



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-318717-23

Development	Construction of supermarket with off licence and signage, revision to entrance with all associated site works
Location	Greenfield site of .914 ha on lands to the south of T junction on the R362 and immediately south of the Joe Duffy Car Showroom , L-7596-0, Monksland, Athlone, County Roscommon
Planning Authority	Roscommon County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	2360138
Applicant(s)	MCS River Village Limited
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Refuse
Type of Appeal	First
Appellant(s)	MCS River Village Limited
Observer(s)	None

Date of Site Inspection

2nd of May 2024

Inspector

Darragh Ryan

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1.1. The existing greenfield site is west of the town of Athlone in the Monksland Area. The site, west of the River Shannon is in the jurisdiction of Roscommon County Council.
- 1.1.2. The site (0.91ha) is located immediately south of a car sales show room. The site is relatively flat with boundary hedging of scrub, blackthorn and alder trees to the eastern most boundary, there are other pockets of trees on the southern boundary. To the front (west) of the site is a post and rail fence. The site is serviced by a footpath and public lighting.
- 1.1.3. The area in the immediate vicinity of the site is characterised by industrial/office use within the Monksland Business Park. Immediately to the south and west of the site are ARM Academy and Athlone Springs Hotel. To the north west of the site (approximately 200m) is a mixed use centre, that comprises a pharmacy, health and beauty shop, takeaway, Supervalu and suite of offices at first floor level. There is extensive levels of carparking within the Business Park.
- 1.1.4. West of the Business Park is the wider River Village which is a residential mix of detached, semidetached dwellings and apartments.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposed development consists of the following:
 - Construction of a of a single storey supermarket with ancillary off-licence sales area;
 - ESB substation building & Bin store,
 - Trolley Bay Canopy
 - Advertising Signage (53.90m²)
 - Roof mounted photo-voltaic panels;
 - Car parking of 127 spaces, 4 EV spaces, 6 parent and child spaces and 4 accessible spaces. 23 spaces pre wired for future EV charging.

The supermarket is for a total area of 2,210sqm and a net area of 1425sqm.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

The planning authority issued a decision to refuse permission for three reasons:

1. The proposed development is on lands which form part on an area of the “District Centre” land use zone as identified in the currently available Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athloine West) LAP 2016 – 2022. Having regard to the proposal submitted for a standalone supermarket structure, of generic design, and a site layout arrangement which has been devised to exclusively provide access and car parking for the proposed retail facility,, the proposed development fails to provide an integrated mixed land use approach to the development of the “District Centre” zoned lands. The proposed development if permitted would fail to satisfy the primary land use zoning objectives for these centrally positioned lands as set out in the Monksland/ Bellanamullia (Athlone West) LAP 2016 – 2022 and would militate against the achievement of the objectives in the Athlone Joint Retail Strategy 2019 – 2026 (including Policy Objective RP I0) for the River village area to develop as a mixed use centre, would set a precedent for other similarly inappropriate development....
2. The development if permitted in isolation would result in the creation of single retail operator development on the subject lands, which would be car dependent, would fail to provide connectivity to an integrate with other surrounding “District Centre” zoned lands and would not be conducive to creating a vibrant centre and sense of place in the core area of Monksland/ Bellanamullia. The proposed development would militate against the achievement of the principles set out in Roscommon County Council’s Smarter Trael Initiative, which emphasis prioritisation of pedestrian mobility and alternative modes of transport to the car and would fail to promote the principles of active travel and sustainable development.
3. Having regard to the generic design approach proposed, which is lacking in architectural merit and has been designed to take account of the specific site context and does not provide an overall design solutions which mitigates the massing of this unit, the Planning Authority (considers) that the proposed

development would give rises to an adverse visual impact, would fail to achieve a high-quality presentation to the public realm which is essential to the subject site, and would fail to provide a unique sense of place I this commercial area....

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

- Acknowledge that a Supermarket is permitted use on lands zoned District centre and acceptable in the context of principles as set out in associated Specific Objective 1 & 2 of the LAP
- A framework Plan for the lands identified as SO3 had commenced, however due to the NPF and requirement for a new County Development Plan and Local Area Plan the Framework Plan was never finalised. The absence of a framework plan in this instance should not present as an impediment to the advancement of appropriate proposals on appropriate zoned lands.
- Key aspects of policy SO2 and SO3 remain key considerations in guiding and determining development proposals that may arise with the “District Centre Land use
- The Planning Statement and Retail Impact Assessment as submitted does not provide adequate justification for the proposed standalone supermarket in the context of current plans, guidelines and policies.
- The development as proposed is a standalone development which is far removed from an integrated mixed land use development that is advocated for this key land use zone. A single retail use on centrally positioned land of a generic design and layout and prioritises car dependency is not compliant with the zoning principles. RCC policy position in respect of development on “District Centre” lands is clearly outlined including that any proposal that may be advanced must be part of an integrated wide multi use development proposal.

- The development of a standalone retail development at this location is contrary to Objective RP10 as set out within the Athlone Joint Retail Strategy.
- The current proposal in the context of the physical assessment does not create the high quality urban space which the location requires.
- There are concerns with regard to the car dependent nature of the development and the creation of an access which is to solely serve the proposed development and lack of attempt to facilitate the connection to surrounding lands. No active travel principles have been included within the scheme.
- The proposed development is premature to the adoption of the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone and Athlone West area where it is envisaged will set out a framework for the development of this commercial area.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- Athlone Municipal District Office – no objection to the proposed development – recommend conditions
- Roads Section – no objection to the proposed development, concerns with regard to the increase in traffic as a result of the proposed development – recommend a signalised junction at R362 and a special contribution request of €50,000 is sought.
- Roads Memo – regarding the public lighting design
- National Roads Regional Office – the site is not located in an study area being considered by the NRRO.
- Uisce Eirann – no objection

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

Transport Infrastructure Ireland – no objections to the proposal

3.4. Third Party Observations

There are two valid observations on file. The issue can be summarised as follows:

- Proposal will not contribute positively to the amenity and public realm of the area
- The proposal would be ad hoc and piecemeal and contrary to the objectives of the Local Area Plan
- The junction at the M6 is at capacity. Significant traffic implications as a result of the proposed development.
- The development is premature pending the Strategic Traffic Assessment and Athlone Joint Area Plan and Athlone Joint Retail Strategy.
- Concerns raised regarding the springs on site and risk of flooding whereby the site was developed further.

4.0 Planning History

Existing Site:

PA ref no – 08/1276 – permission granted on 23/02/2009 for the construction of a commercial building to consist of 3no. storey offices and all new associated site development works.

Adjacent Site across the road to the west

PA ref no – 06/1365 – Permission granted on 14/09/2006 for a mixed use development containing retail/medical centre/crèche/hotel, bar-restaurant, leisure complex and light industry units (register reference no. PD/04/2029). This application relates only to the hotel/bar/restaurant and leisure complex element (Block D) – increasing the overall area from previously approved 4783 sq. m. to 6875 sq. m. an increase of 2092 sq. m. and for the revision to parking layout (increasing the overall provision from 221 no. spaces to now provide 369 no. spaces, an increase of 148 no. spaces) and is amended as follows; The Leisure complex has an aggregate increased floor area of 267 sq. m. and a new basement service/plant area under the pool area of 330 sq. m. , a revised internal layout including provision of fire escape stairs, revised changing area layout, revised reception layout, revised pool layout,

revised first floor gym layout to accommodate additional multipurpose studios, plant/services area, and also includes for amendments and enhancements. (this application was subject to amendment applications, all of which were permitted by the local authority)

5.0 Policy Context

5.1.1. National Policy Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)

The Guidelines states that the role of a district centre is to provide a range of retail and non-retail service functions (e.g. banks, post office, local offices, restaurants, public houses, community and cultural facilities for the community at a level consistent with the function of that centre in the core strategy. They should not serve as a retail destination in their own right sufficient to adversely impact on the city/town centre to which they are subservient. They can be purpose built serving new or expanding suburbs or traditional serving long established communities. The need for additional retail development in particular district centres to serve future population growth or for any significant extension to an existing district centre should be identified in the development plan and be based on a significant growth in population in the intended location or on a demonstrable level of under-provision of retailing or other services to meet the regular convenience and lower order comparison shopping needs of new communities as provided for and quantified by the relevant core strategy A supermarket is defined as a single level, self-service store selling mainly food, with a net retail floorspace of less than 2,500 sq. metres.

Retail Design Manual (2012)

This document sets out a planning framework for future development of the retail sector in a way which meets the needs of modern shopping formats while contributing to protecting and promoting the attractiveness of town centres.

A supermarket is defined in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 as:

Single level, self- service store selling mainly food, with a net retail floorspace of less than 2,500 sqms.

5.1.2. Roscommon County Development Plan 2022 – 2028

Retail Strategy

The Athlone Joint Retail Strategy 2019- 2026, in conjunction with the Monksland / Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016–2022 sets out the District Centre requirements for the Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) area and these requirements will continue to apply until the preparation of a Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone.

Section 12:15 – Development Management Standards

A Design Statement will generally be required in support of a planning application. This facilitates the explanation of why a particular design solution is considered most suitable;

- Site coverage (i.e. the extent of a development site that is covered by buildings, and expressed in percentage terms) should not exceed 75% for industrial or retail developments. 80% site coverage may be permissible in town centre locations;
- Car parking provision should be in accordance with the standards set out in Table 12.1. Provision should also be made for bicycle parking;
- Larger development proposals should include provision for cycle and pedestrian routes to link to local established infrastructure;
- Larger developments will be required to prepare a sustainable mobility plan which may lessen car parking requirement provision;
- In the interests of preserving the visual amenity of County Roscommon, good quality architectural design and finishes will a priority for all planning applications for retail, commercial and Industrial buildings;
- High quality landscaping should be incorporated into the design concept;
- The location of advertising on proposed structures and within the development site shall be clearly indicated on drawings at planning application stage.
- The degree of detail required in a design statement reflects the nature of the development, scale and complexity of the proposed development. Design solutions can by their very nature be both simple and complex; the former

needing less explanation.

Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016 – 2022 - Land Use Zoning Objectives –

District Centre - Provide a range of retail and non-retail service functions, including social and community functions, at a level which will serve the population of the Plan area, but will not affect the viability and vitality of neighbouring Athlone town.

- Purpose built group of shops.
- Provide for the development of a mix of commercial/retail uses including a convenience shop(s) such as a supermarket or superstore, comparison shops, non-retail services, such as banks, building societies, restaurants, pharmacies, take away, video/DVD rental, public house, and dental/medical surgery.
- Provide for local services such as medical centre, offices, workshops, crèche, petrol station, waste segregation facility (bring bank), launderette, where appropriate, to meet the needs of the community.
- Where appropriate, provide accommodation over retail/commercial units, grouped small starter/incubator workshops, craft or service units etc.
- Strong building design to provide focal points within mixed-use developments that will add legibility and clarity to the physical structure and layout of the development.
- The centre could be developed around a public/focal space, where appropriate
- Provide sustainable transport linkages such as public transport, adequate cycle and walkways from the district centre to surrounding residential areas.
- Require the inclusion of appropriate open spaces in development in this zone.

Specific Objective 3 (SO3) –

- Indicated on lands zoned for District Centre (DC)
- Provides for the development of a Framework Plan by RCC, to be prepared in the first year following the making of this LAP, for all the lands in this area

including the adjacent S02 site, prior to the granting of permission on any of it.

- The Framework Plan will provide details of the type of development and layout envisaged on the full site and the adjacent SO 2 site.
- Only appropriate developments that are fine-grained, of high architectural merit and well landscaped will be considered.

Athlone Joint Retail Strategy 2019 -2026

- Build on the role of Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) as a Key Town within Tier 2 of the County Settlement Hierarchy and given its Special Category status as a settlement which will develop as part of the larger Athlone Town area.
- Support the consolidation of commercial activity within the LAP area around a District Centre in which a high-quality commercial core is established within a well-developed public realm. The public realm should display appropriate and sustainable building forms, materials, heights and associated landscaping in order which aims to create a sense of place and focus for the Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) LAP area.

5.2. Natural Heritage Designations

Lough Ree SAC – 2.65km to the North

River Shannon Callows SAC – 2.5km to the South

5.3. EIA Screening

See completed form 2 on file. Having regard to the limited nature and scale of the proposed development, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development. The need for environmental impact assessment can, therefore, be excluded at preliminary examination and a screening determination is not required.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

This is a first party appeal against the decision of Roscommon County Council to refuse permission for a single storey supermarket at this location. The applicant has taken each of the three refusal reasons and refutes each point in turn.

- The proposed development of a supermarket aligns with the principles of development, emphasizing adherence to district centre policies and zoning regulations. It is poised to serve as a foundational element within the district centre, evolving over time to accommodate growing retail demands. Additionally, the project underscores connectivity, strategically situated near the District Centre and offering convenient access to River Village by foot.
- The application for the proposed development demonstrates adherence to the outlined policies within the Development Plan, particularly concerning retail provision and the integration of various uses. Notably, Policy RP 9 and RP 10 emphasize the improvement of retail services and the promotion of densification and diversification within River Village. The proposed development not only aligns with these objectives but also aims to bolster the vitality and sustainability of Athlone's central area. It is poised to contribute positively to the densification and diversification of the district centre, ensuring its long-term viability and serving as a model for future developments within the area.
- It is very difficult to understand how a supermarket which is permitted in principle on designated District Centre Lands, in the local Area plan and specifically encouraged in the local area plan could not densify and diversify the district centre and set a precedent for inappropriate development. The development complies with Council own Local Area Plan District centre objectives.
- The grounds for refusal, particularly the objection regarding a single retail unit or operator, do not hold merit within the framework of Development Plan

policy. Furthermore, the concept of a "Supermarket" is explicitly permitted within the zoning, as defined by the retail planning guidelines of 2012.

- The proposed development complies with the principles outlined in the Development Plan and adheres to the definition of a "Supermarket" as specified in the retail planning guidelines of 2012. This definition characterizes a single self-service store primarily selling food, with a net retail floor space of less than 2500m². Moreover, the development aligns with established precedents, indicating the suitability of the site for such activities, as evidenced by precedent cases such as ABP 310695.21, which supports the provision of single-level supermarkets with adjacent surface car parking.
- Having regard to concerns raised with regards to not achieving the principles as set out in Roscommon County Council Smarter Travel Initiative, the site is zoned district Centre with retail development acceptable in principle. To refuse permission based on smarter travel initiatives is to undermine the local authorities own zoning. In any case the store will be proximate to public transport . The site is also walkable to the existing and growing residential neighbourhood in the vicinity of the site. The car parking provided is below the required car parking as set out in the County Development plan minimum standards for food stores.
- With regard to reason 3 for refusal as set out by the planning department with regard to design and layout, the design of the proposed development follows a definable and permissible format. The design is discussed in some detail in the Urban Design Assessment at Appendix 2 of the planning statement. The glazed façade of the building and shopper access are close to the street with carparking to the side of the store. This design addresses the retail design manual and has regard to local context.
- The architect for the development took its context from the recently granted Arm Academy building directly opposite the appeal site. The proposal demonstrates many of the same design and layout characteristics of this building.
- The planners report refers to policies SO2 and SO3 from the LAP for Monksland and Bellanamullia, these appear to have been the guiding policies

in refusing permission in this instance. As per figure 6.6 Extract from the Local Area Plan S02 should not apply Geographically, the site lies in lands designated S03. With regard to the S03 policy, it points to the timing of a framework plan by RCC. The policy states that no development can be permitted until the plans are in place and references high quality architecture in design. As the Framework Plan has not been prepared, the above policies should not be applied to this application, as these policies are there only to guide the preparation of the Framework Plans.

6.2. Planning Authority Response

None

6.3. Observations

None

7.0 Assessment

7.1.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including the appeal, and having inspected the site and having regard to the relevant national and local policy guidance, I consider the main issues in relation to the appeal are as follows:

- Zoning & Policy Objectives
- Design and Sitting
- Other Matters
- Appropriate Assessment

7.1.2. Zoning & Policy Objectives

Local Area Plan and Policy Objectives – The lands zoned District Centre are identified in the Local Area Plan as a strategically important location as underlined by notable developments including the upgrading of the New and Old Tuam Roads, the enhancement of the Sports Grounds in Cushla, the establishment of a supermarket

to meet community needs, and the development of a hotel that has drawn people to the area. The planner's report references specific objectives outlined in the Local Area Plan for the development of lands at this location. The lands fall under designation SO3, which mandates that a future Framework Plan completed by the planning authority provides details on the type of development and layout envisioned for both the SO3 lands and the adjacent SO2 lands. The planning authority has stated within the report that a framework plan was never finalised owing to the introduction of the National Planning Framework. These lands in the future will come under a Joint Urban Area Plan for Monksland/ Bellanamullia and Athlone. Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council commenced the preparation of the Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 on the 7th of December 2023. The Plan is currently at pre-draft stage. The Monksland/Bellanamullia 2016 – 2022 is the operative Plan for the area and its respective policies must be adhered to.

- 7.1.3. The site is an area zoned District centre as set out in the Monksland/ Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2016 – 2022. The principle of providing a supermarket at this location is acceptable in principle. The principle of a supermarket is not contested by Roscommon County Council. The refusal reason as set out by the local authority sights the single use nature of the development, that does not provide an integrated land use approach. The development if permitted would militate against the achievement of the objectives in the Athlone Joint Retail Strategy 2019 – 2026 for the River Village Area to develop as a mixed-use centre. Furthermore, the development if permitted in isolation would result in the creation of single retail operator development on the subject lands, which would be car dependent, would fail to provide connectivity to and integrate with other surrounding “District Centre” zoned lands
- 7.1.4. The applicant asserts that the proposed supermarket development adheres to district centre policies and zoning regulations, embodying key development principles. The project is envisioned as a foundational element within the district centre, designed to evolve and meet increasing retail demands. Emphasizing connectivity, the development is strategically located within the District Centre, providing convenient pedestrian access to River Village. Moreover, the applicant argues that the refusal reason cites policies related to a Framework plan for the area—a responsibility of the

local authority that has not yet been fulfilled. Therefore, this absence should not prejudice or delay the application's approval. The applicant sets out that the application as presented to the Board in accordance with Roscommon County Development Plan, Monksland/ Bellanamullia Local Area plan and Athlone Joint retail Strategy.

- 7.1.5. The central issue in this appeal concerns the single-use nature of the development and how a standalone supermarket at this location integrates with the function of the area as a District Centre, along with its broader connectivity to River Village and Athlone Town. The District Centre zoned lands are situated between River Village to the west and Athlone Town to the east, with the site located to the west of the River Shannon.
- 7.1.6. The site will be the first site within the District Centre zoned lands to be developed in the lifetime of the current plan. There is an adjacent single use car sales showroom immediately north of the site. While the planning report acknowledges that the absence of a Framework Plan should not hinder development, it emphasizes that any proposal must align with the specific objectives of SO2 and SO3. I consider the site's prominent and central location within the zoning area to be significant in terms of the area achieving its zoning objectives. The placement of access and egress points for all zoned lands, the provision of open spaces, community facilities, and building blocks should be considered within a masterplan or "Framework Plan." However, I agree with the planning authority that a lack of a "Framework Plan" should not be a substantive reason to prohibit development.
- 7.1.7. Noting the concerns of the planning authority regarding the standalone nature of the proposed development, it is important to note the context of surrounding uses currently in the area. There is a car sales showroom to the north of the site, Athlone Springs hotel is to the west and ARM academy lies to the southwest. All of these developments are on their own sites and represent standalone development. I do not consider that the development of supermarket with associated car parking to be out of character with the current pattern of development in the local area. Furthermore, I do not consider the proposal to provide a supermarket at this location would prevent the District Centre in achieving its zoning objectives for the area. The site is located on serviced lands on the very south of the zoning, it is immediately adjacent to other uses within River Village and District Centre uses, there is scope within the area to

develop out zoned lands in a sequential manner. While I agree the development of these lands would be best achieved through the stated framework plan, I do not consider the current proposal before the Board would be detrimental to achieving the zoning objectives of the area.

7.1.8. Having regard to connectivity to adjoining zoned lands I consider it appropriate that a connection is provided from the existing site to the remainder of zoned District Centre lands to the east. This connection should consist of a footpath and cycle path through the site that immediately abuts the adjacent site boundary to the east. This may result in some loss to car parking; however, I consider this appropriate to ensure that future development potential is not compromised. Having regard to vehicular access into the zoned District Centre lands there is a possibility of future connectivity from the regional road to the north and lands zoned Enterprise and Employment to the south and east. I therefore consider that the issue of connectivity is not a substantive issue on its own to warrant a refusal in this instance.

7.1.9. The planning authority has indicated that the proposed development would conflict with the zoning objectives outlined in the Athlone Joint Retail Strategy 2019–2026, specifically policy Objective RP10. This policy aims to encourage the densification and diversification of retail, non-retail services, commercial, and community uses in the River Village Commercial area to better meet local needs. The district centre objectives, as set out in the Local Area Plan, strive to establish a mix of commercial and retail uses, including a convenience store such as a supermarket or superstore, cantered around a robust core with a strong sense of place and focus. In my view, the proposed development aligns with the overall zoning objectives of the area and enhances the retail offerings. The site's connectivity to the River Village and other zoned lands, including residential areas, will increase the commercial offerings and contribute positively to the area. Considering the above policies and other uses in the immediate vicinity, I do not believe the provision of a supermarket at this location would contradict any policy within the Local Area Plan or the Athlone Joint Retail Strategy.

7.1.10. In conclusion, I consider that development is consistent with the site's land use zoning objective and retail policy in the Local Area Plan and County Development Plan. In my opinion, having regard to the passage of time since the adoption of the local area plan and lack of framework plan for the area , it is not reasonable for the

development to be delayed due to the absence of a framework plan. Regarding the standalone nature of the development, I note existing pattern of development immediately surrounding the site, there is no preclusion within the Local Area Plan development objectives for a standalone development. I do not consider it reasonable that the applicant be required to carry the aspirations of the District Centre zoning on its own. In my opinion, to refuse development such as that proposed for the standalone nature of the development would be contrary to the zoning objective and would ultimately adversely impact the short to medium-term vitality and viability of the area. Having regard to connectivity I consider it appropriate that a cycle lane and footpath is provided through the site to connect into other zoned lands to the east. Having regard to vehicular connectivity, I consider that there is ample capacity in the wider area to facilitate same without requiring the use of the existing site. Having regard to the foregoing, I consider that the proposed development is consistent with the policies and objectives of the Development Plan, Local Area Plan and Joint Retail Strategy and is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

7.2. Design and Sitting

- 7.2.1. As part of the reasons for refusal, the planning authority states that the layout and access arrangements are for a single use access for a supermarket on centrally zoned lands would fail to provide a high-quality public realm that would make a positive contribution to the “District Centre” environment. The applicant contends that a “Supermarket” is permitted in principle within district centre zoning and the proposed store follows a definable and permissible format. The development takes it context from other development in the immediate surrounds of the site including the ARM academy. I note the submission of an “Urban Design Assessment” with the application and the further submission of the applicant as part of the appeal to reduce the level of car parking to the front of the site by 8 spaces, resulting in an increase of green space provision to limit the impact from a visual perspective.
- 7.2.2. The proposed supermarket is to be located to the very south of the site. The proposed design is for a single storey structure that follows the format of a typical Lidl building. The store is located and orientated to allow the tall glazed front façade to address the road with parking to the side of the store. A plaza area sits between the store and public footpath creating a feature entrance and meeting point.

Landscaping has been employed throughout the site to soften the development and in the case of the plaza soft and hard features create character and interest in the space. In accordance with the Development Management standards Section 12.15 of the County Development Plan the applicant has submitted an Urban Design Statement. This document sets out parameters with regard to site coverage, car parking, public realm, density and mixed use, access and connectivity and character and context.

- 7.2.3. I consider the design detail as presented is consistent with the prevailing development architecture in the area. The design is contemporary in nature with glazed front façade that would not detract from the visual aesthetics of the area. Having regard to the specific concerns of the local authority in relation to creating a high-quality public realm and a strong sense of place, I do not consider that the site location will be the predominant site on the zoned lands. The area immediately surrounding the site is already developed out with very similar architecture to the one proposed. I do not consider that the proposed development as set out to the rear of an existing car sales development would detract from the provision of a positive District Centre environment. Furthermore, the removal of a level of carparking from the front of the site to replace with additional landscaping will contribute to the public realm and visual aesthetic of the area.

7.3. Other Matters

7.3.1. Smarter Travel/ Car Parking

- 7.3.2. As per refusal reason 2, the planning authority asserts that granting permission in this instance would undermine the principles set out in Roscommon County Council's Smarter Travel Initiative, which prioritises pedestrian mobility and alternative modes of transport. The applicant contends that the proposed development is located within a district centre, which is the preferred location for supermarkets. The site is proximate to and easily walkable from the wider River Village facilities and is near a local bus route connecting Monksland with Athlone to the east of the site. The development proposal contains 8 no. short-stay cycle parking spaces (4 double-sided Sheffield stands beside the trolley bay for customers. Further secure long stay cycle storage can be accommodated within the building for staff. I do not consider that the proposal, as set out, undermines the

principles of the local Smarter Travel Initiatives, given the scale and location of the development in proximity to River Village. I am satisfied the is easily accessible from adjacent River Village and Athlone town without the requirement for a car.

7.3.3. Regarding the level of car parking proposed, the development falls below the minimum standards outlined in Table 12.1 of the County Development Plan. The development includes provision of 119 surface level car parking spaces, including electrical vehicle (EV) charging spaces and pre-wiring other spaces to accommodate future EV parking and cycle stands. Further car parking spaces maygv be lost where by the applicant is mandated to provide a footpath and bicycle path through the site up to neighbouring eastern boundary. Having regard to the foregoing I do not consider the level of car parking proposed in this instance to be exceptional in the context of a supermarket development.

7.3.4. Considering the site's location, pedestrian connectivity to the wider area, and the proximity of adjacent bus stops, I do not believe the lack of other Smarter Travel initiatives by the applicant constitutes a substantial reason to warrant refusal of permission. Having regard to the foregoing, I would not recommend refusal on the grounds of issues related to smarter travel initiatives.

7.3.5. Traffic and Transportation

7.3.6. The applicant has submitted a traffic and transport assessment as part of the application. The traffic impact of the proposed development was assessed using data from the TRICS database. The analysis indicated that the proposed development would generate an additional 106 arriving vehicles and 108 departing vehicles during the PM peak hour.

The additional traffic generated by the proposed supermarket would result in a maximum increase of 7.95% in traffic on the R362 to the west of the link road junction during the AM peak in the 2025 opening year. Similarly, there would be a maximum increase of 8.97% in traffic on the R362 to the east of the link road junction during the PM peak hour in the 2025 opening year. These figures are conservative and do not account for potential secondary trips, such as pass-by traffic already on the R362 that might turn onto the link road to visit the development, traffic diversions, or additional cross-visitation between the proposed development and surrounding residential and commercial areas. The Traffic Impact Report submitted

with the application concludes that the traffic generated as a result of the proposed development can be accommodated within the surrounding road network. An independent Road Safety Audit was carried out and the recommendations have been accepted. No specific traffic mitigation measures are required to accommodate the traffic in terms of junction capacity. I note internal report on file from the Road Sections of Roscommon County Council, whereby it is considered a signalised junction would be required on the R362 and the applicant should pay a special contribution of €50,000 towards these works.

8.0 AA Screening

8.1.1. Stage 1 Screening

The applicant submitted an Appropriate Assessment Screening. The report was prepared by Russell Environmental and Sustainability Services Limited. There are 15 no. European sites within a 15km zone of influence of the appeal site. The applicant's Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening report was prepared in line with current best practice guidance and provides a description of the proposed development and identifies European Sites within a possible zone of influence of the development. Having reviewed the document, I am satisfied that the information allows for a complete examination and identification of any potential significant effects of the development, alone, or in combination with other plans and projects on European sites.

8.1.2. The proposed development comprises the construction of a single storey supermarket with an ancillary off-licence sales area. Provision of surface level car parking including EV charging, cycle stands, trolley bay, hard and soft landscaping, ESB substation building and site lighting. During the operation phase, surface water and storm water from the carparking area will filtrate to the ground through porous asphalt. Surface water from the roof will be discharged to an attenuation tank which will connect to the municipal drainage system in the adjacent road. Wastewater shall be discharged to the public sewer.

8.1.3. A summary of European Sites that occur within a possible zone of influence of the proposed development is presented in Table 7.1. I note that the applicant included a greater number of European sites in their initial screening consideration, with sites

within 15km of the development site considered. There is no ecological justification for such a wide consideration of sites, and I have only included those sites with any possible ecological connection or pathway in this screening determination.

Table 7.1 - Summary Table of European Sites within a possible zone of influence of the proposed development.				
European Site (code)	List of Qualifying interest /Special conservation Interest	Distance from proposed development (Km)	Connections (source, pathway receptor)	Considered further in screening Y/N
Lough Ree SAC 000440	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150] Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210] Active raised bogs [7110] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] Alkaline fens [7230] Limestone pavements [8240] Bog woodland [91D0] Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355] 	2.65km north of the site	The site is completely outside of the SAC. Surface water shall be managed on site and wastewater shall be managed through public sewer. There will be no direct effects as the project footprint is located entirely outside of the designated site.	N
River Shannon Callows SAC 000216	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) [6410] 	2.5km south of the site	The site is completely outside of the SAC. Surface water shall be managed on site and	N

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowland hay meadows (Alopecurus pratensis, Sanguisorba officinalis) [6510] • Alkaline fens [7230] • Limestone pavements [8240] • Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] • Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355] 		wastewater shall be managed through public sewer. There will be no direct effects as the project footprint is located entirely outside of the designated site.	
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Having considered the nature, scale, and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any European Site. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- scale and nature of the development]
- Location-distance from nearest European site and lack of connections

I conclude that on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (stage 2) (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) is not required.

9.0 Recommendation

I recommend that planning permission be granted for the following reasons.

Reasons and Considerations

It is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development would be an appropriate form of development at this location and would comply with the specific policies and objectives of the District Centre as set out within the Local Area Plan and County Development Plan. The proposal as set out will not jeopardise the future development of other District Centre zoned lands or mitigate against achieving any of the objectives set out in the local area plan for District centres. Furthermore the nature and type of development identified for these lands, would not seriously injure the urban design of the area and would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and car parking. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

10. Conditions

1. The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application as amended by the further plans and particulars submitted to An Bord Pleanála on the 15th of December 2023, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. Prior to commencement of development the applicant shall submit for the written approval of the planning authority a revised site layout plan indicating footpath and cycle path through the site. The footpath/cycle path shall be constructed from the proposed access on the western most boundary up to the eastern boundary of the site. There shall be no obstruction including the erection of any structure which would otherwise constitute exempted development under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

Reason: In order to ensure adequate connectivity to all zoned lands and to ensure future objectives of district centre zoning can be achieved.

3. Details, including samples, of the materials, colours and textures of all the external finishes to the proposed development shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of the visual amenities of the area.

4. (a) Advertisement and corporate signage shall be as shown on the drawings submitted to the Planning Authority.
(b) No additional advertisement, advertisement structure, freestanding sign, or other projecting elements including flagpoles or banners, shall be erected or displayed on the building or within the curtilage of the site, unless authorised by a further grant of planning permission.
(c) The display area for alcohol products shall be limited to the area indicated on the submitted drawings.
(d) Notwithstanding exempted development provisions of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, there shall be no advertising of the sale of alcohol products on the façade/frontage of the premises.
(e) There shall be no display of alcohol products or advertising of the sale of alcohol products on or near both the entrance and/or windows.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity and proper planning and sustainable development.

5. The construction of the development shall be managed in accordance with a Construction Management Plan and Construction Traffic Plan which shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development. This plan shall provide details of intended

construction practice for the development, including noise management measures and off-site disposal of construction/demolition waste.

Reason: In the interests of public safety and residential amenity.

6. Site development and building works shall be carried out only between the hours of 0700 to 1900 Mondays to Fridays inclusive, between 0700 to 1400 hours on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays and public holidays. Deviation from these times will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances where prior written approval has been received from the planning authority.

Reason: In order to safeguard the amenities of property in the vicinity.

7. Public lighting on site, including light associated with signage, required to comply with the specification the plans and particulars lodged with the application and as amended by the further plans and particulars submitted to the Planning Authority on the 27th of September 2023. The level of illumination shall be reviewed at any time by the planning authority and any

adjustments shall be made to the satisfaction of the planning authority at the developer's expense. Reason: In the interest of residential amenity.

8. Water supply and drainage arrangements, including the attenuation and disposal of surface water, shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works and services.

Reason: In the interest of public health.

9. All service cables associated with the proposed development (such as electrical, communal television, telephone and public lighting cables) shall be run underground within the site.

Reason: In the interest of orderly development and the visual amenities of the area.

10. The developer shall pay to the planning authority a financial contribution in respect of public infrastructure and facilities benefiting development in the area of the planning authority that is provided or intended to be provided by or on behalf of the authority in accordance with the terms of the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The contribution shall be paid prior to commencement of development or in such phased payments as the planning authority may facilitate and shall be subject to any applicable indexation provisions of the Scheme at the time of payment. Details of the application of the terms of the Scheme shall be agreed between the planning authority and the developer or, in default of such agreement, the matter shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála to determine the proper application of the terms of the Scheme.

Reason: It is a requirement of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, that a condition requiring a contribution in accordance with the

Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Act be applied to the permission

11. The developer shall pay a financial contribution of €50,000(Fifty Thousand Euro) to the planning authority as a special contribution under Section 48(2)(c) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in respect of provision of a signalised junction on the R362 which benefits the proposed development. The contribution shall be paid prior to commencement of development or in such phased payments as may be agreed prior to the commencement of the development, and shall be subject to any applicable indexation provisions of the Scheme at the time of payment. Details of the terms of payment of this financial contribution shall be agreed in writing between the planning authority and the developer.

Reason: It is considered reasonable that the developer should contribute towards the specific exceptional costs which are incurred by the planning authority in respect of public services, which are not covered in the Development Contribution Scheme or the Supplementary Development Contribution Scheme and which will benefit the proposed development.

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.

Darragh Ryan
Planning Inspector

22nd of May 2024

Appendix 1 - Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

[EIAR not submitted]

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	318717		
Proposed Development Summary	Construction of a supermarket		
Development Address	Monksland, Athlone, County Roscommon		
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes	X
		No	
2. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and does it equal or exceed any relevant quantity, area or limit where specified for that class?			
Yes			
No	X		Proceed to Q.3
3. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) but does not equal or exceed a relevant quantity, area or other limit specified [sub-threshold development]?			
		Threshold	Comment (if relevant)
No	X		No EIAR or Preliminary Examination required
Yes		Class/Threshold	Proceed to Q.4

4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?

No		Preliminary Examination required
Yes		Screening Determination required

Inspector: _____ **Date:** _____

Form 2

EIA Preliminary Examination

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	318717	
Proposed Development Summary	Construction of a supermarket	
Development Address	Monksland, Athlone, County Roscommon	
<p>The Board carries out a preliminary examination [Ref. Art. 109(2)(a), Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)] of, at least, the nature, size or location of the proposed development having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Regulations.</p>		
	Examination	Yes/No/ Uncertain
<p>Nature of the Development</p> <p>Is the nature of the proposed development exceptional in the context of the existing environment?</p> <p>Will the development result in the production of any significant waste, emissions or pollutants?</p>	<p>The site is located on a greenfield site on zoned lands The proposed development is not exceptional in the context of existing environment.</p> <p>No demolition, however groundworks on site will be required. A construction management plan should be submitted as part of any grant of permission. The development is not exceptional in the context of its urban environment.</p>	No
<p>Size of the Development</p> <p>Is the size of the proposed development exceptional in the context of the existing environment?</p> <p>Are there significant cumulative considerations having regard to other existing and/or permitted projects?</p>	<p>No the red line boundary of the site remains the same. There is no extension to boundary as a result of proposed development.</p> <p>There are no other developments under construction in proximity to the site. All other development are established uses.</p>	No

<p>Location of the Development</p> <p>Is the proposed development located on, in, adjoining or does it have the potential to significantly impact on an ecologically sensitive site or location?</p> <p>Does the proposed development have the potential to significantly affect other significant environmental sensitivities in the area?</p>	<p>The proposed development is not immediately adjacent to any SAC or SPA. There is no potential for impact on Special Area of Conservation. An AA screening has been submitted as part of this application.</p> <p>There are no other locally sensitive environmental sensitivities in the vicinity of relevance.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Conclusion</p>		
<p>There is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.</p> <p>EIA not required.</p>		

Inspector: _____

Date: _____

DP/ADP: _____

Date: _____

(only where Schedule 7A information or EIAR required)