



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-314351-22

Development	Limerick City Greenway (UL to Annacotty)
Location	Castletroy, Co. Limerick
Prospective Applicant	Limerick City and County Council
Planning Authority	Limerick City and County Council
Case Type	Pre-application consultation under Section 51A of the Roads Act 1993, as amended
Date of Site Inspection	7 th of May 2025
Inspector	Joe Bonner

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. Limerick City and County Council (the prospective applicant) requested Pre-Application Consultations under Section 51A of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended), for the development of the proposed Limerick City Greenway (University of Limerick to Annacotty).
- 1.2. Two pre-application consultation meeting took place between An Bord Pleanála and the prospective applicant. The first meeting was held on the 13th of October 2022 and the second meeting was held on the 8th of November 2024.
- 1.3. The initial meeting request was accompanied by a full set of detailed design drawings, photomontages and a planning report. The second meeting request was accompanied by a series of photomontages, detailed drawings and an updated planning report, which are on the file.
- 1.4. This report is prepared following a written request, dated the 30th of April 2025, from the prospective applicant, to close the pre-application consultation. The prospective applicant intends to submit an application for approval to the Board, pursuant to Section 51(2) of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended). An Environmental Impact Assessment and a Natural Impact Statement are to be submitted with the application.
- 1.5. This report provides an overview of the site location and proposed development, a summary of the two meetings and the advice provided by the board representatives, details of relevant legislative provisions, and a list of recommended Prescribed Bodies that copies of the application for approval should be forwarded to.

2.0 Site Location and Description of Development

- 2.1. It was originally planned that the development would have a length of 6.8km and would extend from UL Boat Club in the west to Annacotty at its eastern end. The route was amended in revised drawings submitted to the board in advance of the second meeting, and the final letter submitted to the board on the 30th of April 2025, requesting the closure of the pre application consultation stated that the proposed linear greenway development would have a length of 4.25km and would be 3.5m - 4.3m in width.

- 2.2 The proposed greenway would start c2.5km to the east of Limerick city centre, c725m to the south of the University of Limerick (UL) Boat Club slipway, at the point where a pair of existing bridges mark where the River Groddy joins the River Shannon. From there, the greenway would first travel northwards to the boat club and would include the construction of two new sections of a parallel combined cycle and footpath, located c12m on the landside of the existing tarmacked path. The new sections of path would extend to c475m of this section over this section. This section of the existing path ranges from 1.6-3.9m in width. The remainder of the existing path is unmetalled and consist of gravel paths of varying widths.
- 2.3 From the UL Boat Club slipway the path turns eastwards, following along the southern side of the River Shannon for c2.5km. This section generally follows the route of the existing unmetalled shared cycle and pedestrian path, but a 270m diversion would be built to avoid a group of existing fisherman's cottages. The diversion will commence to the east of the ruins of Plassey Mills and will south, east and then north where it would rejoin the existing path adjacent to the bridge connecting Dromroe student village to other university buildings and playing pitches on the northern side of the river Shannon, in Co Clare. Compensatory trees planting and hedging are proposed in the area between the rear of the cottages and the new path.
- 2.4 After traveling under the bridge, the path would continue eastwards along the existing route for c100m, where a new 300m section of path would be constructed between the existing path and Dromroe student village, before rejoining the existing path. From here, the path is located south of the river Shannon and north of the Millrace and will continue for a distance of c500m to where it arrives at Plassey Beach, where the third of three new bridges on the route would be located. Works here would include a retaining wall, and wheelchair access to Plassey Beach, as well as seating.
- 2.5 From Plassey beach, the path would continue eastwards for c 280m and would meet to an existing dirt path that runs southwards along the eastern side of Kilmurray Student Village for a distance of c250m and is to be upgrade as part of the proposed development. The path then connects to University Road, adjacent to the entrance to Troy studios, where new segregated cycle and footpaths would be built on both sides of the road over a distance of c 400m before connecting into existing cycle

lanes and footpath infrastructure that has recently been constructed on short (60-80m) sections on either side of University Road, which has in turn been integrated with the existing cycle lane and footpaths on Plassey Park Road.

- 2.6 From the aforementioned junction, the path would continue along the route of the existing path for a distance of c680m, before turning south-eastwards, c25m before it reaches the ruins of Troy Castle. Along this section, the path runs immediately adjacent to three electricity poles, which are supported by stays. From Troy Castle, a new path would be created over a distance of c300m, where it would then connect to McLaughlan Road, which would in turn be upgraded on both sides over a distance of 310m, to facilitate the construction of segregated cycle lanes and footpaths on either side, and in turn it would connect to the existing cycle lane and footpaths on Plassey Park Road.
- 2.7 Both University Road and McLaughlan Road serve a number of large commercial premises while University Road also provides access to UL sports grounds. A distance of c450m separates the junctions of McLaughlan Road and University Road where they connect to Plassey Park Road.
- 2.8 The development will also include drainage along the landside of the pathways, the replacement of some culverts and the installation of new culverts, to ensure that potential floodwaters do not become trapped on the landward side of the path. A number of bug hotels and bird boxes would also be installed along the route, while lighting, bollards, bike racks and fencing would also be installed.

3.0 Natural Heritage Designations

- 3.1. Parts of the route that runs along or close to the River Shannon are located within or adjacent to the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code 002165).

4.0 Pre Application Consultation Meetings

- 4.1. As noted above, two pre application consultation meetings took place, which are summarised below. Please refer to the records of the meetings included on the file for further details of the matters discussed.

First Meeting (10th October 2022)

- 4.2. The prospective applicant made a presentation of the proposed greenway, which was to have a length of 6.8km and was to extend from between the University of Limerick Boat Club at its western end to Annacotty on the east, with two cycle and footways to extend from the path, along University Road and McLaughlan Road. Much of the existing path is inaccessible to wheelchair users, due to the nature of the surface finishes.
- 4.3. The applicant presented information on the following:
- 4 no proposed bridges
 - An Arboricultural survey has been carried out
 - Works at Plassey beach
 - Protection around Troy Castle
 - Path through UL Bohemians rugby grounds
 - Downward directional public lighting to reduce impacts on birds and bats
 - Construction and phasing including temporary construction compounds
 - Project timelines
- 4.4. Following the presentation, the following issues were discussed
- **CPO** – The prospective applicant clarified that a Compulsory Purchase Order will be sought along the entire length of the route and an application will be submitted to the Board, and positive discussions have been held, with landowners along the route. The board representatives advised that the lands to be acquired should be included in the application.
 - **Flooding** – The prospective applicant confirmed the majority of the route would be liable to flooding, but would be back in use once flood waters recede. Culverts will be added at 200m intervals to ensure no water ponding occurs on the land side of the path.
 - **Baseline conditions and mitigation** – The board representative advised the applicant to be clear and concise in this regard.
 - **Slopes** – Responding to the board representatives query about the severity of slopes and engineered approach to the greenway construction, the applicant stated

that the tarmac path will have a 2.5 degree slope to allow water to flow towards the river, while steeper slopes will be draped with cell web to prevent erosion.

- **Riparian habitat** – The board representatives asked that the application is clear on how riparian habitat will be impacted during construction and in the final scheme. The prospective applicant confirmed that sections of habitat would be removed, but would be replaced and added to.
- **Invasive species** – The prospective applicant advised that an invasive species survey had been completed and will involve treatment or removal in accordance with an Invasive Species Management Plan.
- **Otters** – The prospective applicant confirmed that the environmental survey showed no evidence of otters along the route.
- **Landscaping** – In response to the board representatives recommendation that landscaping around Troy Castle be softened, the prospective applicant stated that native Irish trees and hedging would be added.
- **Lighting and Bats** – The prospective applicant stated that lighting had been selected to reduce impact on Bats. The board representatives advised that lighting would attract more people to the route at night and this impact should be addressed in the EIAR.
- **Sedimentation** – The board representatives advised that construction mitigation measures are to be clearly set out in the NIS.
- **EIAR and NIS** – The prospective applicant confirmed that the NIS was completed and that 13 of the 14 EIAR chapters were prepared, while an arborist assessment was nearing completion.
- **Consultations** – The prospective applicant has consulted with the NPWS and a number of mitigation measures have been identified including that works would not take place during the bird breeding season of 1st March to the end of September.
- **Bird Surveys** – The prospective applicant confirmed that winter and breeding bird surveys have been completed.
- **Target users** – The prospective applicant stated that the target users would be commuters towards the town (Limerick) and families.

- **Erosion/Compaction** – The Board Representatives advised that potential erosion or compaction of older paths due to increased footfall should be addressed.
- **Design Justification** – The Board Representatives advised that the proposed applicant provides justification for the overall design and demonstrates how the main aspects of the development such as materials, verges, drainage and rest areas, have been considered in an integrated way.
- **Legislation** – Following a question from the prospective applicant, the board representatives agreed to confirm the legislation required for the application to be lodged in accordance with.
- **Further Consultation** – The board representatives reminded the prospective applicant that the onus is on them to seek a further meeting or formally close the pre-application consultation.

Second Meeting (11th of November 2024)

4.5. Applicant's presentation

- 4.5.1. The prospective applicant made a presentation of the proposed development and addressed the following issues:
- They described the development route and noted that the originally proposed River Mulcair section of the proposed greenway had been removed, and that the length of the route would now be 4,483m and that Plassey Park Road has been redeveloped to include cycle lanes and footpaths.
 - They indicated that they would submit the application under Section 51(a) of the Roads Act 1993.
 - The application will include an EIA screening report, an EIAR, an AA screening report and a NIS.
 - All trees that would be removed would be replaced in accordance with the tree replacement plan in the Limerick City and County Development Plan 2022-2028.
 - The route would be diverted around the Fisherman's cottages to address resident's concerns regarding disturbances outside of their homes, while also addressing their drainage issues.
 - The level of the path would be higher than the predicted flood plain.

- A retaining wall and ramp will be added at Plassey Beach to create a meeting place for the public. This area which will experience high footfall and the impact on biodiversity has been considered in the EIAR and Biodiversity Management Plan.
- The prospective applicant has been in discussion with UL since 2021 and its facilities team supports the proposed development. A change has been made near the UL agricultural lab to allow the construction of a playing pitch.
- On University Road and McLaughlan Road, the path would change from a shared path to a segregated cycle lane and footpath

4.6. Following the presentation, the following issues were discussed:

- **Troy Castle** – In response to a question from the board representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that Troy Castle has been removed from the proposed route.
- **Reports to accompany application** – The board representative queried whether updated surveys had been carried out regarding the NIS and EIAR and the prospective applicant confirmed that surveys had been carried out in Winter 2023 and Summer 2024 for bat and bird roosts, while a badger and otter survey was carried out in August 2024 and the arboriculture report was updated in February 2024.
- **Riparian Habitat** – In response to a query regarding changes to riparian habitat since the last meeting, the prospective applicant confirmed natural grass has been allowed to grow on earth banks along the route.
- **Other Reports** – The board representative highlighted the importance of referring to the National Biodiversity Plan and having consistency with the Climate Action Plan in the application documentation. They also advised that a Water Frameworks Directive Assessment should be submitted.
- **Rugby Club** – In response a question the prospective applicant confirmed that the area at UL Bohemians Rugby Club had been removed from the proposed route.
- **Legislation** – The board representative stated that the two legislative vehicles the applications are made under are Section 51(2) of the Roads Act 1993

(application for approval) and Section 213 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (Compulsory Purchase Order).

- **Timeline for lodgement** – The prospective application stated they would not seek additional meetings and the application would be lodged in Q1 2025.
- **Trees** – The board representative commented on the engineered look of the scheme and advised to include a plan to add replacement planting in the form of a landscaping plan.
- **Closure** – The board representative reminded the prospective applicant that the onus was on them to close the pre-application process or to request a further meeting.

5.0 Legislation and Conclusion

- 5.1. Section 51A of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, provides that a Road Authority or an Authority can enter into consultations with An Bord Pleanála prior to submitting an application under Section 51(2) in relation to a proposed road development.
- 5.2. The Act also provides that the board may give advice to the Authority in relation to the procedures involved in making the application, and what may have a bearing on its decision in relation to the application in respect of the effects of the proposed road development on the environment, or an area, site or land, and proper planning and sustainable development. During the two meetings held, advice was provided, as noted above and the records of the meetings are found in the attached file.
- 5.3. The prospective applicant now wishes to close the consultation stage and, following this stage, the applicant may apply to the board for approval of the Limerick City Greenway.
- 5.4. A recommended list of Prescribed Bodies, who should be forwarded copies of the application documentation, is as follows:
 - 5.4.1. Section 51(3)(b) of the Roads Act 1993, as amended, lists the following bodies:
 - (i) The Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland.
 - (ii) Bord Fáilte Éireann (now Failte Éireann).
 - (iii) An Taisce – the National Trust for Ireland.

- (iv) The Environmental Protection Agency.
- (v) Any other prescribed body or person.

5.4.2. It is also considered that the following prescribed bodies or persons, as per section 51(3)(b)(v) of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended), should also be notified:

- (vi) Department of Planning and Local Government and Heritage
- (vii) Minister of Environment and Climate & Communications
- (viii) Clare County Council
- (ix) Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- (x) National Transport Authority.
- (xi) An Chomhairle Ealaíon (Arts Council)
- (xii) The Heritage Council
- (xiii) Southern Regional Assembly
- (xiv) Irish Water
- (xv) Inland Fisheries
- (xvi) Waterways Ireland
- (xvii) Department of Transport
- (xviii) Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media
- (xix) HSE
- (xx) Office of Public Works
- (xxi) ESB
- (xxii) Eirgrid

Joe Bonner
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12th May 2025