significant effects on the environment and that an EIA would be required.

2.0 Site Location and Description

The site is located to the northeast of Galway city, along the N63 corridor and directly east of Abbeyknockmoy village. The proposed upgrade and realignment would extend eastwards from the village, across the Abbert River and on towards the junction of the N63 and the L6234. The overall length of the road development is 2.3km.

The proposed road realignment would cross low lying agricultural land to the north of the existing national secondary road. The landscape is dominated by the ruins of Abbeyknockmoy Abbey, which lies on elevated ground to the north. The Abbert River flows in an east-west direction between the N63 and the abbey. To the east, close to Liss Bridge, there is a cluster of community facilities including a national school, community centre and St Bernard's Church. Residential development consists of one-off houses in ribbon form along the southern side of the N63.

The road passes to the south-east of two National Monuments, Abbeyknockmoy Cistercian Abbey (GA058-004001), which includes a graveyard (GA058-0040030) within its precincts, and a field system (NM No 166) associated with the monastic site. There are also recorded archaeological features in the vicinity including two Leacht Cuimhne or commemoration memorials (GA058-057 and GA058-074) to the east and west respectively of the proposed road, which are also recorded as Protected Structures in the Plan (No 3921 and 3918). A ringfort (GA058-055) and Designated Landscape Feature (GA058-056) are located 400m to the west and southwest.

The proposed road also passes c 60m to the north of Rose Villa (NIAH No. 30405814), a detached house, built c 1870. It also passes to the north of Liss Bridge (NIAH No. 30405811). Other architectural assets within the vicinity include St Bernard's Church and a handball alley (NIAH No. 30405810) to the south and a mill (NIAH No. 304058) located 300m to the northeast.

3.0 Proposed Development

The proposal is for a Type 2 Single Carriageway (predominantly offline) new 2.3km roadway. The development covers an area of c.12 ha and includes the following:

- New roundabout at the western end of the scheme to provide connection with the existing N63.
- Two new priority junctions to provide connection to the existing L6159 and L6234, including some minor road realignments.
- One clear span bridge crossing of the Abbert River.
- New piped culverts over existing field ditches.
- Improved and new pedestrian and cycle facilities, predominantly located along the existing N63.
- Excavation works, accommodation works, drainage works, utilities /service diversion works, safety barrier, public lighting, landscaping, environmental works and other ancillary works.

4.0 Request for Direction and Submitted Documents

On December 22nd, 2020 the Board received a request for an EIAR Direction for the proposed development. The application is supported by an EIA Screening Report and an AA Screening Report.

5.0 Policy and Context

Development Plan

The operative development plan is the Galway County Development Plan 2015-2021. The proposed realignment runs to the east of the village of Abbeyknockmoy

within a rural area. The lands lie within a landscape which is classified as Class 1 'Low' with pockets of Class 2 'Moderate' sensitivity.

The proposed development lies within the protected viewshed of '*Focal Point and View 26: Knockmoy Abbey southeast of Tuam*'. It is an objective of the plan to preserve these focal points/views from development that would negatively impact on them, but that this must be balanced against the need to develop key infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan.

The Plan seeks to protect the architectural (Policy AH-1 and Objective AH-2 Protected Structures) and archaeological heritage (Policy ARC-1) of the County.

The Plan support the protection, conservation and enhancement of natural heritage, including the integrity of European sites (Policy NHB 1, Objective NHB1)

Natural Heritage Designations

The proposed road passes close to the boundary of Lough Corrib SAC. A bridge over the Abbert River is proposed as part of the development. The river is part of the Lough Corrib SAC.

Killaclogher Bog NHA (Site code: 001280) is located c 3.5km southeast of the proposed development site.

6.0 Legislation

Section 50(1)(a) of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, places a mandatory requirement on a roads authority to prepare an environmental impact assessment report in respect of any proposed road development comprising the construction of a motorway, busway, service station or any prescribed type of road development consisting of the construction of a proposed public road or the improvement of an existing public road as is presently defined in Article 8(b) of the Roads Regulations, 1994:

(a) the construction of a new road of four or more lanes, or the realignment or widening of an existing road so as to provide four or more lanes, where such new,

realigned or widened road would be eight kilometres or more in length in a rural area, or 500m or more in an urban area;

(b) the construction of a new bridge or tunnel which would be 100m or more in length.

The proposed development, which is for a single carriageway road, 2.3km in length in a rural area and a small bridge, does not fall within these categories of and is therefore not subject to mandatory EIA.

With regard to sub-threshold development, section 50(1)(c) of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, states that where the roads authority considers that any proposed road development (other than those described above), which consists of a proposed public road or the improvement of any existing public road, would be likely to have significant effects on the environment it shall inform the Board in writing and where the Board concurs with the roads authority it is required to give a direction to the authority pursuant to section 50(1)(b) of the Act to prepare an environmental impact assessment report in respect of the proposed road development and the authority is obliged to comply with any such direction.

Section 50(1)(d) states that where a proposed road development (other than development to which paragraph (a) applies) is located in a European site, the roads authority shall decide whether the proposed development would be likely to have significant effects on the environment. If it is concluded that the development is likely to have such effects, it must make its decision publicly available (Section 50 (1)(f)).

Section 50 (1)(e) states that An Bord Pleanála or the road authority shall take into account the relevant selection criteria specified in Annex III of the EIA Directive in making its EIA Screening determination.

The proposed clear span bridge associated with the proposed development will cross the Abbert River, which is part of Local Corrib SAC. The works will also be proximate to the SAC boundary. Galway County Council has carried out an EIA Screening determination under the provisions of section 50(1)(d) of the Roads Act 1993, as amended and concluded that the proposed development is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

7.0 Galway Co. Council EIA Screening Report

The request for a direction from the Board as to whether or not the proposed bridge would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, necessitating the preparation of an environmental impact assessment report, is accompanied by an 'EIA Screening Report' prepared by AECOM-ROD. It takes into account the 3 no. relevant criteria specified in Annex 111 of EIA Directive 2014/52/EU which are as follows:

1. Characteristics of projects.
2. Location of projects.
3. Types and characteristics of the potential impact.

1 Characteristics of project

Size and design of project - The proposed road development is c 2.3km in length and the proposal covers an area of c 12 ha. The various elements of the development are described.

Cumulation with other existing and/or proposed developments –There are developments (Table 3-3) which may result in transient impacts, specifically from noise, traffic and dust associated with construction, which could result in in-combination effects with the construction of the road, the impacts would be temporary and not significant. The only large-scale development (quarry) identified within a 15km radius of this site has been refused permission (307944).

Nature of demolition works – no building will be demolished, but some surfaces may be removed to tie into existing roads and paths/drainage alterations.

Use of natural resources – aggregates, concrete, fill material and granular sub-base material will be imported to the site. Minor cutting sections may be required to facilitate level tie-ins and to maintain sight distances and geometric alignment. Excavation will be kept to a minimum and excavated material will be used for landscaping and embankments where possible to reduce material importation and to minimise the risk of the introduction of invasive species. Preliminary earthwork volume calculations indicate an overall deficit (56,00m³) of fill material, which will be sourced from local licensed suppliers. No water will be extracted from rivers or streams.

Production of waste – There will be waste produced from the proposed development, the quantities are as yet unknown.

Pollution and nuisances – these would include exhaust emissions to air, noise and vibration, social effects such as temporary road diversions, leaks/spills of hydrocarbons and run-off to nearby watercourses during construction.

Risk of accidents and/or disasters including those caused by climate change – potential accidents and/or disasters include flood events and major road accidents. The proposed development is not within a designated flood zone. There are no records of past flood events within or close to the study area. Onsite observations indicate that the lands adjacent to the Abbert River are likely to be prone to flooding. Further assessments will be required to determine the hydrological effects caused by the new bridge over the Abbert River. A Flood Risk Assessment will be undertaken for the proposed development.

The size of the development is not of sufficient size/scale to cause a major accident or disaster during the construction phase as normal construction mitigation measures will apply.

The proposed development will help to alleviate congestion issue around Liss Bridge and will improve road safety.

Risk to Human Health – with the implementation of the mitigation measures the impacts during the construction stage due to water contamination and air pollution is considered to be low. The proposed development will assist in alleviating congestion issues around Liss Bridge at the local level by segregating local and regional traffic. Regional traffic will use the new alignment and local traffic can use the existing N63 to separate the two types of traffic that will be travelling at different speeds.

2 Location of the Project

Existing and approved land use – The development is located in a rural area. The main land use is agriculture with some dispersed residential development and community facilities.

Relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (Land/Soil/ Water and Biodiversity) – the proposed road will result in land take and severance resulting in the loss of hedgerow between fields and mature

hedgerow where the eastern section of the route ties in with existing infrastructure. There is also potential for loss of habitats.

Absorption capacity of the natural Environment – the proposed development is located in open land with some wooded areas in the section south of the Abbert River. The Abbert River is the main waterbody and it provides hydrological connectivity to watercourses in the wider area. The development is not proximate to the coastal zone/marine environment and there are no mountain/forests parks or nature reserves and parks close to the site. The site is hydrologically connected to Lough Corrib SAC (Site code:000297) via the Abbert River which is a tributary of the Clare River. Killaclogher Bog NHA (Site code: 001280) is located c 3.5km southeast of the proposed development site.

The proposed site is not located in, or, close to areas that have already had a failure to meet environmental quality standards. The river waterbody status (2013-2018) of the Abbert River was classified as 'Good' but the river has been identified as being 'at risk' of meeting the WFD objective. The development is located above the Clare-Corrib groundwater body, which has been classified as having 'Good' groundwater status (under the WFD 2013-2018), has been identified as being 'at risk' of failing to meet its WFD Objective.

Densely populated areas – the development is in a rural area and the closest settlement is Abbeyknockmoy. The construction stage may result in temporary impacts of short duration (noise, vibration and traffic) with the potential to impact on sensitive receptors. It is not considered that these impacts would be significant.

Landscapes, Focal Points/Views and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance -the roadway passes through a landscape of archaeological and architectural significance. There are National Monuments, Protected Structures, buildings listed in the NIAH and other features of archaeological significance close to the site. The road also passes through a house cluster in the townland of Moyne at the eastern end of the proposed road, with the remains of a house still visible.

The site is located in area of 'Low' landscape sensitivity, but the south eastern section of the road passes through part of the designated landscape associated with Newtown House, which was constructed in the first half of the 19th century. There is one protected viewpoint which is located north of the Abbert River. Open views of

the development will be available from the ground of Abbeyknockmoy Abbey, which is in ruins.

3 Types and Characteristics of Potential Impacts

Magnitude and spatial extent of the impact – The potential impacts will be limited to the site (c.12 ha) and sensitive receptors, including watercourses and properties surrounding the proposed development.

Nature of the impact – the nature of impacts is considered in terms of environmental factors. With regard to population and human health, no significant negative effects are predicted during the construction phase due to implementation of appropriate mitigation measures. During the operation stage, the additional bridge over the Abbert River would have positive impacts for the local community in terms of improving connectivity. The segregation of local and regional traffic would also have positive effects and improve safety. The proposal may increase noise levels at some receptors, including Abbeyknockmoy Cistercian Abbey but noise levels may reduce at existing affected receptors due to improvements in congestion levels. Significant effects on population and human health are not predicted.

There proposed development presents a risk to water during the construction and operational stages of the development. Subject to best practice mitigation measures to prevent pollutants from entering the water environment, no significant effects are anticipated. During the operational stage, run-off would be attenuated prior to discharge to watercourses. A Flood Risk Assessment will be carried out to determine any likely significant effects.

Regarding land and soils, the construction stage has the potential to generate impacts arising from weathering and erosion of surface soils, increased silt levels or pollutants, accidental spills etc. Subject to adherence to standard best practice and recognised mitigation measures no significant negative effects are predicted.

The main air quality impacts would arise during site preparation and construction works. These impacts can be mitigated through the implementation of dust management measures and best management practices, which will be incorporated into the CEMP. Due to the proximity of sensitive receptors, it is acknowledged that further consultation may be required prior to construction to determine if other measures are required.

Minor greenhouse gas emissions would arise from truck movements and the operation of construction equipment, but this will not be significant having regard to the scale and size of the proposed development. No significant climate effects are predicted.

During the operational stage, the main air emissions would be from traffic. Road traffic is currently passing through the area and the proposed development is not expected to significantly affect this. There will be a reduction in congestion resulting in more free-flowing conditions which may help to reduce traffic derived air quality impacts.

It is likely that noise and vibration control measures would be required to reduce the effects of the likely temporary and negative effects on sensitive receptors during the construction stage. With standard best practice measures in place, no significant effects are likely. During the operational stage there is the potential for an increase in noise levels at some remote sensitive receptors, but these may improve due to a reduction in congestion levels. In addition, the majority of traffic likely to use the road is already traversing the local area and significant effects are not expected. The inclusion of mitigation measures will assist in reducing potential noise impacts on noise sensitive receptors, e.g., new road to be located in cuttings, construction of earth bunds, installation of noise barriers.

The development includes a considerable offline section and would be raised on an embankment to reach the proposed bridge level. The new bridge with a clearance of c 4m above the river would result in a high landscape effect. The significance is considered to be 'Moderately Adverse' as it would detract from the overall character of the landscape and it is unlikely that the bridge would be capable of being integrated into its environs (depending on the architectural quality of the final bridge design). The proposed development would result in a High-Medium change in landscape character as the proposed section of the offline development would become a discernible feature and alter the landscape character locally.

The majority of the visual effects would be from the proposed bridge crossing and the significant earthworks (cut and fill) along the southwest and northeast of the river. The bridge would be visible when travelling along the local roads to either side of the N63 and from elevated local views such as St Bernard's Church. Cuttings and large

embankments would also be visible from several locations within the local area. The proposed development would result in significant visual effects on Focal Point/ View 26. The impacts will depend on the final architectural design of the bridge.

Regarding biodiversity, the development would result in significant land take which could impact on habitat connectivity and the loss of mature hedgerow where the eastern section ties in with existing infrastructure. It would also result in loss of treelines and hedgerows between agricultural fields. This could impact on bats and bird should trees be removed during the breeding season.

There is potential for impacts on Lough Corrib SAC associated with the road works and bridge construction. In the absence of mitigation measures, the proposed development could potentially impact on biodiversity. Further ecological impact assessment is required to identify any potential likely significant effects and to identify appropriate mitigation measures.

In the absence of appropriate mitigation measures, the proposed development could potentially result in significant cultural heritage effects. A further cultural heritage assessment is required to identify potential likely significant effects and to identify appropriate mitigation measures.

No significant impacts are predicted on material assets, in the locality which will be protected in-situ where possible. The proposed development would result in the permanent acquisition of 9.5 ha of agricultural land where the route goes offline. This will result in land severance, which is not likely to give rise to significant effects on existing land use having regard to the limited scale of the project.

Intensity and complexity of the impact – the majority of impacts will occur during the construction stage. Subject to the implementation of appropriate control measures, it is not anticipated that significant effects on the existing environment are likely to occur. Intense and complex impacts are not anticipated.

Significant effects are considered likely on landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage. In terms of landscape, there will be impacts during the construction and operational stages. There is potential for the impacts on landscape character and the visual amenity of the area associated with construction activity, including excavation, material/machinery removal, vegetation removal, bridge construction and alterations to existing road layouts. These impacts will be temporary. During the operational

stage there is potential for impact on landscape character and visual amenity resulting from changes to views and the character of the landscape, particularly from residential receptors and from the protected view at Abbeyknockmoy Abbey. These impacts will be permanent.

With regard to biodiversity, the proposed road will result in the loss of semi-natural habitat areas such as hedgerow, treelines and wet grassland. The majority of these impacts would be temporary or short term. The significance of impacts would be reduced by the creation of compensatory habitat. There is potential for impacts on a Natura 2000 site, associated with the bridge crossing. The river crossing would be developed in accordance with TII and environmental guidelines and specific environmental avoidance and mitigation measures will be implemented. No complex impacts are predicted.

The proposed development would result in ground disturbance during construction and there is potential for unrecorded sub-surface archaeological remains to be encountered. This has the potential to result in significant negative effects. Both the construction and operational stages have the potential to impact on the setting of heritage assets.

Possibility of effectively reducing the impact -the introduction of the proposed development and the associated change in the landscape cannot be mitigated. Visual effects can be reduced by the appropriate location of structures and planting which would enable effective integration into the landscape.

Impacts on biodiversity would be reduced subject to compliance with environmental guidance and standard mitigation measures.

Groundworks during construction would create a significant negative impact upon previously unrecorded archaeological features which may be present within the scheme footprint. Impacts could be impacted by archaeological testing, excavation and preservation through record. Impacts to the setting of cultural heritage assets would be reduced by embedded mitigation within the scheme design.

Conclusion

The conclusion reached in the report is that the proposed development is likely to result in significant impacts on landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage and the preparation of an EIAR is recommended.

8.0 Assessment

8.1 Introduction

Annex 111 of the Directive as set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended, lists 3 no criteria to determine whether a project should be subject to environmental impacts assessment. These area as follows:

- 1. Characteristics of the proposed development**
- 2. Location of proposed development**
- 3. Types and characteristics of potential impacts**

Schedule 7 lists matters that require consideration under each of the criteria which are addressed below.

1. Characteristics of proposed development

Size and design of whole project

The proposal is to upgrade and re-align a small section of the N63. It would have an overall length of 2.3km and would involve the removal of some hedgerows between fields and some mature hedgerow close to the tie-in to the east. A new bridge would be provided, crossing the Abbert River. The bridge would be clear span and no instream works are proposed. No details are provided of the design of the bridge.

The project is small-scale road project and would involve an area of c 12 ha in a rural area. It would by-pass local community facilities (school, community centre and the local church), which are clustered close to Liss Bridge, creating a safer environment for the public accessing these facilities. The new road offers significant benefits in terms of traffic safety in that it would by-pass Liss Bridge which is substandard in width and alignment.

Having regard to the limited scale of the development, which is significantly below threshold for mandatory EIA, I do not consider that the impacts would be of a magnitude that warrants EIA.

Cumulation with other existing and/or approved projects

The EIAR Screening Report prepared on behalf of Galway Co. Council has not identified any significant existing/proposed developments in the immediate vicinity of the road development which would act in combination with the proposed development to generate cumulative impacts. There is reference in the Screening Report to a proposal for the permanent placement of soil/topsoil on a 2.58ha site adjacent to the proposed upgrade of the N63 at Ballyglunin. This site is west of the village and is close to the river. I am not aware if the development has progressed. In any event, the potential for cumulative impacts would be associated with impacts on water quality and on the adjoining SAC.

There is also reference to other residential development schemes dating back to 2012/2013. I note that the referenced cases all relate to applications for the extension of the duration of the planning permission, which if not built, would have since expired.

The nature of demolition works, use of natural resources, production of waste, pollution and nuisances, risk of major accidents/disasters including those caused by climate change

As noted, the proposal would not involve the demolition of any buildings. Some surfaces will be regraded at tie-in locations. Having regard to the nature and limited scale of the proposal there will not be a significant use of natural resources. Excavated material will be re-used as far as possible on the site to minimise the need to import soil/stone onto the site. Aggregates/fill material will be sourced locally to minimise effects on the environment. It is accepted that similar to other construction projects, that waste will be produced and it intended that this will be disposed of to licensed facilities.

The proposal will result in the removal of some trees and hedgerows which will impact on non-renewable elements of the natural environment and biodiversity. However, the land take associated with the development will be limited and relatively small scale.

I accept that the nature of the proposed development and its limited scale is such that it will not result in significant use of natural resources either during construction or associated with its on-going use as a road.

I also accept the conclusions of the Screening Report with regard to other characteristics of the development including likely instances of pollution and nuisance, and the risk of accidents. Having regard to the routine best practice methodologies proposed during the construction phase, significant effects are not likely to occur. While the proposed road development is not located in any area which has been identified as susceptible to flooding, it is accepted that Flood Risk Assessment will be required as the area may be prone to flooding.

As stated, no details are provided on the design of the bridge, but there would be a requirement that it is designed to make allowance for climate change. The nature and scale of the development is not likely to lead to an adverse impact on human health arising from water contamination, air pollution etc.

Having considered the characteristics of the proposed development, I accept that the potential for significant effects on the environment is low and would not generate the requirement for environmental impact assessment.

2. Location of proposed development

Existing and approved land use

The realigned section of the road would cross over undeveloped agricultural land and would span the existing river. The works would also require the removal of some hedgerows and trees. These impacts would be small scale and insignificant in terms of the land use of the area.

Abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area and its underground

No instream works are proposed which removes the potential for interference with riverbeds, underlying geology, flow rates or velocities within the river system and their natural resources. The road would cross over agricultural land and the offline section will result in the loss of c 9.5 ha of land. Given the abundance of similar land/habitat in the locality this is not considered to be significant.

Absorption capacity of the existing environment

The River Abbert is part of the Lough Corrib SAC designated for a range of habitats and species. There will be no direct impacts on the SAC as no in-stream structures are proposed. There is potential for the release of contaminants into the river system

during construction with indirect impacts on the European site. The AA Screening Report submitted by Galway County Council acknowledges the requirement for Appropriate Assessment.

While the proposed development will alter the landscape character in this location, I do consider this is overly significant in the context of its low value rating. However, its overall sensitivity is increased by the presence of Abbeyknockmoy Abbey and the protected viewpoint in the area. There are currently unobstructed views towards the Abbey from sections of the N63 in this location.

The area is also sensitive in terms its architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage, which includes national Monuments, archaeological monuments, protected structures and structures included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. I accept that the proposed road re-alignment has the potential to impact on the character and setting of some these monuments/buildings, in particular Abbeyknockmoy Abbey and St Bernard's Church which are elevated above the surrounding landscape. The new road will also be visible from Liss Bridge (NIAH) and other designated/listed structures in the locality. The proposed development also has the potential to impact on previously undisturbed archaeological remains.

The significance of the impact will be influenced by the level of the new road, cut/fill required, embankments and the detailed design the bridge, its height, width and materials used. I consider that these impacts can be addressed at detailed design stage and are not so significant to require full environmental impact assessment of the entire project. Potential impacts on the archaeological resource would be mitigated by an archaeological appraisal of the site in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)

I accept that AA will be required in respect of the proposed development. Under the provisions of section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, Galway Co Council will be required to submit an application for approval for the development. In addition to the likely significant effects on European sites, the likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area would be considered and assessed, including those relating to impacts on the landscape, visual amenities and archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage.

3. Types and characteristics of the potential impact

Nature, magnitude and extent of the impact

The extent of the impact in terms of *geographical area* impacted and the *size of the population likely to be affected* is limited. There will be construction related impacts but these will be localised, of short duration and capable of effective mitigation by good construction practices and effective traffic management.

There will be *visual impacts* associated with the provision of a new roadway in another wise undisturbed natural landscape. Most sensitive receptors are residential receptors on the N63 or visitors to the ruins of the abbey. The impacts will be localised, confined largely to sections of the N63, to views to/from the abbey and elevated roadways and structures in the locality. The development will impact on a protected view (Viewpoint 26: Knockmoy Abbey southeast of Tuam). While it will not be possible to fully mitigate the visual impact of the development, landscaping, appropriate bridge design and the use of sympathetic materials will reduce the effect.

In terms of *biodiversity*, the proposal will result in the removal of trees and hedgerows, which may result in displacement of species that use the site. Having regard to the limited scale of the development and the abundance of similar habitat in the locality, the impact is not likely to be significant.

The works will be proximate, but not within the SAC. The bridge will span the river but no instream works are proposed. There will, therefore, be no direct impacts on the SAC, but the potential exists for indirect impacts arising from a deterioration in water quality during construction. It is considered that these measures can be adequately dealt with under the Habitat's Directive (Appropriate Assessment)

Impacts on *lands and soil* will be negligible due to the limited land take associated with the proposed development and the proposal to re-use excavated material on site. There is potential for impacts on *air/climate* and for *noise/vibration* impacts to occur during construction with the potential to impact on the amenity of local residents and on the school, community hall, church etc. These impacts will be temporary and short lived.

There is potential for impacts on *cultural heritage*. In particular, the proposed road will be visible in views to/from the abbey ruins which will significantly alter its

character and setting. While it is not possible to fully mitigate these impacts, the overall design of the road and the bridge would be critical in minimising effects.

There is also potential for significant effects on the archaeological resource and the discovery of previously undisturbed material during construction. Adherence to standard mitigation measures in accordance with the requirements of the DHLGH would be sufficient to mitigate impacts.

Due to the nature and limited scale of the development, it is not considered that the proposed development would result in significant negative impacts on *materials assets* in the area.

There is potential for *interaction between environmental factors*, notable between water, biodiversity and landscape/visual impacts and cultural heritage. Subject to mitigation, significant interactions are not considered likely, or such that would give rise to significant environmental effects.

Probability, intensity and complexity of impacts

This is a small scale road development and the nature of the environmental impacts is not considered complex or intense.

Expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact

The impacts will be long-term, on-going and only reversible if the road is removed.

Transboundary nature of impact

There will be no transboundary impacts associated with the proposed development.

Cumulative impacts

I am not aware of any existing/permitted projects in the vicinity of the site that would act in combination with the proposed development to give rise to cumulative effects.

9.0 Recommendation

Having regard to the location of the proposed development, the characteristics of the proposed project and the type and characteristics of potential impacts, I consider that the proposed realignment of the N63 would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment. I recommend that Galway County Council be advised that the

preparation and submission of an environmental impact assessment report is not therefore required.

Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development, I accept that the issues arising from connectivity to European sites, can be adequately dealt with under the Habitat's Directive (Appropriate Assessment).

I consider that the likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area arising from potential impacts on landscape, visual amenity, archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage can be addressed in a section 177AE application to the Board.

10 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the following:

- (a) The criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Regulations 2001, as amended,
- (b) The nature and limited scale of the development which is below the threshold for prescribed road development set out in article 8(b) of the Roads Regulations, 1994, as amended,
- (c) The location of the proposed development, the characteristics of the proposed development and the characteristics of potential impacts
- (d) The limited potential for significant effects on the environment,
- (e) The submission of the planning authority,

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 is not, therefore required.

It is considered that the impacts likely to arise including potential impacts on European sites and the likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area arising from impacts on the landscape, visual amenities,

archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage can be addressed in a section 177AE application to the Board.

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28th April 2021