



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-319525-24

Development

Repair and rehabilitation works of an existing structure to address corrosion within the bridge structure and deck works

Location

Ardcahan Bridge, Co. Cork

Local Authority

Cork County Council

Type of Application

Application for approval made under Section 177(AE) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (local authority development requiring appropriate assessment)

Prescribed Bodies

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Inland Fisheries Ireland

Observers

None

Date of Site Inspection

4th June 2024

Inspector

Susan Clarke

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. Cork County Council is seeking approval from An Bord Pleanála to undertake rehabilitation works to Ardcahan Bridge in the townlands of Ardcahan and Derrylahan, approx. 4km north of Dunmanway in Co. Cork. The site is located in the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171). A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) and application under Section 177AE was lodged by the Local Authority based on the proposed development's likely significant effect on European sites.
- 1.2. Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that where an appropriate assessment is required in respect of development by a local authority, the authority shall prepare a NIS and the development shall not be carried out unless the Board has approved the development with or without modifications. Furthermore, Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that the appropriate assessment shall include a determination by the Board as to whether or not the proposed development would adversely affect the integrity of a European site and the appropriate assessment shall be carried out by the Board before consent is given for the proposed development.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1. The subject site is located in the townlands of Ardcahan and Derrylahan, approx. 4km north of Dunmanway in Co. Cork. The bridge is located on the upper Bandon River (20B02), within the River Bandon SAC (002171) and is situated on the R587 road, directly downstream of the Bandon River confluence with the River Caha (20C01) confluence. The road, which connects Dunmanway to Toonbridge, is typical of a local road in a rural area and the existing bridge is not capable of accommodating two-way traffic. The area is rural in nature with a limited number of one-off dwellings and farm buildings.
- 2.2. Ardcahan Bridge is a six-arch structure with each span being c.5-6m in width, which carries the R587 over the River Bandon connecting Dunmanway to Toonbridge. The bridge is not a protected structure, however the Applicant highlights that there is a reference to it on the Ordnance Survey Map of Ireland (OSI 6inch Cassinin) that was conducted between 1829 and 1842.

- 2.3. The Applicant advises that the area is prone to flooding and that the R587 frequently becomes impassable to road traffic. It is stated that due to the road speed, traffic volumes, and visibility issues in the hours of darkness the flooding presents significant risk to safety of road users.
- 2.4. Photographs & maps accompanying this Report describe the site & surroundings in more detail.

3.0 Proposed Development

- 3.1. Cork County Council proposes to undertake bridge repair and rehabilitation works at Ardcahan Bridge. The repair and rehabilitation works will include: (1) installation of a temporary construction compound; (2) addressing corrosion with the bridge structure; and (3) deck works to include resurfacing, deck waterproofing and bridge parapet repair.

Temporary Site Compound

A temporary site compound (c.30 sq m) to be located approx. 30m setback from the southwest corner of the bridge. It will be on agricultural land but within the Bandon River SAC. It will be constructed with crushed rock aggregate hard standing with low dust content. Facilities to be provided in the temporary site compound will include the following:

- Welfare facility
- Employee parking
- Contractor lock-up facility
- Bottled water for potable supply
- Water tanker to supply water used for other purposes
- Fuel storage
- Diesel generator
- Storage areas
- Waste management areas.

Corrosion Repairs and Minor Parapet Repairs

- To facilitate the installation of the scaffold, vegetation within a 2m width on either side of the bridge face will be cut back. Trimming will be limited to tree branches; no main stems will be cut.
- A scaffold shall be installed to allow access to the underside of the bridge arches.
- Steel beams to be sandblasted to SA2.5 as per detail provided in Drawings P1959-ARDH0004. One operator will carry out the sandblasting using appropriate sandblasting equipment, accessing the beams surface from the scaffold provided.
- Welding of additional steel plates at the bottom flange of existing steel beams. One operative will carry out the welding using portable electric welding equipment, accessing the beams surface from the scaffold provided.
- A protective paint system to be applied to all exposed steel work by brush. One operative will paint the steel beams accessing them from the scaffold provided.
- Steel drip strips will be positioned along the bottom edge of the bridge parapet on both sides of the bridge.
- Cracking at deck pier interface to be injected with epoxy resin. Prior the injection, the crack and surrounding surface will be cleaned to allow the paste-over to bond to sound concrete. The epoxy resin will be pressure pumped locally (directly into the cracks) to close the cracks at the deck pier interface. (The deck/pier interface is above the waterline.)
- Scaffold to be removed.

Deck Works

- Upon completion of the corrosion repairs, it is proposed to repair the road surfacing on this bridge. A road closure and diversion will be required to facilitate these works.
- The existing road surface shall be scarified, and the existing surface shall be removed and the concrete surface of the bridge deck exposed.
- Any defects encountered when deck is exposed to be repaired using an appropriate concrete repair mortar. This will only include small localised repairs with concrete repair mortar, limited to the top side of the deck.

- A trial hole and rebar scan shall be completed to confirm deck reinforcement and strength. The trial hole will be superficial and will not penetrate the entire thickness of the deck. If this investigation is unsatisfactory, Cork County Council may introduce a weight limit to the bridge.
- A spray applied bridge deck waterproofing system shall be installed.
- The pavement surface shall be laid, sand asphalt followed by HRA, high friction colour contract surfacing shall be applied.

It is proposed that the works will take place over 6-10 weeks in the summer months to coincide with low river water level.

3.2. Amendments to Proposed Development

- 3.2.1. The Applicant was invited to respond to submissions received by prescribed bodies (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Inland Fisheries Ireland) on 11th June 2024. A response was received on 28th June 2024. As part of this response, the Applicant proposes to relocate the temporary site compound from a greenfield area southwest of the bridge to the adjacent existing R587 road. There are no other amendments proposed to the project. As outlined below, there were no third-party submissions from the public received in respect of the proposal. The works will be completed in a 6-10 week period and a traffic management plan will be implemented during the course of the works. Having regard to the foregoing, it is considered that the proposed amendment is not material and as such, the statutory notices do not need to be readvertised.

3.3. Accompanying documents:

- 3.3.1. The application is accompanied by the following documents:
- Cover Letter (12th April 2024)
 - Planning Statement (December 2023)
 - Ecological Appraisal Report (August 2023)
 - Bat Survey Report (November 2023)
 - EIA Screening Report (January 2024)
 - Appropriate Assessment Screening (July 2023)

- Natura Impact Statement (August 2023)
- Construction Environmental Management Plan (November 2023)
- CCC Part 8 Planning Report (21 March 2024)
- CCC Habitats Directive Appropriate Assessment Determination (February 2024)
- CCC EIA report (20th March 2024)
- Statutory Notices
- A list of Prescribed Bodies and copies of public notices
- Maps and Drawings.

As part of the response to the submissions received by the DHLGH, the Applicant submitted an AA Screening Report/NIS Addendum (June 2024).

4.0 Planning History

There is no recently recorded history for this site. There are several planning cases in the wider vicinity of the subject site relating to *inter alia* rural housing, quarry activity, and electrical infrastructure. However, I do not consider these to be relevant to the project.

5.0 Legislative and Policy Context

5.1. The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

- 5.1.1. This Directive deals with the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora throughout the European Union. Article 6(3) and 6(4) require an appropriate assessment of the likely significant effects of a proposed development on its own and in combination with other plans and projects which may have an effect on a European Site (SAC or SPA).

5.2. European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011

- 5.2.1. These Regulations consolidate the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 to 2005 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Control of Recreational Activities) Regulations 2010, as well as addressing

transposition failures identified in CJEU judgements. The Regulations in particular require in Reg 42(21) that where an appropriate assessment has already been carried out by a 'first' public authority for the same project (under a separate code of legislation) then a 'second' public authority considering that project for appropriate assessment under its own code of legislation is required to take account of the appropriate assessment of the first authority.

5.3. National Nature Conservation Designations

- 5.3.1. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the National Parks and Wildlife Service are responsible for the designation of conservation sites throughout the country. The three main types of designation are Natural Heritage Areas (NHA), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and the latter two form part of the European Natura 2000 Network.
- 5.3.2. The proposal is located within the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171). The closest other European Site to the subject is Gearagh SAC (site code: 000108, which is located 13km north-east of the development.

5.4. Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)

- 5.4.1. Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, sets out the requirements for the appropriate assessment of developments which could have an effect on a European site or its conservation objectives.
- 177(AE) sets out the requirements for the appropriate assessment of developments carried out by or on behalf of local authorities.
 - Section 177(AE) (1) requires a local authority to prepare, or cause to be prepared, a Natura impact statement in respect of the proposed development.
 - Section 177(AE) (2) states that a proposed development in respect of which an appropriate assessment is required shall not be carried out unless the Board has approved it with or without modifications.
 - Section 177(AE) (3) states that where a Natura Impact Statement has been prepared pursuant to subsection (1), the local authority shall apply to the Board for approval and the provisions of Part XAB shall apply to the carrying out of the appropriate assessment.

- Section 177(V) (3) states that a competent authority shall give consent for a proposed development only after having determined that the proposed development shall not adversely affect the integrity of a European site.
- Section 177AE (6) (a) states that before making a decision in respect of a proposed development the Board shall consider the NIS, any submissions or observations received and any other information relating to:
 - The likely effects on the environment.
 - The likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
 - The likely significant effects on a European site.

5.5. **Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities**

- 5.5.1. Guidance is provided for the competent authority to assess any plan or project. The impact of any plan or project alone or in combination with other projects on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site is considered with respect to the conservation objectives of the site and the structure and function.

6.0 **Policy Context**

- 6.1.1. **National Planning Framework:** This Plan sets out a high-level strategic plan for shaping future growth and development to 2040. It seeks to develop a region-focused strategy to manage growth and environmentally focused planning at a local level.
- 6.1.2. **National Development Plan, 2018-2027:** This Plan underpins the National Planning Framework 2018-2040. It contains several priorities which include investment in regional growth potential and increasing investment in national, regional and local roads.
- 6.1.3. **Climate Action Plan, 2024:** This plan provides a roadmap of actions to halve Ireland's emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by no later than 2050, as committed to in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.
- 6.1.4. **Biodiversity Action Plan:** The Plan sets out actions through which a range of government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland's 'Vision for

Biodiversity’ and follows on from the work of the first and second National Biodiversity Action Plans. It contains 119 x targeted actions which are underpinned by 7 x strategic objectives.

- 6.1.5. **The Planning System and Flood Risk Management, 2009:** These Guidelines seek to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding and avoid new developments increasing flood risk elsewhere and they advocate a sequential approach to risk assessment and a justification test.
- 6.1.6. **Regional Planning Guidelines:** The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy sets out a strategy to implement the NPF in the Southern Region, including Cork. It sets out a strategic vision and policy objectives for urban and rural areas, people, the economy, the environment, connectivity, amenities and utilities.
- 6.1.7. **Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028:** This is the operative development plan for the area. There are numerous policies in Chapter 12 Transport and Mobility of the CCDP which support the principle of sustainable mobility. The main aim of the policies is ‘to support the delivery of an efficient transport system in the county, supporting connectivity and competitiveness, and to make sustainable travel modes an attractive and convenient choice for as many people as possible in order to deliver economic, social, health, wellbeing, environmental and climate action benefits’. Specific policies relevant to the subject proposal include:

Objective TM 12-8 (Traffic/Mobility Management and Road Safety) (e) – Improve the standards and safety of public roads and to protect the investment of public resources in the provision, improvement and maintenance of the public road network.

Section 12.16 (Strategic Road Infrastructure Investment) states ‘The County’s road network facilitates movement of goods, services and people and maintaining, improving and protecting its strategic function is therefore crucial for the County’s economy and society’.

Objective TM 12-13 (National, Regional and Local Road Network) (l) – Ensure that all route upgrades are planned, designed and constructed to be compliant with EU environmental directives and to minimise impacts on biodiversity, built heritage and landscape.

Chapter 15 addresses Biodiversity and Environment and includes the following relevant policies:

Objective 15-2 a): Protect all natural heritage sites which are designated or proposed for designation under European legislation, National legislation and International Agreements. Maintain and where possible enhance appropriate ecological linkages between these. This includes Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Marine Protected Areas, Natural Heritage Areas, proposed Natural Heritage Areas, Statutory Nature Reserves, Refuges for Fauna and Ramsar Sites. These sites are listed in Volume 2 of the Plan.

b) Provide protection to species listed in the Flora Protection Order 2015, to Annexes of the Habitats and Birds Directives, and to animal species protected under the Wildlife Acts in accordance with relevant legal requirements. These species are listed in Volume 2 of the Plan.

c) Protect and where possible enhance areas of local biodiversity value, ecological corridors and habitats that are features of the County's ecological network. This includes rivers, lakes, streams and ponds, peatland and other wetland habitats, woodlands, hedgerows, tree lines, veteran trees, natural and semi-natural grasslands as well as coastal and marine habitats. It particularly includes habitats of special conservation significance in Cork as listed in Volume 2 of the Plan.

d) Recognise the value of protecting geological heritage sites of local and national interest, as they become notified to the local authority, and protect them from inappropriate development

e) Encourage, pursuant to Article 10 of the Habitats Directive, the protection and enhancement of features of the landscape, such as traditional field boundaries, important for the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network and essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.

7.0 The Natura Impact Statement

- 7.1. Cork County Council's application for the proposed development was accompanied by an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report and Natura Impact Statement (NIS), which scientifically examined the proposed development and the European sites. The

NIS identified and characterised the possible implications of the proposed development on the European sites, in view of the sites' conservation objectives, and provided information to enable the Board to carry out an appropriate assessment of the proposed works. In summary, the Applicant concludes that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have an adverse effect or pose a risk of likely significant effects on the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171).

8.0 Consultations

8.1. The application was circulated to the following bodies:

- Cork County Council
- Fáilte Ireland
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Heritage Council
- Office of Public Works
- An Taisce
- An Chomhairle Ealíon
- Waterways Ireland
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Uisce Eireann

8.2. A response was received from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage. The key points can be summarised as follows:

- The impacts from the site compound including the concrete washout area, which are to be located in the SAC, have not been addressed in the NIS. It is noted that the area proposed for the site compound is described by the Applicant as mosaic habitat of wet calcareous and neutral grassland.

- Emphasises the importance of implementing the mitigation measures outlined in the various planning documentation submitted with the application.

8.3. A response was also received from the Inland Fisheries Ireland, which advised that the Body had no objection to the proposed development, subject to condition.

8.4. **Public Submissions**

There are no public submissions on file.

9.0 **EIA Screening**

9.1. The proposed development relates to repair and rehabilitation works to Ardcahan Bridge. The proposed development is not of a class in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended). Having regard to the scale of works on lands within a rural area, the proposed works are considered not to have a significant effect on the biodiversity of the site or surrounding area.

10.0 **Assessment**

10.1. **Introduction**

10.1.1. Under the provisions of Section 177AE (6) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), the Board is required to consider the following in respect of this type of application:

- The likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area;
- The likely effects on the environment; and,
- The likely impact on any European sites.

10.2. **The Likely Consequences for the Proper Planning and Sustainable Development of the Area:**

10.3. Cork County Council proposes to undertake bridge repair and rehabilitation works at Ardcahan Bridge. The Applicant states that the proposed development is required due to the poor condition of the bridge as a result of erosion. The strength of the bridge is at risk and urgent intervention is required to repair and rehabilitate the corroded areas

and to restore the structure of the bridge to full strength. It is proposed that the works will take place over 6-10 weeks in the summer months to coincide with low river water levels. In summary, the repair and rehabilitation works will include:

- Instillation of a temporary site compound (c.30 sq m) on the R587.
- Addressing corrosion with the bridge structure.
- Deck works to include resurfacing, deck waterproofing and bridge parapet repair.

10.3.1. The supporting documentation notes that these works are required to bring the bridge into safe working order. There are no specific policies in the CDP that relate to the proposed development, however as outlined above, Objective TM 12-8 refers to improving the standards and safety of public roads and protecting the investment of public resources in the improvement and maintenance of the public road network. The upgrade and maintenance of bridges and roads is a function of the local authority. Having regard to the nature and scale of the works, I consider that the principle of development acceptable and in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

10.4. The Likely Effects on the Environment

Design and Layout

10.4.1. The location and design of the proposed Ardcahan Bridge repair and rehabilitation works are described in Sections 2.0 and 3.0 above. The existing bridge is in a poor state of repair and requires maintenance works. Given that the project would not comprise any new structures, with no instream works proposed and minimal disturbance to the riparian embankments, the design and layout of the proposed works are considered acceptable. The site or surrounding area is not covered by any sensitive built heritage or conservation designations. Given the small scale and nature of the works to an existing bridge, the proposed works will not give rise to an adverse long-term visual impact on the character of the area.

Biodiversity

10.4.2. An Ecological Appraisal Report (August 2023) (informed by desk and field surveys) was submitted with the application, and includes a classification of **habitats** according to the Fossitt scheme. It reports that there are ten habitat types at and around the

bridge: Depositing/lowland rivers (FW2), Buildings and artificial surfaces, (BL3) Dense Bracken (HD1), Wet grassland/Dry calcareous and neutral grassland Mosaic (GS4/GS1), Improved agricultural grassland (GA1), Hedgerows (WL1), Treelines (WL2), Dry meadows and grassy verges (GS2), Scrub (WS1), and Riparian woodland (WN5). In addition, the Applicant highlights that floating river vegetation that shares strong links with EU Habitats Directive Annex I habitat type 'Watercourses of plain to montaine levels with the *Ranunculus fluitans* and *Callitriche-Batrachium* vegetation (3260)' is present immediately up and down-stream of the bridge. However, this vegetation will not be directly impacted by works as it does not occur immediately at the structure. I reiterate that there are no in-stream works proposed. The proposed development does not involve the felling of any trees, but rather the trimming of branches within 2m of the bridge to access purposes.

10.4.3. The DHLGH raised concerns in relation to the potential impact on habitats as a result of the construction of the temporary site compound. As outlined above, the Applicant now proposes to locate the temporary compound on the R587. Whilst this area is still within the Bandon River SAC, it is an existing hard surface area, located 50m from the River. As such, the proposed development will not result in the loss of any vegetation area. Overall, I am satisfied that subject to the implementation of proposed mitigation measures, the works including the provision of a temporary construction compound on the R587, will not adversely impact on habitats present in the area.

10.4.4. The Applicant has advised that winter heliotrope (an **invasive species**) is present along the road verge at the north-western corner of the bridge. I concur with the Applicant that as the species is not within the footprint or zone of influence of proposed repair works, the risk of accidental spreading is low. Nonetheless, Section 6.3.1 of the EIA outlines mitigation measures to ensure there is no accidental spreading. These are standard measures including *inter alia* undertaking a survey of the area again for the presence of the species, demarcation fencing and signage, and good work hygiene practices. I note that a Project Ecologist will be appointed to oversee the construction works. Also, I highlight that there are no instream works proposed and as such, the spread of invasive species by water would be limited. Having regard to the foregoing, I am satisfied that the threat of spreading of invasive species can be managed appropriately during the construction phase.

10.4.5. **Otter** signs (spraints) were recorded under and in the vicinity of the bridge. The Applicant states that the channel is suitable for foraging/commuting otter, however, no holts or slides were recorded. No signs of other mammal species were recorded. It is acknowledged that Otters may undergo some temporary disturbance during the repair works and as such the following mitigation measures are proposed:

- An activity survey shall be carried out to assess the potential for the holt to be used by otters. If a holt is discovered, all works within 150m of the holt shall cease including vegetation clearance. NPWS shall be contacted, and a derogation licence shall be sought.
- All efforts to minimise pollution and siltation escapement to the river will be made and an Ecological Clerk of Works (EcoW) will be present to supervise the construction activities as informed by their knowledge of the site's ecological sensitivities.
- Working hours will be constrained to daylight.

10.4.6. Having regard to the scale and nature of the works proposed, I am satisfied that subject to the implementation of the above mitigation measures, the proposed development will not adversely impact on the local Otter population.

10.4.7. The Applicant submitted a **Bat** Survey Report (November 2023) with the application, which concluded that whilst there was no evidence of bat roosting with the bridge, the site does have moderate roosting potential. The Applicant advises that as a precautionary measure, the bridge will be subject to a preconstruction endoscope survey and emergence surveys (2 separate emergence survey rounds) to re-confirm baseline conditions. If bats are found to be present, a derogation licence will be sought from NPWS to allow works to proceed in a manner which minimises disturbance and ensures no bats are harmed. An Annex IV assessment and report shall be completed in the event that bats are present in the bridge. A bat specialist will carry out any exclusion procedures required under the conditions set out in the derogation licence prior to any works. Bat boxes will be installed under the bridge to enhance roosting potential and increase roosting options and capacity. I am satisfied that subject to the implementation of the above mitigation measures, the proposed development will not adversely impact on bats.

10.4.8. The EIA highlights that walkover surveys of both instream and riparian habitats were carried out 150m upstream and downstream of the bridge. In addition, it is stated that following an initial appraisal, stage I and stage II freshwater pearl mussel surveys were undertaken to establish the presence/absence of the pearl mussel and also to conduct population estimates in light of proposed bridge repair works. In summary, freshwater pearl mussel are present under and in the vicinity of the bridge, with the highest densities recorded in the immediate downstream vicinity (≤ 5 m) of the bridge structure. Salmonids are also present in the area. Lamprey spawning habitat and European eel habitat are also present. An appraisal of white-clawed crayfish habitat was undertaken, however none were recorded. Having regard to the foregoing, a series of water quality mitigation measures are proposed including:

- compliance with water quality mitigation measures defined in the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- monitor water quality throughout the construction period including chemical and physico-chemical water testing.
- a suspended scaffold attached to the bridge deck will be used in order to avoid instream works/access and prevent injury or mortality of pearl mussels during scaffold installation;
- aggregate with low content of fines will be used for construction of the temporary compound hard standing in order to minimise sediment washout.
- All concrete washout shall be carried out in a dedicated area of the temporary compound.
- Biosecurity/invasive species measures detailed in the CEMP will be adhered to.

10.4.9. Any impact on the water quality from the proposed development could have a negative impact on aquatic fauna and its habitat. Mitigation measures in the outline CEMP and NIS include the protection of the water quality and avoidance of distribution to any habitat. I have assessed these in detail below in the NIS and I am satisfied that mitigation measures can be successfully implemented to protect the water quality of the River Bandon.

It is proposed to appoint an Ecological Clerk of Works to oversee the repair works and the mitigation measures contained in the NIS report would protect sensitive species. The works will be conducted in accordance IFI guidance, the removal of vegetation during the bird nesting season will be prohibited, and pre-construction surveys for Otters and Bats will be undertaken. In conclusion, having regard to all of the above, the predicted impacts on biodiversity would be temporary and short term as most species will return to the area after the works are complete.

Cultural Heritage

10.4.10. Ardcahan Bridge and its environs are not covered by any sensitive heritage designations, and it is not of any heritage value. The proposed development would not adversely affect the character or setting of any Recorded Monuments, Protected Structures, NIAH features or ACAs in the area. Having regard to the non-intrusive nature of the proposed development, it is unlikely that the works would negatively impact on any uncovered historical artefacts. Accordingly, I do not recommend that archaeological monitoring be conditioned should the Board approve the development.

Flooding

As highlighted by the Applicant (and noted on floodinfo.ie) the area is subject to flooding. The temporary construction compound will cover an area measuring c.30 sq m for a period of 6-10 months. The works will be carried out in the summer months to coincide with low river water level. Having regard to the nature, scale, duration and timing of the proposed development, I do not consider that it would increase flood risk in the area.

Roads and Traffic

As noted above, the purpose of the project is so as to safeguard the structure and to prevent its collapse into the Caragh River thereby ensuring the continued operation of the local road. As stated above, it is proposed to locate the construction compound on a section of the road surface that will be cordoned off by temporary fencing. I note from my site visit that the road is sufficiently wide at this location to accommodate two-way passing traffic. The Applicant notes that the proposal may result in temporary traffic disruption, however this will be managed in a Traffic Management Plan, which I consider to be acceptable noting the scale of the proposal. Any disturbance arising from noise during the works would, again, be of limited duration.

Conclusion

10.4.11. Having regard to the documentation submitted, conducted a site visit, and the nature and scale of the proposed development, I am satisfied that the proposed development will not have a significant impact on the environment.

10.5. The likely significant effects on a European site:

The areas addressed in this section are as follows:

- Compliance with Articles 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive
- The Natura Impact Statement
- Appropriate Assessment.

10.6. Compliance with Articles 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive

10.6.1. The Habitats Directive deals with the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora throughout the European Union. Article 6(3) of this Directive requires that any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. The competent authority must be satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site.

10.6.2. The proposed development is not directly connected to or necessary to the management of any European site and is therefore subject to the provisions of Article 6(3).

10.7. Screening the Need for Appropriate Assessment

10.7.1. The first test of Article 6(3) is to establish if the proposed development could result in likely significant effects to a European site. This is considered Stage 1 of the appropriate assessment process i.e., screening. The screening stage is intended to be a preliminary examination. If the possibility of significant effects cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information, without extensive investigation or the application of mitigation, a plan or project should be considered to have a likely significant effect and Appropriate Assessment carried out.

10.7.2. The Applicant carried out an appropriate assessment screening exercise, which accompanies the Natura Impact Statement submitted with the application. The screening report identifies two European sites within the zone of influence of the proposed development: Bandon River SAC (002171) and Gearagh SAC (000108).

Table 1: European sites considered for Stage 1 Screening:

European site (SAC/SPA)	Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source, pathway, receptor)	Considered further in screening. Y/N
Bandon River SAC (002171)	<p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculus fluitans</i> and <i>Callitriche-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnus incanae, Salix alba) [91E0]</p> <p><i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</p> <p><i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</p>	The subject site is located in the European Site.	Yes
Gearagh SAC (000108)	<p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculus fluitans</i> and <i>Callitriche-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</p> <p>Rivers with muddy banks with <i>Chenopodium rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidens</i> p.p. vegetation [3270]</p> <p>Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles [91A0]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnus incanae, Salix alba) [91E0]</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p>	The proposed works are located approx. 13km (as-the-crow-flies) to the SAC. There is no hydrological or ecological connection between the European Site and the subject site. Accordingly, no further examination is required.	No.

10.7.3. Based on my examination of the NIS report and supporting information, the NPWS website, aerial and satellite imagery, the scale of the proposed development and likely effects, separation distances and functional relationship between the proposed works

and the European sites, their conservation objectives and taken in conjunction with my assessment of the subject site and the surrounding area, I would conclude that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required for the Bandon River SAC (Site code 002171) as the possibility of significant effects cannot be ruled out.

10.7.4. The other site can be screened out from further assessment because of the lack of a substantive hydrological links or ecological connectivity between the proposed works and the European site. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that on the basis of the information on the file, which I consider adequate in order to issue a screening determination, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to have a significant effect on Gearagh SAC (001087) in view of its site conservation objectives and a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not therefore required for this site.

10.7.5. No measures designed or intended to avoid or reduce any harmful effects on a European Site have been relied upon in this screening exercise.

10.8. Natura Impact Statement

10.8.1. The Stage 1 Screening Assessment concluded that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (NIS) was required as significant effects on Bandon River SAC (site code 002171) could not be ruled out.

10.8.2. The NIS provides a detailed scope of works (Section 2) and overview of the receiving environment (Section 3). Section 4 describes the potential adverse effects on the site integrity of Bandon River SAC and the suggested mitigation measures.

10.8.3. The NIS was informed by the following studies, surveys and consultations:

- A desk top study.
- Terrestrial and aquatic ecological surveys were undertaken on the River Bandon. Stage I and Stage II freshwater pearl mussel surveys were conducted under licence.
- Consultations with the Inland Fisheries Ireland and National Parks and Wildlife Service.

10.8.4. The report concluded that, subject to the implementation of best practice and the recommended mitigation measures, the proposed development would not have a significant negative impact on any European Sites.

10.8.5. Having reviewed the NIS and the supporting documentation, including the AA Screening Report/NIS Addendum (June 2024), I am satisfied that it provides adequate information in respect of the baseline conditions, clearly identifies the potential impacts, and uses best scientific information and knowledge. Details of mitigation measures are provided and they are summarised in Section 4.3 of the NIS and Section 2.2 of the AA Screening Report/NIS Addendum. I am satisfied that the information is sufficient to allow for appropriate assessment of the proposed development (see further analysis below).

10.9. **Appropriate Assessment of Relevant European Sites**

10.9.1. The Bandon River SAC consists of relatively short adjoining stretches of the Bandon and Caha Rivers. These rivers flow in a southerly direction to the east of Dunmanway, Co. Cork. Towards the southern end of the site the Bandon River takes an easterly course. The predominant rock formations are Old Red Sandstone to the north and Carboniferous slate stretching south of Dunmanway. Soils in the northern section consist of peats, podzols and skeletal soils. The southern section consists of alluvial soils and Brown Podzolics. The site contains good examples of two habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive - alluvial forest and floating river vegetation - and supports populations of four Annex II species - Otter, Salmon, Brook Lamprey and Freshwater Pearl Mussel. The presence of a number of Red Data Book plant and animal species adds further interest to the site.

Qualifying Interest	Map Ref	Conservation Objective	Direct and Indirect Impacts
Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculus fluitans</i> and <i>Callitriche-Batrachium</i> vegetation [3260]	Not mapped in SCI	Restore favourable condition	The Applicant records that this habitat is present both upstream and downstream of the Ardcahan Bridge. Indirect impacts on water quality (increased siltation/sedimentation or release of hydrocarbons) as a result of the proposed

			development may negatively impact on the habitat.
Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]	Map 2	Restore favourable condition	<p>The Applicant highlights that given that examples of gallery woodland with links to the qualifying interest habitat 'Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>)' are present in the vicinity of Ardcahan Bridge there is potential to impact this habitat during scaffold construction.</p> <p>The cutting back of tree limbs in riparian habitat sharing links with the Annex I, Alluvial woodland habitat may alter water flow pathways, reduce the capacity for local development of this habitat while also increasing light penetration to the bed, increasing algal proliferation and or the surface area of water crowfoot (<i>Ranunculus</i> vegetation).</p>
<p><i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</p> <p><i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</p>	Map 3	Restore favourable condition	<p>This species has been recorded by the applicant to occur both upstream and downstream of the proposed works area as well as underneath the bridge.</p> <p>Indirect impacts on water quality as a result of sedimentation/siltation or release of hydrocarbons from the proposed development could negatively impact on the species.</p>
<i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]	Not mapped in SCI	Maintain favourable condition	The Applicant records that brook lamprey spawning habitat is present both upstream and

			<p>downstream of Ardcahan Bridge with significant ammocoetes burial habitat present downstream of the bridge on the right hand side of the channel.</p> <p>The release of sediments and chemicals or hydrocarbons as a result of bridge remediation works would have the potential to impact on downstream brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>) spawning and nursery habitat.</p>
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10.10. Mitigation Measures

10.10.1. Section 4.3 of the NIS outlines the various mitigation measures proposed as part of the proposed development to mitigate against the identified potential impacts. Section 2.2 of the AA Screening Report/NIS Addendum updates a number of these measures with reference to the relocation of the temporary site construction compound.

10.10.2. The collective key measures are summarised below:

- Compliance with best practice guidance notes

Mitigation by design

- All site clearance works will minimise land take of habitats and flora. No instream works.
- All washout will be carried out in a dedicated area of the temporary compound. A purpose-built concrete wash-out facility will be installed to separate solids and liquids. Solids shall be removed to an appropriate waste management facility, wastewater will be collected in a secondary holding tank for recycling in the washing process. Wash-out facilities will be positioned away from drainage features and fuel storage areas.
- A suspended scaffold supported by the bridge deck shall be designed by a temporary works design specialist.

Water quality

- A CEMP with ecological mitigation is included within the application for consent for the proposed development. The ecological mitigation including that from the NIS will be reviewed by an appointed Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW).
- All efforts to minimise pollution and siltation escapement to the river will be made in light of proposed bridge remediation works and an Ecological Clerk of Works (EcoW) will be present to supervise works and as informed by their knowledge of the site's ecological sensitivities.
- Silt fencing will be installed in roadside drains/swales as required.
- Daily inspections of surface waters in the vicinity of the site will be undertaken, with any escape of contaminants notified immediately to IFI.
- Wheel wash facilities will be located at the site entrance to reduce construction traffic fouling public roads.
- Operations to cease during and after periods of heavy rainfall.
- All temporary works shall be designed to accommodate water levels up to 0.75m (71.03m AOD malin). Where water level exceeds 0.5m (70.78m AOD Malin) rising temporary works shall be demobilised.
- Water levels will be monitored at all times by site management to anticipate flood events. Works will cease during spate events and the works area will be prepared to ensure that flood risk will not result in material escapement or spills which may indirectly impact qualifying interest habitats or species downstream.
- Chemical testing will be undertaken. Turbidity and pH will be measured daily with a site log kept.
- Machinery will only be refuelled in the site compound located c.>50m from the River Bandon. Mobile bowsers, tanks and drums will be stored in a secure, impermeable storage area, away from drains and open water. Ancillary equipment such as generators, fuel storage tanks will be contained within a bunded area.
- Paint will be stored in a bunded container.
- Statutory check to be carried out on machinery weekly.

- Sand stored in the compound will be covered in a secure area and surrounded by silt barriers.
- A field tent and bund to be erected on the scaffolding to contain and prevent any contaminants or debris from sandblasting, welding, painting, rendering, drainage outlet upgrades and any associated activities from falling into the river. The scaffold tent and bund will be cleaned and material to be sent to an appropriate off-site waste management facility. Field tent to be sealed to ensure sand and debris won't leak out to the river.
- Prior to deck works, the deck drainage outlets shall be blocked with a waterproof membrane to prevent run off or debris entering the water course.

Tree Branch/Limb Cutting

- Tree branch/limb cutting will only be undertaken within 2m of the Ardcahan Bridge structure. The branches/limbs will only be cut by hand and all work will be supervised by an ECoW.
- There will be no interference with the main stems or root systems of riparian trees within 2m of the bridge structure.
- Any large tree limbs removed will be cut into 1m sections and placed on the lower river bank downstream of the bridge to provide deadwood supply to the river.

Invasive species (biosecurity)

- All contractors must implement routine cleaning and drying of their equipment once they leave a site and before using it again on a new watercourse.
- During the duration of the proposed bridge remediation works, all plant/equipment used onsite shall be cleaned, dried and disinfected prior to and after demobilisation from the works area.
- To prevent spread of hazardous invasive species (and pathogens), high-pressure steam cleaning of all items of plant and equipment to be used in and adjacent to waters will be undertaken prior to and after use. The wash-down area will be located in the site compound area.

- Importation of materials to the site shall comply with Regulation 49 of the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2021.

Mitigation Post Works

10.10.3. No mitigation is considered necessary post construction.

10.11. Potential In-combination Effects

10.11.1. Section 4.1.4 of the NIS includes an assessment of the potential in combination effects. This assessment has regard to those threats and impacts listed in the NPWS information (i.e. agricultural impacts, discharges and flooding modifications). A planning search of applications submitted within the areas overlapping and surrounding Ardcahan Bridge during the previous 5 years was conducted. They included a 10-year permission for the proposed development of a 110kV electricity substation including 2 no. control buildings associated electrical plant and equipment, underground electricity cabling, fencing, alterations to a previously permitted borrow pit, permission granted in April 2018. In addition, the Applicant highlights that there is an application for afforestation projects in the area. I concur with the Applicant's assessment that having regard to scale and nature of the proposed works, inclusive of the absence of instream works, cumulative impacts arising from the proposed bridge works in-combination with other plans, projects or land practices are not predicted.

10.11.2. In conclusion, I consider that with the implementation of specific environmental protection and control measures as outlined above to avoid/negate any potential adverse impacts, there will be no cumulative impacts arising in combination with any other plans or projects which would be of significance in respect to impacts affecting the conservation objectives of integrity of the Bandon River SAC.

10.12. Residual Effects

10.12.1. No residual impacts on any of the species or habitats where identified. I am satisfied that those mitigation measures proposed will protect the aquatic species and habitats which have the potential to be impacted.

10.1. NIS Omissions

10.1.1. None noted.

10.1. **Suggested Related Conditions**

All plant and machinery used during the works should be thoroughly cleaned and washed before delivery to the site to prevent the spread of hazardous invasive species and pathogens. IFI requirements should be adhered to.

10.2. **Conclusion on Bandon River SAC (002171)**

- 10.2.1. I consider that the potential direct and indirect effects on the qualifying interests identified as having the potential to be affected have been satisfactorily identified. The mitigation measures outlined are comprehensive and address the potential direct and indirect effects appropriately.
- 10.2.2. I am satisfied that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of this European site in light of its conservation objectives subject to the implementation of mitigation measures outlined above.

10.1. **Integrity Test**

- 10.1.1. Following the Appropriate Assessment and the consideration of mitigation measures, I am able to ascertain with confidence that the project would not adversely affect the integrity of Bandon River SAC (002171) in view of the Conservation Objectives of the site.
- 10.1.2. This conclusion has been based on a complete assessment of all implications of the project alone and in combination with plans and projects.

10.2. **Appropriate Assessment Conclusions**

- 10.2.1. Having carried out screening for Appropriate Assessment of the project, it was concluded that the proposed development may have a significant effect on the following European site;
- Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171)
- 10.2.2. Consequently, an Appropriate Assessment was required of the implications of the project on the qualifying interests of this site in light of its conservation objectives.
- 10.2.3. Following an Appropriate Assessment, it has been ascertained that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171) or any other

European site, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives. This conclusion is based on a complete assessment of all aspects of the proposed project and there is no reasonable doubt as to the absence of adverse effects.

10.2.4. This conclusion is based on:

- A full and detailed assessment of all aspects of the proposed project including proposed mitigation measures.
- Detailed assessment of in combination effects with other plans and projects including existing, permitted and proposed projects and plans.
- The lack of reasonable scientific doubt as to the absence of adverse effects on the integrity of the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171).

11.0 Recommendation

11.1.1. On the basis of the above assessment, I recommend that the Board approve the proposed development subject to the reasons and considerations below and subject to conditions including requiring compliance with the submitted details and with the mitigation measures as set out in the NIS.

12.0 Reasons and Considerations

In coming to its decision, the Board had regard to the following:

- (a) the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC),
- (b) the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (As amended)
- (c) the likely consequences for the environment and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which it is proposed to carry out the proposed development and the likely significant effects of the proposed development on a European Site,
- (d) the conservation objectives, qualifying interests and special conservation interests for the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171),
- (e) the policies and objectives of the Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028,

- (f) the nature and extent of the proposed works as set out in the application for approval,
- (g) the information submitted in relation to the potential impacts on habitats, flora and fauna, including the revised Natura Impact Statement,
- (h) the submissions received in relation to the proposed development, and
- (i) the report and recommendation of the person appointed by the Board to make a report and recommendation on the matter.

Appropriate Assessment

The Board agreed with and adopted the screening assessment and conclusion carried out in the Inspector's Report that the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171) is the European site for which there is a likelihood of significant effects.

The Board considered the Natura Impact Statement and the revision to same and all other relevant submissions and carried out an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposal for the Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171), in view of the site's Conservation Objectives. The Board considered that the information before it was adequate to allow the carrying out of an appropriate assessment.

In completing the assessment, the Board considered, in particular, the

- (i) Likely direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposal both individually or in combination with other plans or projects, specifically upon Bandon River SAC (site code: 002171).
- (ii) Mitigation measures which are included as part of the current proposal, and
- (iii) Conservation Objective for this European Site,

In completing the appropriate assessment, the Board accepted and adopted the appropriate assessment carried out in the Inspector's Report in respect of the potential effects of the proposed development on the integrity of the aforementioned European Site, having regard to its conservation objectives.

In overall conclusion, the Board was satisfied that the proposed development, by itself or in combination with other plans or projects, would not adversely affect the integrity of the European Site, in view of the site's conservation objectives.

Proper Planning and Sustainable Development/Likely effects on the environment:

It is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development would not have significant negative effects on the environment or the community in the vicinity, would not give rise to a risk of pollution, would not be detrimental to the visual or landscape amenities of the area, would not seriously injure the amenities of property in the vicinity, would not adversely impact on the cultural, archaeological and built heritage of the area and would not interfere with the existing land uses in the area. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Conditions

1. The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, and additional plans and particulars submitted on 28th June 2024, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where any mitigation measures set out in the Natura Impact Statement or any conditions of approval require further details to be prepared by or on behalf of the local authority, these details shall be placed on the file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interest of clarity and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and to ensure the protection of the environment.

2. The mitigation measures and monitoring commitments identified in the Natura Impact Statement, Ecological Appraisal Report, Bat Survey Report, and Construction Environmental Management Plan submitted to the Board with the application shall be carried out in full except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with other conditions.

Reason: In the interest of clarity and protection of the environment during the construction and operational phases of the proposed development.

3. A suitably qualified ecologist shall be retained by the local authority to oversee the site set up and construction of the proposed development and implementation of mitigation measures relating to ecology. The ecologist shall be present during repair and remediation works. Upon completion of works, an

ecological report of the site works shall be prepared by the appointed ecologist to be kept on file as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interest of nature conservation and the protection of biodiversity.

4. Prior to the commencement of development, the local authority, or any agent acting on its behalf, shall prepare in consultation with the project ecologist and relevant statutory agencies, a detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), incorporating all mitigation measures indicated in the Natura Impact Statement. The CEMP shall include:
 - a) all mitigation measures indicated in the Natura Impact Statement, Ecological Appraisal Report, Bat Survey Report, and Construction Environmental Management Plan submitted to the Board with the application;
 - b) Specific proposals as to how the measures outlined in the CEMP will be measured and monitored for effectiveness.

Reason: In the interest of protecting the environment and the European Sites.

5. The following nature conservation requirements shall be complied with:
 - (a) The works shall be carried out in compliance with the Inland Fisheries Ireland document "Guidelines on protection of fisheries during construction works in and adjacent to waters."
 - (b) No in-stream works shall be undertaken without prior consultation with Inland Fisheries Ireland, and the works shall only be undertaken between July to September (inclusive).
 - (e) No riparian vegetation removal shall take place during the period 1st March to 31st August (inclusive).
 - (f) Any riparian zones damaged by machinery or equipment shall be fully re-instated.

Reason: In the interest of biodiversity and nature conservation.

6. The County Council and any agent acting on its behalf shall ensure that all plant and machinery used during the works should be thoroughly cleaned and

washed before delivery to the site to prevent the spread of hazardous invasive species and pathogens.

Reason: In the interest of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and to ensure the protection of the European sites.

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.

Ms Susan Clarke
Senior Planning Inspector

8th July 2024

13.0 Appendix

Form 1 EIA Pre-Screening

[EIAR not submitted]

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	ABP-319525-24		
Proposed Development Summary	Repair and rehabilitation works of an existing structure to address corrosion within the bridge structure and deck works at Ardcahan Bridge		
Development Address	Ardcahan Bridge, Co. Cork		
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	
		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) or does it equal or exceed any relevant quantity, area or limit where specified for that class?			
Yes			
No	✓		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	✓	N/A	No EIAR or Preliminary Examination required
Yes			Proceed to Q.4

4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?		
No	✓	Preliminary Examination required
Yes		Screening Determination required