



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Inspector's Report

**ABP-318345-23**

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Development	Revised Street Layout and Public Realm Improvements Works, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.
Location	Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford
Local Authority	Wexford County Council
Type of Application	Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Determination (Application under Article 120 (3) (b) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended)
Applicant(s)	Matt Ronan
Date of Site Inspection	9 <sup>th</sup> May 2024
Inspector	Susan Clarke

# Contents

1.0	Introduction.....	3
2.0	Site Location and Description.....	3
3.0	Proposed Development .....	4
4.0	Planning History .....	7
5.0	Policy Context .....	7
6.0	Legal Context .....	10
7.0	Request for Determination.....	11
8.0	Assessment.....	12
9.0	Recommendation .....	23
10.0	Reasons and Considerations .....	23

## **1.0 Introduction**

Under the provisions of Article 120 (3) (b) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (PDR) an application for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Determination was made to An Bord Pleanála (the Board) as to whether the development of revised street layouts and public realm improvement works to Castle Hill, Castle Street, Court Street, Weafer Street, Spout Lane, Cathedral Street, Main Street, Barrack Street, and Island Road by Wexford County Council (WCC) at Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

The proposed development is a local authority development and is being applied for under Part XI of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (PDA), and Part XIII of the PDR. It is not a direct planning application to the Board.

One party (Matt Ronan) made an application under the provisions of Article 120 (3) (b) requesting the Board to make an EIA Screening Determination.

WCC is of the opinion that the proposed development is not a specified class of development as set out in Part 1 or Part 2 Schedule of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), and therefore EIA is not required. The applicant contends that the proposed development would likely have significant effects on the environment, in particular traffic impacts.

## **2.0 Site Location and Description**

The site is located in the town centre of Enniscorthy in Co. Wexford, covering a stated area of c.1.25ha. The town is divided in two by the River Slaney. The western side of Enniscorthy contains its commercial centre and this is where the revised street layouts and proposed public realm works will be carried out. The proposed works will focus on a network of narrow streets including Market Square, Castle Hill, Castle Street, Church Street, Court Street, Weafer Street, Spout Lane, Cathedral Street, Main Street, Barrack Street, and Island Road. The site area comprises a mix of one-way and two-way street systems, footpaths of various widths, on-street parking, loading bays, bus stops, street furniture, overhead wires, etc.

The town centre largely reflects the established and historic core of the town. It is listed in the recorded monuments (WX020-031) and there are a number of RMPs and

Protected Structures within its bounds most notably, Enniscorthy Castle (WX020-031003) and St. Mary's Church (WX020-031004). The area is characterized by continuous and enclosed narrow streets and spaces on tight-grained plots. In general the footpaths are narrow. It comprises a mix of land uses including retail, commercial, residential, religious, and recreational. The topography of the area varies significantly as is evident from the photographs enclosed with this Report.

Enniscorthy Train Station is located approximately 500m from Market Square on the western side of the River Slaney. The train station is served by the Dublin Connolly – Rosslare rail. The town is also served by several bus routes stopping within walking distance of Market Square. There are 7 publicly owned and 4 privately owned public car parks in the Town. There are no dedicated cycle facilities in the town centre.

The site at its closest point is located 20m from the River Slaney Valley Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code: 000781).

### **3.0 Proposed Development**

The proposed development comprises revised street layouts and public realm improvement works incorporating revised on-street parking zones, increased pavement widths, hard & soft landscaping, and improved active travel measures.

#### ***Market Square***

- Revised layout to create broader footpaths with defined zones for loading bay, cycle parking, trees and low-level planting, and seating.
- Vehicle traffic will run one-way only in a westerly direction on the south side of the square.
- A pedestrian-only area at the centre of the square will allow business premises on the northern side of the square to have external seating at one side of the space.
- The centre open space will be softened with planting and informal seating areas at its perimeter.
- There will be new raised table crossings at the south-east and south-west corners of the square to assist pedestrian movement.

- Pavement areas and the body of the square will be finished in natural stone pavers and curbs.

### ***Castle Hill & Castle Street***

- Revised layout to create defined zones for parking, loading bays, cycle parking, trees and low-level planting, and seating.
- Pavement areas will be finished in pavers, and the roadway in macadam.
- The junction of Castle Hill, Castle Street and Church Street will be marked with pavements and roadway finished in natural stone.
- New landscape and seating areas will be provided at the junction to allow views of Enniscorthy Castle with Vinegar Hill in the background.
- Castle Street and Castle Hill will become one-way.

### ***Church Street & Court Street***

- Revised layout to create defined zones for loading bays, cycle parking, trees and low-level planting, and seating.
- The existing stone pavements (completed c. 2011) will be retained as far as possible. Where footpaths are extended these will be laid in matching granite.
- The existing raised crossing at St Mary's Church will be widened.
- The northern footpath will be widened, and a footpath installed on the south side of the street adjacent to the churchyard.
- The existing one-way traffic flow arrangement will be maintained.

### ***Weafer Street***

- Revised layout to create defined zones for parking, loading bays, cycle parking, trees and low-level planting, and seating.
- Pavement areas will be finished in high quality pavers, and the roadway in macadam.
- A widened footpath incorporating planting and street trees and seating will be located on the northern side of the street.
- The existing one-way traffic flow arrangement will be maintained.

### ***Cathedral Street & Main Street***

- Revised layout to create defined zones for parking, loading bays, cycle parking, trees and low-level planting, and seating.
- Pavement areas will be finished in high quality pavers, and the roadway in macadam.
- The Cathedral entrance will be marked with pavements and the roadway finished at this location in natural stone.
- The existing one-way traffic flow arrangement will be maintained.

### ***Barrack Street & Island Road***

- Revised layout to create defined zones for parking, loading bays, trees and low-level planting, and seating.
- Pavement areas will be finished in high quality concrete pavers, and the roadway in macadam.
- There will be a new raised table crossing addressing the entrance to Dunne's Stores.
- Barrack Street from Irish Street to the Dunne's Stores car park will be one way traffic only in an easterly direction.
- There will be a new signal-controlled junction where Barrack Street meets Island Road to assist traffic flow.

The construction of the above works will involve a number of core elements, which are common across all streets, as follows:

- Removal of existing footpaths, hard standings, and kerbs.
- Installation of ducting to facilitate the undergrounding of overhead utilities and services.
- Installation of new kerb lines.
- Laying of paving setts to footpaths and public realm areas.
- Repaving of new street layouts in macadam surfacing.

These details of the proposed development are set out in the Design Report (dated 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023) which accompanied the Part VIII application.

### **3.1. Documents supporting the Proposed Development**

The following documents were submitted to the Board by WCC following the application under Article 120 (3) (b):

- Enniscorthy Town Centre First Plan.
- Cover Letter providing an overview of the proposed development, planning policy context, EIA screening, and AA Screening.

The following documents formed part of the Part VIII application and are available on WCC website under Reg. Ref. LC2312:

- Part XI Application Form
- Statutory Notices
- Traffic Analysis Report
- Archaeological Assessment
- Conservation Report
- Photomontages
- Plans and Particulars including Drawings.

## **4.0 Planning History**

A review of the WCC Planning Portal and the Board's case files was carried out on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2024 to collate any planning history for the site. There are numerous planning applications to the buildings and structures in the town centre. The planning applications largely relate to changes of use and alterations to the buildings and structures. These are noted and considered in the assessment below.

## **5.0 Policy Context**

### **5.1. Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028**

The relevant statutory plan is the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028. Enniscorthy Town is listed as a Level 2 Large Town. The CDP states that the Council is committed to developing the town as a tourist destination and is currently developing a Master Plan to develop the town as new iconic visitor attraction and public realm space whilst protecting its strong heritage, cultural and environmental sites. The CDP sets out the Development Approach for Enniscorthy which includes social and economic transport heritage and public realm objectives.

Objective ET06 states: To improve the public realm and attractiveness of the town centre as a place to live, work and visit through key urban regeneration projects/environmental improvement schemes.

The CDP does not contain any land use zoning plans for Enniscorthy however Objective CS15 states that a local area plan will be prepared for the Town. The CDP states that the LAP will contain zoning plans.

Section 13.4.12 highlights that Enniscorthy Town Historic Core is an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

Objective ACA01 states:

*To protect and enhance the character of the designated Architectural Conservation Areas in Wexford, Enniscorthy, New Ross, Gorey and Bunclody, including the views and prospects to and from these areas.*

Objective AH02

*To recognise the importance of monuments and sites and protect the character and integrity of these monuments and sites where appropriate. The Council will consult the National Monuments Service where a development is proposed that may impact on an archaeological monument and/or site.*

Objective ACA03 states:

*To ensure that all proposed developments are carried out to the highest architectural and urban design standards within the Architectural Conservation Areas.*

Objective ACA06 states:

*To preserve historic street patterns and encourage pedestrianisation on key streets.*

Volume 5 of the CDP provides a list of designated Protected Structures in the County, a number of which are located in the town centre.

Chapter 8 contains the CDP's Transportation Strategy, which promotes a model shift towards sustainable means.



Objective TS09 states:

*To seek to achieve a modal shift from greenhouse gas generating vehicles to sustainable modes in accordance with the targets in Table 8-1 to Table 8-10. These targets will be further developed in the local area plans and local transport plans for Wexford, Gorey, Enniscorthy and New Ross towns. The Council will monitor and review these targets over the lifetime of the County Development Plan.*

**Table 8-4 Travel to Work – Enniscorthy Town (%)**

Year	Private car/motorbike	Public transport/walking /cycling
<b>Baseline 2016</b>	79.3	20.7
<b>Target 2027</b>	70	30

Objective TS45:

*To review current and new car parking provision, to consider restricting motor vehicle access on certain roads and streets and to consider the designation of low emission zones where such measures would promote sustainable transport modes and would have wider environmental and social benefits having regard to the need to avoid creating significant traffic congestion and undue adverse impacts on residents and commercial activity and to facilitate appropriate access for people with disabilities.*

## **5.2. Enniscorthy and Environs Development Plan**

The Enniscorthy and Environs Development Plan 2008-2014 (as extended) has expired. As outlined above, the CDP states that a new LAP will be prepared for Enniscorthy.

## **5.3. Enniscorthy Town Centre First Plan**

The Local Authority provided the Board with a copy of the Enniscorthy Town Centre First Plan with its Response. The non-statutory plan provides a roadmap for the regeneration of the town centre from a social, economic and environmental perspective. The Local Authority outlines that the ETCFP aligns closely with the national Town Centre First Policy Approach for Irish Towns. The proposed

development is one project in a framework of regeneration projects contained in the ETCFP. Appendix A provides a summary of the ETCFP's regeneration strategies which include *inter alia*:

- L05: to deliver high quality public streets and spaces within a coherent and connected network.
- CT1: To transition to active travel and eliminate traffic dominance in the town centre as a critical condition for regeneration.
- CT3: To prioritize pedestrian movement in the town centre as part of a large transition to sustainable mobility.
- CT4: To fully manage the quantum and access to dedicated car parking areas and to eliminate all non-essential on-street car parking from the town centre.
- CT6: To develop a sustainable traffic management strategy for the town as part of the upcoming LTP and local statutory plan as a measure to eliminate congestion and car dominance in the town centre.
- AT2: To decarbonise transport in the Town Centre, through sustainable mobility measures and support for sustainable transport technologies.

#### **5.4. Natural Heritage Designations**

The site at its closest point is located 20m from the River Slaney Valley SAC (Site Code: 000781) and the Slaney River Valley pNHA.

### **6.0 Legal Context**

Annex I to Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU requires as mandatory the preparation of an EIA for all projects listed therein. Projects listed in Annex II to the Directive are not automatically subjected to EIA. Member States can decide to subject them to an assessment on a case-by-case basis or according to thresholds and/or criteria (for example size, location, sensitive ecological areas and potential impact).

The European Union (Planning and Development) (EIA) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 296/2018) amended the PDA and the PDR in order to transpose into Irish Law the provisions of Directive 2014/52/EU.

In Ireland, Schedule 5 (Part 1 and Part 2) of the PDR, transposes Annex I and Annex II of the amended EIA Directive. Schedule 7 sets out the criteria for determining

whether a development would or would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment, under three headings: characteristics of the proposed development; location of the proposed development; types and characteristics of potential impacts.

In addition, Section 50 (1) (a) of the Roads Act, lists forms of road development in respect of which there is a mandatory requirement to carry out EIA. It is stated under Section 50 (1) (b) that if An Bord Pleanála considers that any road development proposed consisting of the construction of a proposed public road or the improvement of an existing public road would be likely to have significant effects on the environment it shall direct that the development be subject to an environmental impact assessment.

Screening is the term used to describe the process for determining whether a proposed development requires an EIA by reference to mandatory classes of development and legislative threshold requirements or by reference to the type and scale of the proposed development and the significance or the environmental sensitivity of the receiving baseline environment set out in Schedule 7.

In this instance, an application has been made under Article 120 (3) (b) of the PDR where it states that any person at any time before the expiration of 4 weeks beginning on the date of publication of the notice may apply to the Board for a screening determination as to whether a development proposed to be carried out by a local authority under Part XIII would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

## **7.0 Request for Determination**

Matt Ronan made an application under the provisions of Article 120 (3) (b) requesting the Board make an EIA Screening determination. The key points raised are summarized below:

- Proposed works will significantly change traffic flow and parking availability within the Town, which will negatively effect businesses.
- No assessment of the traffic implications has been carried out.
- Considers the proposed development falls under Class IV Urban Development with an area greater than 2ha.
- The proposal will remove 104 No. of the 130 No. town centre on-street car parking spaces.

- A survey of 300 Enniscorthy shoppers revealed that a lack of parking was what drivers found to be the most frustrating aspect of shopping in the Town.
- The reduction in parking will affect businesses in the Town.
- Traffic flow through the Town will be heavily modified with two-way traffic ended. It will create a bottleneck and lead to delays for drivers. No trial of this type of traffic flow has been undertaken.
- No consultation with businesses owners was undertaken, who will suffer financially and psychologically from the proposed development.
- A copy of a submission by John O'Leary to the Local Authority is included which is critical of the proposed development with particular emphasis on the reduction in car parking.
- The reduction in car parking spaces in tandem with the topography of the town centre will impact those who are less mobile.
- An impact assessment would have identified the real consequences of the proposed works.
- The proposed development will have a profound impact on the Town.

## **8.0 Assessment**

Under the provisions of Article 120 (3) (b) of the PDR, the Board is required to provide a screening determination as to whether the proposed development comprising revised street layouts and public improvement works in Enniscorthy town centre would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Section 2 of the WCC response to the Board provides a "Description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly impacted". The Response concludes (Section 3) that the proposed works are not specified as a class of development as set out in Part 1 or Part 2 Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (amended). On the contrary, the applicant contends that Class 10 (b) (vi) of Schedule 5, Part 2 of the PDR is applicable and that the proposed development would have significant traffic impacts on the Town.

I consider the following matters are relevant in the assessment of whether the submission of an EIA Report is required:

- Assessment of project type/class of development under Schedule 5 of the PDR, relevant to the proposed development.

- Assessment of relevant thresholds under Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the PDR.
- Assessment of proposed development under the criteria set out under Schedule 7 of the PDR.

An assessment of the proposed development against the above criteria is carried out in the sections that follow.

## **8.1. Project Types / Class of Development**

- 8.1.1. I concur with the applicant that Class 10 (b) (vi) of Schedule 5, Part 2 of the PDR may be applicable to the proposed development.
- 8.1.2. Schedule 5, Part 2, Class 10 (b) (vi) Urban development which would involve an area greater than **2 hectares in the case of a business district**, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere. (In this paragraph, “business district” means a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use.) (Bold: My emphasis.)
- 8.1.3. The proposed development is in the town centre which can be considered a ‘business district’ with the predominant land uses being retail and commercial. The following Section below, examines this threshold.
- 8.1.4. Whilst not stated by the applicant, I consider that Section 50 (1) (a) of the Roads Act may also be relevant to the proposed development.
- 8.1.5. Section 50 (1) (a) of the Roads Act lists the following forms of road development in respect of which there is a mandatory requirement to carry out EIA:
- i. the construction of a motorway.
  - ii. the construction of a busway.
  - iii. the construction of a service area, or
  - iv. any prescribed type of proposed road development consisting of the construction of a proposed public road or the improvement of any existing public road.
- 8.1.6. The proposed development does not fall into the mandatory EIA categories (i), (ii) or (iii), as listed above, as it does not include the construction of a motorway, busway or service area. With regard to category (iv), Article 8 of the Roads Regulations 1994 (S.I. 119 of 1994) outlines the following prescribed types of proposed road development for the purpose of subsection (1) (a) (iv) of Section 50 of the Act shall be:

- 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 length in an urban area.
- b. the construction of a new bridge or tunnel which would be 100m or more in length.”

The proposed development does not comprise a road with four or more lanes or include the construction of a new bridge or tunnel of 100m or more in length.

Therefore, I consider that this class of development is applicable.

## **8.2. Project Thresholds**

- 8.2.1. As set out above, I consider that the proposed development is of a class, Class 10 (b) (vi) for the purposes of EIA. The threshold cited under Class 10 (b) (iv) in the PDR is *‘urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere’*.
- 8.2.2. The ETCFP outlines that there is no established or defined boundary for the town centre. It is stated that there is a *“shared understanding in the local community that the town centre is distinctive and largely reflects the established and historic core of the Town. This area was considered to be broadly encompassed by the town centre zone included in the most recent statutory plan for the town the Enniscorthy Town and Environ Plan 2008.”* The ETCFP continues to state that the area most commonly referred to as the “Town Centre” on the west banks of the River Slaney is centred on Market Square and the Castle.
- 8.2.3. Having visited the area, I am satisfied that the proposed development is in an urban location which can be considered a ‘business district’ with the predominant land uses being retail and commercial. As such, I consider that the relevant threshold under Class 10 (b) (vi) is 2 hectares. In the Local Authority’s Response (Section 1.2) to the Board, it is stated that the site area is 1.25ha. Therefore, the proposed development is ‘subthreshold’, and mandatory EIA is not required. In such instances, where the development is ‘subthreshold’, an assessment should be made against the criteria for determining whether development listed in Part 2 of Schedule 5 which are set out in Schedule 7 of the PDR. This is set out below in Section 8.3.

### **8.3. Assessment under the Criteria set out in Schedule 7**

The criteria for determining whether a development would or would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment are under the following headings:

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

Each of these criteria is assessed below.

#### **8.3.1. Characteristics of proposed development**

##### **8.3.1.1. Size & Design**

As detailed above in Section 3.0, the proposed development comprises revised street layouts and public realm improvement works covering an area of 1.2ha. I consider that the works are all relatively minor in nature: new footpaths and increases in size to existing footpaths, parking zones, loading bays, cycle parking, hard and soft landscaping, street furniture, bus stops, loading bays, undergrounding overhead wires, etc. The proposal will involve the removal of 87 No. on-street car parking spaces and limiting the flow of traffic to a one-way system on Castle Street and Castle Hill, and Barrack Street. Market Square will be fully pedestrianised on its northern side. In addition, the spur lane between Fairview Terrace and Cathedral Street will be made pedestrian-only with the installation of bollards. In my view, the proposed amendments to the traffic flow and the reduction in car parking spaces would be the most notable elements of the project with the greatest potential to impact on the retail operations of the town centre. However, noting the findings of the Traffic Analysis Report, I do not consider that the proposal would have a long-term significantly negative impact on the overall functionality of the town as a retail and commercial destination. See Section 8.3.3.1 below for further discussion on this matter.

I do not consider that the design of the public realm improvements works would be significantly at variance with the established pattern of development on lands in a town centre. The proposal will improve the visual amenity of the overall town centre in addition to improving road safety, in particular pedestrian safety. A palette of materials will be utilised to define various spaces.

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

#### *8.3.1.2. Potential for Cumulative Impacts with other Existing and/or Approved Projects*

The Local Authority has not identified any significant existing/proposed developments in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development which would act in combination with the proposed development to generate significant cumulative impacts.

I note that the ETCFP includes for a number of future regeneration projects for the town centre. However, I consider that the projects in the strategy are not functionally interdependent with each other and that the proposed development is not integral to any other. As such, I do not consider that 'project-splitting' is a relevant matter in this instance.

The development is not associated with any significant loss of habitat or pollution which could act in a cumulative manner to result in significant negative effects to any Natura 2000 sites. There are no known projects which can act in combination with the development which can give rise to significant effect to Natura areas within the zone of influence.

It is considered unlikely that significant cumulative impacts with other existing and/or approved projects would arise.

#### *8.3.1.3. Nature of any Demolition Works*

There are no buildings/structures on the site that require demolition.

#### *8.3.1.4. Use of Natural Resources*

Having regard to the nature and limited scale of the proposal in an urban, man-made environment, there will not be a significant use of natural resources.

#### *8.3.1.5. Production of Waste*

There is no significant production of waste. During the construction phase, routine construction waste will be generated. This is not anticipated to be of any significant level and could be managed through standard construction practices and methodologies.



#### *8.3.1.6. Pollution and Nuisances*

During the construction phase there will be routine construction related pollution and nuisance generated including noise, light, and dust related impacts with the potential to cause nuisance and impact on the amenities of local residents and businesses operating in the town centre. These impacts will be temporary and short-term and would be controlled as part of standard and best practice construction measures.

Having regard to the scale and nature of the proposed development, no significant pollution and nuisances are anticipated.

#### *8.3.1.7. Risk of Major Accidents and/or Disasters including those caused by Climate Change*

Having regard to the characteristics of the proposed development and its location, it is considered unlikely that there is a risk of major accidents and/or disasters including those caused by climate change.

#### *8.3.1.8. Risk to Human Health*

I do not consider that there is any significant risk to human health arising from the proposed development assuming standard best construction techniques and methods are utilised. There is no evidence on file to suggest that such techniques and methods would not be utilised.

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.

### **8.3.2. Location of Proposed Development**

#### *8.3.2.1. Existing and Approved Land Use*

The proposed development is effectively an upgrading of the existing public realm and revised traffic flows in the town centre. It would not have a material impact on existing land uses and would be compatible with the existing use of the land. These impacts would be small scale and insignificant in terms of the land use of the area.

In terms of the construction phase, the Local Authority notes that in order for the proposed development not to impact on the continuation of retail and commercial operations, the works methodology will comprise a series of small scale and localised elements completed by small crews with low input manpower and machinery levels.

Both a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) are to be prepared to minimise the impacts on the environment and sensitive receptors. In addition, the Local Authority highlights that the appointed contractor will be required to prepare detailed method statements for approval by WCC prior to the commencement of any works. The contractor's method statements will set out the detailed approach and methodology which would be followed in scheduling and undertaking the work and will incorporate the control measure details in the CEMP. I am satisfied that the proposed development can be completed without significantly impacting on local businesses with good construction practices and effective traffic management.

#### *8.3.2.2. Relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources*

The urban location of the proposed development is such that the natural resources used in the proposed development is limited and there would be minimal ongoing use of natural resources from the proposed development.

#### *8.3.2.3. The absorption capacity of the existing natural environment*

The lands which are to be affected by the proposed development comprise of man-made ground and are of little environmental sensitivity. The River Slaney is part of the Lower River Slaney Valley SAC (site code 000781) which is designated for a range of habitats and species. There will be no direct impacts on the SAC as no in-stream works are proposed. The closest works are located approx. 20m from the SAC. Having regard to the site's serviced urban context, nature, scale and extent of the proposed works, and to the implementation of standard construction techniques and best practices, I do not consider it likely that the proposed development would significantly impact the SAC or any other European Site. As stated by the Local Authority any surface water runoff from the site would be diverted into the existing urban drainage water network.

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. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed works, I do not consider the

project will significantly impact on the character and setting of these monuments/buildings or the overall character of the townscape.

### **8.3.3. Types and Characteristics of the Potential Impact**

#### *8.3.3.1. Nature, magnitude and extent of the impact*

##### Population

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. It is considered that the proposal will increase traffic safety, in particular for pedestrians. There will be visual impacts associated with the public realm works, although these would be mainly positive.

##### Biodiversity

As stated above, the lands which are to be affected by the proposed comprise of man-made ground and are of little environmental sensitivity. The works will be at their closest point 20m from the River Slaney SAC. Having regard to the nature of the site surrounded by existing urban development; and the scale of the proposed development, and best practice construction and operation practices to be used, it is considered that potential impacts to the River Slaney SAC or any other European Sites during the construction phase would be very limited. As stated above, any surface water runoff from the site would be diverted into the existing urban drainage water network. Notably, the proposed development will not create any additional surface water run-off volumes in comparison to the existing scenario. On this basis I consider it unlikely that significant impacts would arise on biodiversity.

##### Land, Soil, Water, Air and Climate

Having regard to the characteristics and location of the proposed development, no significant impacts would arise on land and soil.

During the construction and operation phases impacts arising from pollution and nuisances would be controlled as part of the standard and best practice construction and operation measures. It is, therefore, considered unlikely that significant impacts would arise on water, air and climate.

### Material Assets, Cultural Heritage and the Landscape

As is evident from the photomontages prepared as part of the Part VIII application, the proposed works will noticeably improve the visual amenity of the town centre and ACA. In my view, this will result largely from the reduction in car dominance with the removal of on-street car parking in tandem with the provision of new hard and soft landscaping. Having regard to the nature and extent of the proposed development, I do not consider that they would have a significant impact on the character of the ACA, Protected Structures or key views of the townscape. I am satisfied that the proposal is consistent with the Conservation Report (29<sup>th</sup> September 2023) prepared in respect of the Part VIII application. The Archaeological Assessment (dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 2023) highlights that the proposed works will involve limited excavation work (repaving, the creation of pedestrian crossings, the relocation of drainage manholes, burying overhead wires, removal of bollards and the installation of new lighting). Deeper excavation for ramp and step foundations on Market Square as well as for planters and tree pits will be required. The Archaeological Assessment states that the National Monuments Service should be informed of any works which are carried out within the zone of notification of a Recorded Monument. This would be consistent with Objective AH02 of the CDP. I consider the findings and recommendations of the Archaeological Assessment to be reasonable. In summary, having regard to the characteristics and location of the proposed development and adherence to standard mitigation measures in accordance with the requirements of the DHLGH would be sufficient to mitigate impacts on cultural heritage.

### Traffic and Transport

The Traffic Analysis Report (dated September 2023) highlights that the town centre is characterised by narrow car dominated streets. The Report states that traffic surveys undertaken in October 2022 recorded that Market Square, Castle Street and Weafer Street Junction has a throughput of 734 vehicles per hour in the AM peak and 925 vehicles per hour in the PM peak. The footpaths are narrow with frequent pitch points and a difficult topography. Furthermore, there is very poor cycle infrastructure. The Report notes that there are a high number of material damage incidences on Cathedral Street, Main Street and Market Square, which the authors suggest may be a consequence of the tight road environment and high turnover of parking vehicles lining the streets. There are 7 publicly owned and 4 privately owned public car parks within

a 10 minute walk of Market Square. On-street carparking is permitted on most streets within the site extents. Cathedral Street, Main Street, Market Square, Weaver Street, Church Street and Court Street all provide on-street car parking to one side of the road. A pay and display tariff and permit system are in place Monday to Friday from 08:30 to 18:30 with a maximum stay of 2 hours.

The proposed development aims to provide a more pedestrian and cycle-friendly public realm and support sustainable transport. In addition to the public realm works, it will alter the flow of traffic through the town centre: Castle Hill and Castle Street to be reduced to a single lane of one-way traffic in the west direction to accommodate wider footpaths; Market Square will be pedestrianised on its entire northern side to accommodate the creation of a new public realm space with eastbound traffic diverted onto Irish Street and Barrack Street; Barrack Street is to become a single lane of one-way traffic in the east direction between Irish Street and the entrance to the Dunnes Stores carpark; and Church Street and the southern end of Rafter Street to maintain existing one way traffic flow with wider footpaths and increased pedestrian priority. Furthermore, the proposal will result in the loss of 87 No. on-street car parking spaces from the town centre.

The construction phase will result in an increase in traffic volumes in the town centre, however the works will be short-term and not significant. The proposal itself will not generate additional traffic volumes during its operational phase, but rather relates to flow direction. Whilst the applicant is concerned that the proposal will create bottlenecks and traffic delays, the junction analysis demonstrates that there would be no significant impacts. Although there will be a noticeable change to traffic flow directions initially when the revised layout is first implemented, I do not consider that there would be a significant longer term impact. In addition to the various DMURS measures (e.g. wider footpaths, raised tables, etc), the proposal will discourage through-traffic in the town centre, which in my view, will improve pedestrian safety.

I note the applicant concerns in relation to the displacement of car parking (87 No. spaces to be omitted), however the Traffic Analysis Report clearly indicates that the wider town's car parking facilities are underutilised. The Report states that the car park survey data shows that there are 815 off-street public car parking spaces within a 10 minute walk of Market Square. These consist of 496 publicly owned and 319 privately owned car parking spaces. The data indicates the facilities typically operate with a

peak occupancy rate of 56% during the week and 52% at the weekend. This equates to 352 vacant spaces during the week and 374 spaces at the weekend. Whilst the applicant refers to a submission made to the Local Authority by John and Chantal O'Leary, which argues that the reduction of car parking will have a significant negative impact on businesses, there is no clear evidence on file to demonstrate same. Noting the extent of car parking (both public and private car parks) available in the wider town, I consider that the reduction in car parking would not be significant. The proposal will provide three additional loading bays and two bus stops in the town centre. Overall, I do not consider that the proposal will have a long-term significant impact on the town's overall car parking capacity.

In summary, having regard to the findings of the Traffic Analysis Report, and the characteristics and location of the proposed development, I consider it unlikely that significant impacts would arise in relation to traffic and transport.

#### Major Accidents or Disasters

Having regard to the characteristics and location of the proposed development, it is considered unlikely that significant impacts would arise in relation to major accidents and disasters.

#### Interaction between the factors

There is potential for interactions between various environmental factors, notably between land, material assets, biodiversity and population. Noting the nature and scale of the proposed development, I consider it unlikely that significant impacts would arise from the interaction between factors.

#### *8.3.3.2. Probability, intensity and complexity of impacts*

Temporary noise, dust and traffic impacts may also arise during the construction phase. However, these would be controlled as part of the standard and best practice construction and operation measures. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development, the nature of the environmental impacts are not complex or intense.

#### *8.3.3.3. Expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact*

Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development, it is expected that the impacts will be on-going, long term and will generally only be reversible if the

constructed elements of the scheme are removed or the street layout is further revised. The construction phase impacts will be of short duration and limited frequency.

#### *8.3.3.4. Transboundary nature of impact*

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

#### *8.3.3.5. Cumulation of Impact*

Whilst noting the urban context for the proposed development, having regard to its nature and scale, I consider it unlikely that significant cumulative impacts would arise.

#### *8.3.3.6. Possibility of effectively reducing impact*

The implementation of standard best practice methodologies during the construction and operation phase of the proposed development will result in a reasonable possibility of effectively reducing potential impacts.

## **9.0 Recommendation**

Having regard to the above assessment, it is considered that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and, accordingly, an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required.

It is therefore recommended that Wexford County Council be advised that the preparation and submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report is not required in respect of the proposed development.

## **10.0 Reasons and Considerations**

Having regard to the following:

- the criteria set out in Schedule 7 and the information provided in Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended,
- the limited nature and scale of the proposed development which is under the threshold in respect of Class 10b(iv) (Infrastructure – Urban Development) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended),
- the location of the site in a built-up area served by public infrastructure and the existing pattern of development in the vicinity,
- the limited potential for significant impacts arising from the proposed development,
- the submission made by the applicant requesting a determination,

- the submission made by the local authority,
- the report and recommendation of the Inspector,

it is considered that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and, accordingly, an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required.

#### Professional Declaration

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.

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Susan Clarke

Senior Planning Inspector

10<sup>th</sup> May 2023