



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-320668-24

Development	Search and rescue hangar, associated airside infrastructure and all associated site development works.
Location	Lands forming part of Weston Airport, at Celbridge Road, Backweston, Lucan, Co. Dublin, W23 XHF8
Planning Authority	South Dublin County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	SD23A/0324
Applicant(s)	Weston Aviation Academy Limited.
Type of Application	Permission.
Planning Authority Decision	Grant, subject to conditions.
Type of Appeal	Third Party
Appellant(s)	John Colgan Tony Doyle Helen and John Shackleton Pat Toolan
Observer(s)	Hugh Courtney Cllr Paul Gogarty.

Date of Site Inspection

21st January 2025

Inspector

Terence McLellan

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The appeal site refers to a 2.1 hectare irregularly shaped plot positioned within the southern boundary of Weston Airport. Weston Airport provides what is referred to as 'general aviation' for commercial and economic activities within the aviation sector in Ireland. It is also the base for the National Flight Centre pilot academy. The site is located adjacent to and has an existing access onto the R403 Celbridge Road. Approximately 75m to the north east of the site access is the signalised junction with the L2010 Celbridge Link Road that connects to Adamstown. The site access is currently permitted for use in emergency circumstances only.
- 1.2. The site is partially brownfield, being the location of the previous Weston Airport facilities prior to relocation to the north of the airfield in the mid 2000's, and partially greenfield, taking into account previously undeveloped airside lands on its eastern edge. The site is located to the south of the existing runway and abuts a large area of concrete apron which connects to the runway and taxiways. The southern edge of the site is marked by fencing and a high hedgerow/tree line along the boundary with the R403. The western edge of the site is marked by the existing emergency access road, beyond which is grassland with many mature trees and a high mature hedgerow.
- 1.3. On the other side of the western hedgerow there is a disused access to Westonpark House and lands to the west. This disused access from the R403 is marked by stone walls, chained gates and a vacant entrance lodge showing some signs of disrepair. Westonpark House is a Protected Structure (RPS Ref. 104) which is also listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH Ref. 11204001) and is located approximately 250 metres to the west of the site.
- 1.4. Weston Airport itself is approximately 1km south of Leixlip and 2.5km west of Lucan. All existing airport infrastructure is located to the north of the airfield and accessed from Cooldrinagh Lane. The wider airport site is bounded to the north by Leixlip Reservoir, the River Liffey, and the M4 beyond. The airport itself spans both Kildare County Council and South Dublin County Council although the proposed development is located entirely within the administrative boundary of South Dublin County. To the west the airport is bounded by Cooldrinagh Lane and the neighbouring residential properties and small businesses. To the south the airport is bounded by the R403 Celbridge Road and the adjacent Lucan Golf Club golf course, agricultural lands, and

the Backweston Laboratory Complex. The western boundary of the site is marked by residential use along the R403 and R404 in addition to commercial use and an equestrian use/stud farm.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. Planning permission is sought the development of a Search and Rescue facility (SAR) to be operated by Bristow Ireland Limited on behalf of the Department of Transport and the Irish Coast Guard Service and Rescue Aviation Service.
- 2.2. The development would incorporate the erection of a part single/part two storey SAR helicopter hangar and ancillary facility. The hangar space would be single storey and would measure approximately 41.5 metres in width, 27 metres in depth, and 11.5 metres in height. A two-storey ancillary facility would wrap around the southwest corner of the hangar and would measure approximately 8.4 metres in height, 39.5 metres in width, 10.5 metres in depth on the front elevation, and 21.3 metres in depth as it wraps around the building on the west elevation. The SAR facility would have a combined floorspace of 1,984sqm.
- 2.3. The SAR facility would be capable of accommodating two SAR helicopters in addition to a maintenance store, workshop and facilities, operations rooms and offices, staff kitchen, and accommodation for on-shift personnel. Further airside development would include the formation of an apron area to connect to the existing apron, refuelling area, service access area, and a subdivided fenced compound to accommodate airside SAR support vehicles.
- 2.4. Landside development would include reconfiguration of the existing vehicular access from the R403 Celbridge Road to facilitate a dual emergency access route, pedestrian footpath, and access to the proposed development. This would include a car park for 20 no. vehicles (inclusive of four EV spaces and two accessible spaces), 17 no. cycle parking spaces and all supporting infrastructure and landscaping. A further single storey building would be provided landside (48.9sqm) accommodating an ESB substation, a switch room, and a security office. This would be located at the entrance to the car park.
- 2.5. The SAR facility would include maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) activities for Bristow's fleet of SAR helicopters only, which in addition to Weston, would include

bases at Shannon, Sligo, and Waterford. Only two helicopters would be based at Weston at any one time with the remainder of the fleet rotated through maintenance on a yearly basis.

Further Information

- 2.6. Following the receipt of Additional Information and a subsequent Clarification, the number of on-site car parking spaces was reduced from 20 to 15 and minor alterations took place to the detailed design of the site entrance from the R403.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

- 3.1.1. Notification of the Decision to Grant Permission was issued by South Dublin County Council on the 6th August 2024 subject to 12 generally standard conditions. Conditions of particular note include:

3. (a) The access/egress from the R403 Celbridge Road shall be used only for the development hereby permitted and as a supplementary accident and emergency access/egress to Weston Aerodrome.

(b) The access/gate labelled 'Proposed fencing/Emergency Access point' on drawing Proposed Site Plan drawing number 953A-P-100B(2) shall not be used for any purpose other than as a supplementary accident and emergency access/egress to Weston Aerodrome and at all other times shall remain permanently closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic with the gates securely locked.

Reason: In the interest of traffic safety and the orderly development of Weston Airport.

6. (b) Prior to the commencement of any works associated with the development hereby permitted, the location, design and construction details of the relocated bus stop to be constructed by the applicant/developer and at their own expense shall be submitted for the written agreement of the Planning Authority (Roads). The agreed plan, along with the written agreement of the roads department shall be lodged to the planning file. The written commitment of the

applicant/developer to implement the agreed plan shall also be lodged to the file.

Reason: In the interest of sustainable transport and safety.

7. (Part 11) All the mitigation measures as outlined in section 4 of the Weston Airport SAR Facility Noise Assessment December 2023, and subsequent assessments, shall be fully implemented with particular emphasis on section 4.7 Complaints Procedure. The contact details of the Noise Community Liaison Officer shall be forwarded to the Environmental Health Section in South Dublin County Council to ensure any complaints received by the Environmental Health can be forwarded to the appropriate person.
7. (Part 12). An operational noise monitoring survey shall be carried out within 4 weeks of the commencement of the flights in order to verify the predicted noise levels at noise sensitive locations. The survey shall be carried out during scheduled day time and night time training flights via helicopter. If there is disparity between the predicted noise levels and the actual noise levels on completion of the noise survey a full review of the mitigation measures should take place to ensure the predicted noise levels as set out in the noise assessment report are met.
7. (Part 13). All noise abatement routes and procedures outlined in the 'Noise Abatement Procedures Weston Airport' and 'Non-Technical Executive Summary of Noise Abatement Procedures at Weston Airport' reports shall be implemented unless otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority. Any alterations to flight paths, number of flights, time of the day flights take place etc. shall trigger a new noise monitoring survey which must take place within 4 weeks of the changes. If noise levels at noise sensitive locations are found to have increased on completion of the new noise survey the mitigation measures shall be reviewed and altered as required to ensure the noise levels as set out in the noise assessment report are still being met.

Reason: In the interest of environmental and public health.

12. Prior to the commencement of the SAR service from Weston Airport, the developer shall engage and have in-person meetings (at least 3 no.) with representatives from the Department of Defence and Air Corps as well as

representatives from Civilian Air Traffic Control Service or Irish Aviation Authority to address the concerns in the submissions received by the Air Corps. Following this consultation, the report submitted by Rose Aviation shall be revised to include details of the foregoing (including meeting minutes) and a revised report provided to the Department of Defence and Air Corps and Irish Aviation Service for comment and thereafter submitted to the Planning Authority for its written agreement.

Reason: To improve understanding and agreement in relation to the operation of the SAR service from Weston and Knock-ons for Casement Aerodrome and having regard to Policy IE9 of the CDP - Casement Aerodrome.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. The first Planner's Report (Chief Executive's Order) was issued on the 9th February 2024 and contains the following points of note.

- The proposed development is acceptable in principle, having regard to the zoning objective. The provision of accommodation for on shift personnel is noted, this should be controlled by condition.
- Having considered the Aeronautical Assessment Report and responses from the IAA, it is considered that the development would safeguard the operational, safety, and technical requirements of Weston Airport and would be compliant with Policy IE10.
- The proposed facility is likely to accommodate 550 to 580 flights per annum (inclusive of MRO) which equates to less than 2.7% of the total permitted annual movements for Weston Airport. The relative increase of air traffic associated with the airport is small. Further Information is required in relation to the existing operating hours of Weston Airport and the proposed operating hours, operating hours of maintenance, repair and overhaul air traffic associated with the proposals, and operating hours of emergency air traffic.
- It is not clear if the proposed development is located within the Inner and/or Outer Public Safety Zones of Weston Airport. This should be clarified by Additional Information.

- The siting, scale, and design of the proposed hangar is considered to be visually acceptable. The existing hedgerow along the front of the site, along the R403, would be maintained. The provision of additional landscaping would help integrate the proposal into its setting. Additional Information is required with regards to signage.
- Condition 2 of permission ABP Ref. 233306 restricts the access from the R403 to emergency use only. This was originally the main access to the aerodrome until 2006 when airport facilities and access were moved to the northern side of the airfield with a new access from Cooldrinagh Lane. Its retention was desirable in reducing response times to major incidents and allowing other accesses to remain free from obstruction for use by emergency/ambulance services.
- There is a 6-year road proposal objective along R403 Celbridge Road and 6-year road proposal objectives joining this road in proximity to the access, including the new L2010 Cellbridge Link Road. There are concerns that the permanent use of this access could prejudice the future delivery of these road objectives.
- Concerns raised by the Roads Department (further detail below in section 3.2.6). Additional Information is requested regarding access layout and design, location of the bus stop on the R403, provisions to protect roads objectives, and reduction in car parking numbers.
- Water Services and Uisce Éireann requested Additional Information (more detail below in sections 3.2.7 and 3.3.12 respectively).
- Environmental Health requested Additional Information in relation to noise (more detail below in section 3.2.4).

3.2.2. The first Planner's Report concluded that Additional Information was required regarding permitted and proposed usage, public safety zones, signage, access, car parking, surface and foul water infrastructure, and noise. Additional Information was received on the 2nd April 2024. This was considered significant and revised notices were published on the 25th April 2024. The second Planner's Report, considering the

Additional Information submission, was issued on the 22nd May 2024 and contains the following points of note:

- The development would result in a change in activity at Weston Airport and an increase in the number of movements and operating hours in comparison to existing. This would result in an intensification of the use of Weston Airport.
- IE10 Objectives 1 and 4, require a balanced approach to development at Weston Airport having regard to ensuring the least possible inconvenience to local communities in terms of noise and other relevant impacts.
- The appropriateness of the location is of consideration having regard to the nature of the proposed facility as an emergency service and the need to operate 24-hours. Restricting movements and operating hours would impact the effectiveness of the service. Only emergency related activity should be considered for 24-hour operation.
- A balanced approach will need to be taken to the justification for the proposal and its location, and it is noted that the proposal is for an emergency service that should be facilitated. Having regard to the issues previously mentioned and proximity to noise sensitive premises, insufficient information has been submitted to fully justify the proposed location.
- Clarification of Additional Information was required on the justification for selecting Weston Airport over other airports, the proposed location within Weston Airport itself, details of a masterplan or similar to demonstrate orderly development and avoid piecemeal development, clarification on whether works are required to the airport to facilitate night time flying, address concerns of the Department of Defence.
- Issues regarding public safety zones and signage have been suitably addressed and outstanding matters can be agreed by condition.
- Road issues have generally been addressed but the Planning Authority maintain concerns in relation to the justification for the proposed location and access of the development. The applicant has only assessed alternative access points, leading to the same hangar location resulting in the provision of long internal roads, which would not be desirable in terms of layout and the future

orderly development of the airport. The relocation of the hangar itself has not been considered. Further justification for the hangar location and access is required.

- Clarification of Additional Information was also required regarding a fully designed access point from Celbridge Road, consultation with Dublin Bus/TFI regarding the bus stop, and car parking provision that more accurately reflects the nature and scale of the proposed development.
- Issues regarding drainage and noise were generally considered to be suitably addressed, subject to conditions and noting the issues identified regarding the location and position of the proposal and the Clarification of Further Information sought.
- Concerns have been raised by the Department of Defence, on foot of a letter provided to them from the Irish Air Corps. This relates to concerns regarding previous and ongoing infringements of military airspace, operational impacts on military aviation, and at times the need for avoiding action to mitigate against mid-air collisions resulting from the aforementioned unauthorised penetration of military airspace. Further detail is provided in Section 3.3.1 below.
- The Planning Authority has no role in the management or routing of aircraft or the interaction between controlled airspace and military airspace. The European Coordination Centre for Aviation and Incident Reporting Systems is the relevant regulatory authority and unauthorised penetration into military airspace is a mandatory reportable event.
- As matters of air traffic control and civilian/military airspace are codified and regulated outside the planning system, the imposition of the condition recommended by the Department of Defence/Air Corps is not considered appropriate. However, a condition is recommended to encourage the relevant parties to improve understanding and agreement in relation to the operation of a SAR facility at Weston Airport.

3.2.3. Clarification of Additional Information was requested on the 22nd May 2024, with a response received on the 9th July 2024. The third Planner's Report was issued on the 6th August 2024. This report concluded that the Clarification of Additional Information

addressed the remaining concerns of the Planning Authority and that any outstanding issues could be dealt with by way of condition.

Other Technical Reports

- 3.2.4. **Environmental Health Officer (15.01.24, 15.04.24, 17.04.24):** No objection, subject to conditions. The relevant conditions refer to noise and air pollution prevention at construction phase, implementation of mitigation measures during the operational phase, the completion of an operational noise monitoring survey, implementation of noise abatement routes and procedures.
- 3.2.5. **Public Realm (02.02.24):** The Applicant is to ensure that the landscape plan and SUDS interventions are implemented in full.
- 3.2.6. **Roads Department (18.12.23):** Initial concerns raised regarding the over provision of car parking, excessive width of the entrance, location of the existing bus stop and the potential for the development to interfere with the County's 6 year roads proposals. All of these issues were generally addressed to the Roads Department's satisfaction by way of Additional Information. No objections were then raised to the development, subject to conditions.
- 3.2.7. **Water Services (12.01.24, 11.04.24):** No objections raised in terms of flood risk. Additional Information was requested in relation to surface water, including revisions to the Engineering Services report in terms of run off rates, attenuation, flow controllers, and drainage areas. Concerns were raised that the development incorporates few SUDS features and relies heavily on underground attenuation. SDDC notes the difficulty caused by attracting birds in the aerodrome environment and notes that CIRIA RP992 raises the risk associated with birds but does not prohibit SUDs features and outlines how the risk to aircraft can be mitigated by good ecological design. Following receipt of Additional Information, Water Services raised no further objection to the proposal.

3.3. **Prescribed Bodies**

- 3.3.1. **Department of Defence (08.05.24, 26.07.24):** The Department initially responded with a request for a full aeronautical assessment to ascertain the potential impact on Irish Air Corps operations, including an assessment of the safety and operational effects of the operation of a 24 hour civil aerodrome with priority emergency traffic in

respect of the activity of the Defence Forces at Casement Aerodrome. The second response from the Department of Defence referred to concerns raised by the Irish Air Corps regarding the unauthorised penetration of Military Airspace by aircraft operating to/from Weston Airport and considered the aviation report to be deficient in failing to address this issue.

- 3.3.2. The Department considers that there is at minimum an operational impact on military aviation and at times the need for avoiding action to mitigate against mid-air collisions resulting from the aforementioned unauthorised penetration of Military Airspace. As a result, the consultant's report needs to address these issues before any decisions can be made. The Department suggest a meeting between the Department, the Irish Air Corps and SDCC planners be availed in order to ensure that the relevant deciding officials are fully conversant with the technical aspects of the attached submission.
- 3.3.3. **Irish Air Corps (26.07.24):** The response from the Irish Air Corps (IAC) was prepared for the Department of Defence rather than as an observation on the planning application. The advice to the Department raises concerns with the aviation which fails to address/mitigate the issue of unauthorised penetration of military airspace by aircraft operating at Weston Airport, noting that this is an ongoing issue. The IAC state that this causes disruption, and that avoiding action has had to be taken by military aircraft to prevent a potential mid-air incident/accident.
- 3.3.4. The IAC consider that the proposed 24 hour SAR operation would increase the number of arrivals and departures by non SAR aircraft and, consequently, increase unauthorised penetrations of military airspace and risk to military aircraft. Further issues are raised regarding the use of incorrect charts and the failure to acknowledge the difference between civil aircraft operations in controlled airspace and military operations in military airspace.
- 3.3.5. The IAC consider that priority transit through military airspace may cause a conflict between several safety of life services and it is stated that no consultation has been undertaken regarding Visual Flight Reporting points (VFR) and that some of the protected area for Weston Airport Instrument Flight Procedure penetrate military airspace.
- 3.3.6. Reference is made to the current Letter of Agreement with Weston Airport (dated 2019) which provides a limitation on the maximum number of Instrument Flight Rules

movements per hour at Weston Airport, with the limit to be determined by military air traffic services. The IAC consider the maintenance of this limitation to be necessary for any future Letter of Agreement. A further condition limiting maintenance activity to the nine helicopters operated by Bristow and again limited to four movements per aircraft, per year.

- 3.3.7. The IAC state that the operation of a civilian SAR base at Casement Aerodrome has not been discussed with the relevant parties and the reasons given by Bristow for ruling out Casement are incongruous as, regardless of the location of the helicopter in Weston Airport, it will require military ATS approval to operate, due to proximity and local procedures. The IAC consider the development to be contrary to Policy IE9 of the CDP as it would fail to safeguard the current and future operational, safety, and technical requirements of Casement Aerodrome.
- 3.3.8. **Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) (12.01.24):** No observations.
- 3.3.9. **Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) (22.12.23, 26.04.24, 22.07.24, 08.05.24):** The response notes that TII will rely on the Planning Authority to abide by official policy in relation to development on/affecting national roads and requests that the Council has regard to the provisions of Chapter 3 of the DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines in the assessment and determination of the subject planning application.
- 3.3.10. **Uisce Éireann (12.01.24, 11.04.2024):** Uisce Éireann initially requested Further Information to show details of the proposed foul pump station. A subsequent response from Uisce Éireann confirmed no objection to the proposal subject to the Applicant entering into a water and waste water connection agreement.
- 3.3.11. No consultation responses were received from the Environmental Protection Agency, Kildare County Council, or the National Transport Authority.

3.4. **Third Party Observations**

- 3.4.1. A total of 13 observations were made on the planning application with an additional observation submitted following the Significant Additional Information submission. The observations have been summarised in the Planner's Report and are on file for the Board's information. In my opinion, the issues raised are generally reflected in the grounds of appeal which are set out in detail at Section 6 below.

- 3.4.2. **Councillor Shane Moynihan (22.01.24):** Expansion of Weston to include a 24 hour SAR facility is not aligned to objectives IE10 (1) and IE10 (4) given the intensification of development and inconvenience to local communities. It is not clear if the award of the SAR contract to Bristow is contingent on the offering of an SAR hangar at Weston and if this is the case it does not represent an optimal approach to such development.
- 3.4.3. **Councillor Joanna Tuffy (22.01.24):** Concerns raised regarding noise impacts to nearby residents, particularly those on Cooldrinagh Lane. Some residents have reported severe impacts from noise due to recent SAR helicopters landing at the airport. The Noise Assessment Report lacks assessment of the impact on the immediate housing.

4.0 Planning History

Specific Subject Site

- 4.1. **ABP Reference 233306/Planning Authority Reference SD08A/0729:** Permission was granted by the Board in July 2009 for the retention of the existing access (to the former airport buildings) from the R403 (Celbridge Road) for emergency purposes, and for permission for the erection of a security fence on the airport side of the existing access. Condition 2 of this permission reads as follows:
2. The access from the R403 Celbridge Road shall be used only as a supplementary accident and emergency access/egress to Weston Aerodrome. It shall not be used for any purpose other than as a supplementary accident and emergency access/egress and at all other times shall remain permanently closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic with the gates securely locked.
- Reason:** In the interest of traffic safety.
- 4.2. **ABP Reference 220352/Planning Authority Reference SD05A/0938:** In March 2008, the Board refused permission to vary condition 10 of ABP-131149 to retain a bungalow and existing offices, and Condition 7 to retain the access as emergency access. Permission was refused for the following reasons:
1. It is considered that the proposed retention of the former dwelling within the aerodrome site for use as a residence and for offices associated with flight training would facilitate an intensification of use of Weston Aerodrome and

would result in a development providing substandard residential amenity for future residents. The proposed development would constitute disorderly development and would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2. Having regard to the location of the proposed entrance to be retained for emergency purposes on a heavily trafficked Regional road, to the provision of a dedicated access junction on this Regional road to serve Weston Aerodrome and to the lack of any justification of the need for an additional access at this location, it is considered that the proposed development would endanger public safety by reason of a traffic hazard and would constitute disorderly development of the aerodrome. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area

4.3. **Planning Authority Reference SD05A/0861:** Permission was refused by South Dublin County Council in December 2005 for the construction of an Aviation Museum, consisting of aircraft display areas, equipment display areas, reception area, coffee dock, library, souvenir shop, lecture rooms, administration offices and 269 car parking spaces with access from proposed roundabout on Celbridge Road. Permission was refused for the following reasons:

1. Having regard to the size and scale of the proposed aviation museum (22,490sq m), it is considered that the proposal would be inconsistent with the character of the development permitted within the greenbelt, would compromise the character of the green belt and would be contrary to the zoning objective which seeks to "preserve a green belt between development areas.
2. Having regard to the siting and design of the proposed building parallel to the runway with the façade 100m from the centreline of the runway, the proposed development would endanger or interfere with the safety of aircraft and their safe and efficient navigation.
3. The proposed development would be premature pending the determination of a road layout in the area, for the Regional/District Distributor Road from Adamstown SDZ to the Celbridge Road R403 by the Roads Authority.

4. The proposed development would endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard due to the generation of additional traffic turning movements on to this heavily trafficked regional route Celbridge Road R403.

- 4.4. **ABP Reference 131149/Planning Authority Reference S01A/0822:** The Board issued a split decision relating to the demolition of existing hangars, construction of new hangars (15,741 m²), office and club house (1,125 m²), 180 car parking spaces and aircraft parking with a new access off R403 and all associated development works. The Board refused permission for the development of hangars A-E together with the adjoining carparking and granted permission to the remainder of the development.
- 4.5. In refusing permission for hangars A to E and the associated car parking, the Board considered that this aspect of the proposal would constitute a greatly expanded development resulting in a significant intensification of use of Weston aerodrome which would be inconsistent with the existing use and character of the aerodrome. The Board were not satisfied, on the basis of the submissions made in connection with the planning application and the appeal, that such intensification of use would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity. The development of hangars A-E would, therefore, contravene the zoning provisions for the area - to preserve a green belt between development areas - and would be contrary to the proper planning and development of the area.
- 4.6. Conditions 5(b) and 7 of this permission required the existing access in the south-western corner of the site (the current subject site access) to be permanently closed off.

Wider Weston Airport Site

- 4.7. **Planning Authority Reference SD22A/0345:** Permission was granted by South Dublin County Council in March 2023 for alterations, extension, and upgrades to the existing terminal building and all ancillary site development works.
- 4.8. **ABP Reference 235146/Planning Authority Reference 08/2018 (Kildare County Council):** Permission was refused by the Board in August 2010 for the relocation of existing runways 07 and 25 to include the provision of Precision Approach Path Indicators. Permission was refused for the following reason:

Having regard to the proposed increase in runway length and the revised location of the thresholds of Runways 07 and 25 and their proximity to the boundaries of the wider aerodrome complex and the adjoining properties in the vicinity, the Board is not satisfied, on the basis of the submissions made in connection with the planning application and the appeal, that the proposed development would not negatively impact on the amenities of said properties by reason of increased noise, nuisance and general disturbance. The Board is also not satisfied that the wider land use planning implications of the proposed development for lands in the general vicinity in County Kildare have been properly identified and assessed.

Furthermore, having regard to the planning history of Weston Aerodrome, and in particular Condition Number 2 attached to the permission granted by An Bord Pleanála on the 5th day of December, 2003, under Appeal Reference Number PL 06S. 131149, it is considered that neither the application nor the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has adequately identified the baseline air traffic types and volumes permitted or those types and volumes using the aerodrome in recent years, nor identified any changes that would be facilitated by the proposed development. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area

Note: The Board considered that any future development proposals for the aerodrome would more properly be assessed in the context of a clearly stated, comprehensive plan for Weston arrived at in cooperation with the relevant public authorities, including Kildare County Council and South Dublin County Council, rather than by continuing piecemeal modifications

- 4.9. **ABP 231394/Planning Authority Reference SD08A/0328:** Permission was refused by the Board in March 2009 for the construction of 6 no. conjoined light aircraft hangers located to the northeast of the existing hangars at the northern end of the airport and all associated site works and services. Permission was refused for the following reason:

Having regard to the scale of development proposed relative to permitted operations at Weston Aerodrome, it is considered that the proposed development would constitute a greatly expanded development resulting in a significant intensification of use of Weston aerodrome which would be inconsistent with the

existing use and of the aerodrome. The Board is not satisfied, on the basis of the submissions made in connection with the planning application and the appeal, that such intensification of use would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and development of the area.

- 4.10. **ABP Reference 232683/Planning Authority Reference SD08A/0779:** Permission was refused by the Board in September 2009 for the relocation of the existing runways 07 and 25 to include the provision of Precision Approach Path Indicators. Permission was refused for the following reason:

Having regard to the proposed increase in runway length and the revised location of the thresholds of Runways 07 and 25 and their proximity to the boundaries of the wider aerodrome complex and the adjoining properties in the vicinity, the Board is not satisfied, on the basis of the submissions made in connection with the planning application and appeal, that the full nature and extent of the changes in the noise environment, or the extent of the areas and populations which would be impacted on by any such changes, including implications for public safety, have been satisfactorily identified and quantified.

Furthermore, having regard to the planning history of Weston Aerodrome, and in particular Condition 2 attached to the permission granted (in 2003) under file ref. PL06S 131149, it is considered that neither the application nor the EIS has identified the baseline air traffic types and volumes permitted or those types and volumes using the aerodrome in recent years, nor identified any changes that would be facilitated by the proposed development. It is also considered that the EIS has significantly failed to identify the impacts of the proposed development resulting from the changes proposed to Runway 25.

Having regard to the above, it is considered that the EIS is seriously deficient in identifying the likely significant effects of the proposed development and their impact on the environment and on people living and working in the vicinity. The proposed development, therefore, fails to comply with the requirements of Schedule 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended and fails to establish that the proposed development is not contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

- 4.11. **ABP Reference 216262/Planning Authority Reference SD05A/0924:** Permission was granted by the Board in May 2006 for alterations to the hard shoulder on either side of the runway.
- 4.12. **ABP Reference 213403/Planning Authority Reference SD05A/0312:** In December 2005 the Board granted permission for revision, alteration and retention to approved office/club house, hanger and car park layout approved under S01A/0822 (ABP-131149).
- 4.13. **ABP Reference: 213348/Planning Authority Reference 04/2141 (Kildare):** Permission was refused by the Board in December 2005 for the change of use and retention of extension of farm buildings for use as aircraft hangars. Permission was refused for the following reason:

Having regard to the location of the site in an isolated and separate location away from the main aerodrome facilities to the northeast of the aerodrome, it is considered that the proposed development is unacceptable in terms of the orderly development by reason of facilitating an intensification of use of the aerodrome in a piecemeal way, which would conflict with the terms and conditions of the permission granted on the site reference number PL06S.131149, which provided for the overall reordering of the aerodrome. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

- 4.13.1. The direction also noted that The Board would have concerns that the development subject of this application would lead to an intensification of use of an existing access onto a busy regional road which would endanger public safety, however, as this would constitute a new issue it was decided not to pursue the issue having regard to the substantive reason for refusal.
- 4.13.2. **ABP Reference 211459/Planning Authority Reference SD04A/0954:** Permission was refused by the Board in July 2005 for the construction of a 95 bedroom hotel/conference and leisure centre in a two storey building with dormer attic level and car parking for 340 number cars with associated site works all within the curtilage/attendant grounds of Weston Park House (a protected structure) and all in the grounds of site of Weston Airport. Permission was refused for the following reasons:

1. The site of the proposed development is located in an area zoned GB in the South Dublin County Development Plan 2004-2010 where it is an objective of the planning authority to preserve a green belt between development areas. This zoning objective is considered reasonable. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and to the size of the site, it is considered that the proposed development would contravene materially a development objective indicated in the development plan for the zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes and would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
2. It is considered that the site of the proposed development is located within the attendant grounds of Weston Park House which is listed for protection in the South Dublin County Development Plan 2004-2010 and that the proposed development by reason of its design and location, would detract, to an undue degree, from the character and setting of the protected structure. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
3. It is considered that the proposed hotel design by reason of its scale and massing and use of inappropriate design features such as the mansard roof and large open portico to the front entrance would be visually obtrusive when viewed from the Celbridge Road and would, therefore, detract from the rural amenities of the area. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028

- 5.1.1. The site is zoned Objective RU which aims 'To protect and improve rural amenity and to provide for the development of agriculture'. Aerodrome/Airfield are permitted in principle.
- 5.1.2. Chapter 3: Natural, Cultural and Built Heritage seeks to protect and enhance the key natural, cultural and built heritage assets which have shaped South Dublin County and

continue to create a sense of place and local distinctiveness, including the diverse landscapes, the varied flora and fauna, the historic buildings and streetscapes, and the rich archaeological history, for current and future generations to appreciate and enjoy. The relevant policies from this chapter include:

- NCBH1: Overarching
- NCBH2: Biodiversity
- NCBH5: Protection of Habitats and Species Outside of Designated Areas
- NCBH11: Tree Preservation Orders and Other Tree / Hedgerow Protections
- NCBH14: Landscapes
- NCBH19: Protected Structures

5.1.3. Chapter 4: Green Infrastructure seeks to promote the development of an integrated GI network for South Dublin County working with and enhancing existing biodiversity and natural heritage, improving resilience to climate change and enabling the role of green infrastructure in delivering sustainable communities to provide environmental, economic and social benefits. The relevant policies from this section include:

- GI1: Overarching
- GI2: Biodiversity
- GI3: Sustainable Water Management
- GI4: Sustainable Drainage Systems
- GI7: Landscape, Natural, Cultural and Built Heritage
- Strategic Corridor 6: Rural Fringe Corridor

5.1.4. Chapter 5: Quality Design and Healthy Placemaking seeks to create a leading example in sustainable urban design and healthy placemaking that delivers attractive, connected, vibrant and well-functioning places to live, work, visit, socialise and invest in. The relevant policies from this section include:

- QDP7: High Quality Design – Development General
- QDP11: Materials, Colours and Textures
- QDP12: Sustainable Rural Neighbourhoods

5.1.5. Chapter 7: Sustainable Movement aims to increase the number of people walking, cycling and using public transport and reduce the need for car journeys, resulting in a more active and healthy community, a more attractive public realm, safer streets, less congestion, reduced carbon emissions, better air quality, quieter neighbourhoods and a positive climate impact. The relevant policies from this chapter include:

- SM1: Overarching – Transport and Movement
- SM2: Walking and Cycling
- 7.7.2 New Street and Road Proposals (Six Year Road Programme)
- SM6: Traffic and Transport Management
- SM7: Car Parking and EV Charging

5.1.6. Chapter 11: Infrastructure and Environmental Services sets out the Council's vision to create an environment characterised by high quality infrastructure networks and environmental services to ensure the health and wellbeing of those who live and work in the County, securing also the economic future of the County. The relevant policies from this section include:

- IE1: Overarching Policy
- IE2: Water Supply and Wastewater
- IE3: Surface Water and Groundwater
- IE8: Environmental Quality
- IE9: Casement Aerodrome - Safeguard, having regard to the requirements of the Department of Defence, the current and future operational, safety and technical requirements of Casement Aerodrome and facilitate its ongoing development for military and ancillary uses.
 - IE9 Objective 1: To ensure the safety of military and other air traffic, present and future, to and from Casement Aerodrome with full regard for the safety of persons on the ground as well as the necessity for causing the least possible inconvenience to local communities.
 - IE9 Objective 2: To maintain the airspace around Casement aerodrome free from obstacles to facilitate aircraft operations to be conducted

safely, as identified in the Development Plan Index map and Map 12 and as outlined in Chapter 12: Implementation and Monitoring.

- IE9 Objective 3: To implement the principles of shielding in assessing proposed development in the vicinity of Aerodromes, having regard to Section 3.23 of the Irish Aviation Authority Guidance Material on Aerodrome Annex 14 Surfaces (2015) (See Chapter 12: Implementation and Monitoring).
- IE9 Objective 4: To prohibit and restrict development in the environs of Casement aerodrome, where it may cause a safety hazard. (See also Policy IE13 Public Safety Zones and Chapter 12: Implementation and Monitoring).
- IE10: Weston Airport - Safeguard, having regard to the requirements of the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), the current and future operational, safety and technical requirements of Weston Airport and prevent encroachment of development around the airport which may interfere with its safe operation, in the context of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and the protection of surrounding amenities.
 - IE10 Objective 1: To safeguard air traffic to and from Weston Airport while ensuring the least possible inconvenience to local communities and with full regard for the safety of persons on the ground (see also section 11.7.7 Public Safety Zones).
 - IE10 Objective 2: To maintain the airspace around the airport free from obstacles so as to facilitate aircraft operations to be conducted safely, including restricting development in the environs of the aerodrome, as identified by the Obstacle Limitation surfaces shown on the Development Plan Index map and Map 12 and as outlined in Chapter 12: Implementation and Monitoring.
 - IE10 Objective 3: To prohibit and restrict development in the environs of Weston Airport, where it may cause a safety hazard to the operation of the airport.

- IE10 Objective 4: To ensure a balanced approach to any further lengthening of the permitted runway or over-run areas having regard to the need for environmental and other assessments including noise and assessment of the impact on local communities.
- IE10 Objective 5: The Planning Authority will engage with Kildare County Council, to guide the consideration of applications for development at Weston Airport having regard to national, regional and local climate action plans
- IE13: Noise - Discourage noise-sensitive developments in the immediate vicinity of airports and aerodromes.
- IE14: Public Safety Zones - Improve protection for the public on the ground, in the event of an aircraft crash occurring, through the provision of Inner and Outer Public Safety Zones around airports.

5.2. Regional Policy

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031

- 7.8 - Local authorities shall incorporate the objectives of the EU Environmental Noise Directive in the preparation of strategic noise maps and action plans that support proactive measures to avoid, mitigate, and minimise noise, in cases where it is likely to have harmful effects.
- 8.2 - Spatial planning policies for areas located within the Public Safety Zones shall reflect the guidance set out in the ERM Report “Public Safety Zones, 2005” (or any update thereof) commissioned by the then Department of Transport and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in assessing proposals for development falling within Airport Public Safety Zones.

5.3. National Policy

The National Planning Framework - Project Ireland 2040

- NPO27: Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling

accessibility to both existing and proposed developments and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.

- NPO52: The planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits, having regard to the requirements of all relevant environmental legislation and the sustainable management of our natural capital.
- NPO65: Promote the pro-active management of noise where it is likely to have significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life and support the aims of the Environmental Noise Regulations through national planning guidance and Noise Action Plans.

5.4. Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines

5.4.1. Having considered the nature of the proposal, I consider that the directly relevant section 28 Ministerial Guidelines and other national policy documents are:

- Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (August 2018)
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities, Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government, (2009).

5.5. Other Relevant Guidance

- Dublin Agglomeration Noise Action plan 2024-2028.
- European Noise Directive (2002/49/EC).
- International Standards and Recommended Practices' within Annex 14 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).
- Irish Aviation Authority Guidance Material on Aerodrome Annex 14 Surfaces (2015).
- World Health Organisation Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region (ENG) (2018)
- World Health Organization Guidelines for Community Noise (GCN) (1999).

5.6. Natural Heritage Designations

- 5.6.1. The site is not located in or immediately adjacent to any European sites. The nearest European site is the Rye Water Valley/Carnton SAC (Site Code 001398) c.1.55km to the north and this includes the Rye Water Valley/Carnton proposed natural heritage area (pNHA). The Liffey Valley Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) is located c.1.56km to the north-east of the site.

5.7. EIA Screening

Introduction

- 5.7.1. The application addresses the issue of EIA within an EIA Screening Report prepared by Arup, dated 7th December 2023, that contains information provided in line with Schedule 7A of the Planning Regulations and which seeks to demonstrate that there is no requirement for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the proposed development. Section 3 of the report relates to the screening methodology and confirms that the screening assessment has been undertaken in accordance with OPR Practice Note PN02 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening 2021. This advocates a three-step approach to screening. Step 1 seeks to determine if a proposal is a project within the meaning of the EIA Directive and, on foot of this, if the development would be of class as set out in Schedule 5 Part 1 or 2 and if it would constitute sub-threshold development.
- 5.7.2. Step 2 requires a preliminary examination of sub-threshold development (nature, size, and location) to conclude if there is a likelihood of significant effects on the environment. Step 3 requires a screening determination to be carried out on the basis of Schedule 7A information where the requirement to carry out an EIA is not excluded at preliminary examination stage.
- 5.7.3. The Applicant's screening report has regard to the criteria set out in in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended (the 2001 Regs), and to the requirements under Schedule 7A of the 2001 Regs. This section also confirms that the assessment has had regard to the relevant annexes of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (Annexes I, II, and II(13)(a)).

- 5.7.1. Where an application is made for subthreshold development and Schedule 7A information is submitted, the Board must carry out a screening determination in line with the requirements of Article 109(2B)(a) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), therefore, it cannot screen out the need for EIA at preliminary examination.

Mandatory Thresholds

- 5.7.2. This proposed development is of a class of development included in Schedule 5 of the Planning Regulations. Schedule 5 to Part 2 of the Planning Regulations provides that mandatory EIA is required for the following classes of development that are of relevance to the proposal:

- Class 10(b)(iv) - Urban development, which would involve an area greater than 2 ha in the case of a business district*, 10 ha in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 ha elsewhere. *a 'business district' means a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use.

- 5.7.3. The screening report gives the site area as 2.21 hectares which is significantly below the above threshold. A mandatory EIA is therefore not required on the basis of class 10 (b)(iv).

- 5.7.4. Further potentially relevant thresholds in addition to that reviewed by the Applicant include:

- Schedule 5, Part 1, Class 7: A line for long-distance railway traffic, or an airport with a basic runway length of 2,100 metres or more.

- 5.7.5. This would not apply to Weston Airport or the proposed development which does not propose any works to the runway.

- Schedule 5, Part 2, Class 10(d): All airfields not included in Part 1 of this Schedule with paved runways which would exceed 800 metres in length.

- 5.7.6. Again, this would not apply to the proposal which does not relate to the construction of an airfield but rather supplementary development to an existing airport.

- Schedule 5, Part 2, Class 13(a) Any change or extension of development already authorised, executed or in the process of being executed (not being a change or extension referred to in Part 1) which would:-

- (i) result in the development being of a class listed in Part 1 or paragraphs 1 to 12 of Part 2 of this Schedule, and
- (ii) result in an increase in size greater than – - 25 per cent, or - an amount equal to 50 per cent of the appropriate threshold, whichever is the greater.

5.7.7. I do not consider that the proposed development would require mandatory EIA on the basis of the aforementioned threshold.

Sub Threshold Development

5.7.8. Item (15)(b) of Part 2, Schedule 5 of the Regulations provides that EIA will be required for 'Any project listed in this Part which does not exceed a quantity, area or other limit specified in this Part in respect of the relevant class of development, but which would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7'.

5.7.9. Environmental Impact Assessment is required for development proposals of a class specified in Part 1 or 2 of Schedule 5 that are sub-threshold where the Board determines that the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. For all sub-threshold developments listed in Schedule 5 Part 2, where no EIAR is submitted or EIA determination requested, a screening determination is required to be undertaken by the competent authority unless, on preliminary examination it can be concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.

5.7.10. The Applicant's Screening Report provides the necessary information for screening this sub-threshold development for Environmental Impact Assessment and I am satisfied that the report and the other information submitted with the application includes the information specified in Schedule 7A of the Regulations, and that the information has been compiled taking into account the relevant criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Regulations.

5.7.11. The reports submitted with the application address a variety of environmental issues and the environmental impacts of the proposed development, including assessing the potential for cumulative impact. The reports demonstrate that, subject to the various mitigation measures, the proposed development would not have a significant impact

on the environment. I have had regard to the characteristics of the site, the location of the proposed development, and the type and characteristics of the potential impacts. Having regard to the Schedule 7A information, I have examined the sub-criteria and all submissions, and I have considered all information that accompanied the application and appeal, including the following:

- Aeronautical Assessment Report December 2023
- Appropriate Assessment Stage 1 Screening Report December 2023
- Architectural Design Statement
- Outline Construction Management Plan December 2023
- Construction Waste Management Plan December 2023
- Ecological Impact Assessment December 2023
- Engineering Services Report December 2023
- Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment December 2023
- Landscape Architecture Report
- Weston Airport SAR Facility Noise Assessment December 2023
- Planning Report December 2023
- Site Lighting Report December 2023
- Traffic Impact Statement December 2023
- Utilities & Energy Report December 2023
- Wind Shear & Turbulence Analysis November 2023
- Noise Abatement Procedures Weston Airport March 2024
- SAR Aircraft Impact on Military Airspace July 2024
- Non Technical Executive Summary of Noise Abatement June 2024
- Weston Airport Outline Business Plan 2021-2024

5.7.12. I have completed an EIA screening assessment of the proposed development with respect to all relevant considerations, as set out in Appendix 2 to this report. Having regard to:

- The nature and scale of the proposed development, which is below the threshold in respect of Class 7 of Part 1 and Classes 10(b)(i)(iv), 10(d), and 13((a)(i)(ii) of Part 2 to Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2022;

- The location of the proposed development on existing airport lands where aerodrome/airfield is permitted in principle;
- The nature of the existing site and the intensity of the existing use;
- The availability of mains water and wastewater services to serve the proposed development;
- The location of the development outside of any sensitive location specified in Article 109(4)(a)(v)(I-VII) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as revised;
- The guidance set out in the 'Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-threshold Development', issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2003);
- The criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as revised, and;

5.7.13. The features and measures proposed by the Applicant that are envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise be significant effects on the environment, including measures identified to be provided in the Outline Construction Management Plan, Construction Waste Management Plan, Ecological Impact Assessment, Engineering Services Report, Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment, Weston Airport SAR Facility Noise Assessment, and the Noise Abatement Procedures Weston Airport.

5.7.14. I am satisfied that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and that the preparation and submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report would not, therefore, be required.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

6.1.1. Four Third Party appeals have been submitted against the decision of South Dublin County Council to grant permission for the development.

6.1.2. **Appeal 1 - Helen and John Shackleton, Long Acre, Coneyboro, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.**

- The surrounding area is mainly rural and this is reflected in the agricultural zoning for the area, which includes the airport. Airport use is permitted in principle under the CDP.
- The development is in a location far removed from the existing facilities, constitutes piecemeal development of the site, and does not make sense from an orderly planning perspective.
- Development of hanger space should logically be adjacent to existing structures on the site. Hangers already exist on lands well removed from the main road.
- The location and size of the proposed hangers will cause serious visual intrusion to the rural area and will be clearly visible from the R403.
- The proposed access onto the R403 would be contrary to previously imposed planning conditions which limited this access to emergency use only.
- The proposed access has poor sight lines onto a busy main R403 and would be in close proximity to the junction with the new Adamstown Road (Celbridge Link Road).
- Noise increases will be an intrusion which is not reflected in decibels. There is already extensive noise and disturbance from the existing activity.
- There are safety concerns regarding aircraft/helicopter accidents, given the site's location next to three major townships (Celbridge, Leixlip, and Lucan).
- The prospect of night flying causes anxiety.

6.1.3. Appeal 2 - John Colgan, The Toll House, Dublin Road Street, Leixlip, Co. Kildare.

- The proposal affects three administrative counties. The Planning Authority have largely ignored the impact on Co. Kildare.
- There are at least seven Protected Structures the airfield, and none of them are considered by the Planning Authority.
- The impact on residential areas of Weston Airport's agreement not to fly over industrial plants or the military airspace at Casement has been ignored by the Planning Authority. This is particularly relevant given previous incidents at Intel.
- The Planning Authority have not considered the impact of any collision with Irish Water's Leixlip plant and hydroelectric dam.

- It has been submitted by others that there have been 13 accidents at Weston Airport and almost all other submissions reference significant noise impacts which are a nuisance to homes and businesses.
- There is no aircraft noise competent authority for Weston Airport and recently published proposals for aircraft noise measuring elsewhere have not included the area proximate to Weston Airport.
- The Planning Authority's consideration of individual submissions is insufficient, instead considering submissions collectively which diminishes their significance. The CEO's consideration fails to note that they all oppose the grant of planning permission.
- There is no evidence that the airport is operating in compliance with the rules of the air. There does not appear to be any active or onsite policing of the airport by the IAA, and the existing training licence ought to be withdrawn.
- Weston Airport operates in contempt for its neighbours in terms of low-flying, noisy, silencer-free training and hobby planes, in pursuit of cost minimisation and facilitated by a conflicted Irish Aviation Authority.
- Previous permissions granted by the Board oblige the relevant Planning Authorities to ensure that no residential developments be permitted that would hinder the development of Weston Airport. There is no evidence that this policy has been implemented as lands near the airport are being developed for housing that will inevitably be subject to noise, air pollution, and safety hazards.
- The Applicant has failed to demonstrate that they have sought to establish this facility at Casement Aerodrome which already houses the Garda helicopter.
- No approach was made to the Air Corps authorities, as confirmed by the submission on the file representing the most senior Air Corps Officer.
- Alternative locations are very likely to be available.
- The development is incongruous with the zoning of land for rural and agricultural use, as approved by elected officials. The grant of permission is contemptuous of the elected Council.

6.1.4. **Appeal 3 - Tony Doyle, Coneyboro, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.**

Transport and Traffic

- The proposed development would endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard, and, by itself or by the precedent which the grant of permission would set for other relevant development, would adversely affect the use of a national road or other major road by traffic.
- The development would rely on the R403, a busy regional road. The nearby junction with the Celbridge Link Road has a theoretical maximum capacity of 28,000 vehicles per day. Previous Board decisions, including ABP-233306 (2009), have maintained that the proposed site access from the R403 should be for emergency use only, in the interests of traffic safety.
- There has since been significant development in the area and traffic on this route has materially increased.
- The Planning Authority granted permission in the absence of a proper Traffic Risk Assessment regarding the use of the access, relevant traffic data was not submitted by the Applicant, and the Planning Authority did not give reasons for departing from the previous condition limiting the use of the access to emergency only.
- The development could lead to serious danger to human health due to the risk of or in the event of a major accident.
- The SAR facility is adjacent to a public road and its operation, including loud noises and take off/landing operations at all hours could be distracting to drivers and pose a traffic and safety risk.
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland did not consider that the Additional Information adequately addressed its concerns.
- Further traffic and road safety concerns that remain unresolved by the Planning Authority include the proposed relocation of the bus stop on the R403.

Zoning and Development Plan

- The Planning Authority considered the existing Aerodrome/Airfield use of the site to be consistent with the rural zoning objective but did not assess if a SAR facility would be permissible, either in its own right or within the definition of an Aerodrome/Airfield.

- Helicopters are intrusive, causing noise and vibration and the use of Weston Airport for this purpose is not consistent with either the existing use, or the zoning objective RU.
- The Planning Authority opted to deal with the Department of Defence concerns by way of condition. The condition requires the Applicant to enter into negotiations with the Department to agree necessary modifications to protect its airspace. The development does not comply with CDP objectives for Casement and the development will need to be modified in light of the Department's requirements.

Amenity

- The proposed development would endanger the health or safety of the Appellant (including family and visitors), and the development would be prejudicial to public health.
- The development would seriously injure the amenities of, and depreciate the value of, the Appellant's property.
- The development would cause serious air pollution, noise pollution, and vibration.
- The development would significantly intensify aviation activity at the airport and the SAR would operate outside of the currently permitted operating hours of the airport.
- Noise mitigation proposals are insufficient and include non-binding policies which pilots will be entitled to deviate from at their discretion.
- The Appellant proposes flight exclusion zones.

Stud Farm

- The Appellant operates a successful stud farm. The horses are particularly vulnerable to severe noise and vibration from aircraft (including helicopters) flying at low heights. The introduction of a 24hr SAR facility would have a significant adverse impact on the Appellant/family and stud farm, particularly due to the introduction of noise at night.
- The stud farm, which has operated in excess of 100 years, is entitled to protection under Policy EDE18, Objective 1 of the CDP which seeks to support

and facilitate sustainable agriculture, horticulture, forestry and other rural enterprises at suitable locations in the County.

- Horses have a greater hearing range and a lower noise threshold than humans. The Board are requested to consider the Veterinary Report submitted with the appeal which states that noise, light flashes, and unknown odours can impact on the health of horses, causing anxiety, fear, and injury. Noise management strategies have been shown to be ineffective.
- Yearlings reared by the Appellant would not be accustomed to noise (tonal and impulsive) or loud environments. Previous decisions by the Board have required clearly audible and impulsive tones at noise sensitive locations during the evening and night to be avoided. The proposed operation of SAR night-time training between September to April is during peak foaling season.
- Nighttime operations and forcing the helicopters to use the axis of the runway for take-off and landing would increase flight movements above the Appellant's land and have significant impacts on the animals and the people attending to them.
- The Veterinary Report makes it clear that the development would have very significant impacts on the stud farm, to the extent that its current operations may well have to cease. This would be a significant risk to the Appellant in terms of the operation of their business, way of life, enjoyment of property, livelihood, and mental health.

Planning History

- There is a history of unauthorised development at Weston Airport. On a recent Section 5 application to Kildare County Council (KCC) regarding the installation of a visual aid system, the position of KCC appeared to be that there is no authorised runway in KCC's operational area. This is an obvious hinderance to the airport's primary function.
- Previous refusals by the Board are relevant. On ABP-235146 the Inspector found the concerns of the Appellant valid and shared concerns regarding impacts on the Appellant and the stud farm.
- The development is premature given that the main operation at Weston Airport lacks the requisite planning permission for its operation. It would not be

appropriate to grant permission for ancillary development until the main development is authorised.

Piecemeal Development

- A previous Board decision stated that future development proposals would more properly be assessed in the context of a comprehensive plan for Weston (including cooperation with relevant public authorities) rather than by continuing piecemeal modifications.
- The Applicant failed to submit a comprehensive plan, and the proposal represents piecemeal development of the airport that would contravene materially a condition attached to an existing permission.
- There has been no prior consultation or engagement.
- The Weston Airport Outline Business Plan 2021-2024 is not a spatial plan or masterplan, it is an outline document, lacking precision, finality and vague/unenforceable, with no evidence of any engagement and falls below what the Board would have expected for a proposed development like this.
- The document strongly suggests that the principle intended use of the airport is for executive jets, not as an SAR facility, which would be ancillary. There is no mention of SAR facilities.
- In the absence of a comprehensive strategic masterplan, it is impossible to determine whether the proposed SAR facility would be truly ancillary to the existing use of Weston Airport for executive jets, or whether it would expand at that location.
- If whether the proposed SAR facility would constrain airport operations at Weston or result in restrictions being imposed on the airport by the Department of Defence.

Safe Air Operations

- The development could endanger or interfere with the safety of aircraft or their safe and efficient navigation. Operations subject to this planning application could lead to serious danger to human health or the environment.
- The Irish Air Corps and the Department of Defence raise significant concerns with the information submitted with the application as well as the potential

impact of the development on safety and operational efficiency of aircraft operating in and around military airspace.

- The development would be contrary to Policy IE9 of the SDCC CDP.
- The decision to grant includes a planning condition intended to address these issues, however, there is no mechanism for adjusting the balance of the permission in light of any changes imposed or required by the Air Corps or the Department of Defence.

Conditions

- It is unclear why permission is being granted for the SAR facility in perpetuity. The base can only be used by Bristow for 10-13 years, unless a further contract was awarded. Previous judgements (IEHC453) have stated that the Board needed to fully explain why permission was granted for longer than the required period.
- The proposed planning decision contains poorly drafted and weak conditions.
- Condition 5 (Mitigation Measures) – There is no time limit by which the mitigation measures must be implemented. The condition is vague and unenforceable.
- Condition 7(1) (Environmental Health) – The condition envisages SDCC as a conduit for complaints but does not commit to any action on foot of the complaints.
- Condition 7(12) (Environmental Health) - One-off noise monitoring within the first four weeks of operation would give only a brief snapshot of noise on a particular day. The parameters of the noise survey are too broad and open ended to establish an appropriate baseline. No monitoring has been undertaken at or in the vicinity of the Appellant's property. The condition is silent on the scope and specification of noise monitoring or the standards to be complied with.
- Condition 7 (13) (Environmental Health) – This condition is necessary due to the lack of detailed information in the application. The condition does not specify the parameters under which agreement would be reached and the Appellant would have no input and would not be party to the process. The condition would be hard to enforce due to the lack of detail or parameters.

Noise sensitive locations have not been laid down in this condition which is potentially an issue given the strong community response against this development.

- Condition 12 (Department of Defence/Air Corps) - The application has been submitted prematurely and without the necessary engagement. This condition could lead to the revision of the Rose Aviation report, including flight pathways. This could change the magnitude/scope of impact on the Appellant/stud farm with no opportunity to be heard.

6.1.5. Appeal 4 - Pat Toolan, Gurteen, Dublin Road, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

Amenity

- There would be unacceptable harm to the living conditions, residential amenity, and development potential of the Appellant's land.
- There would be a clear, material, and significant intensification of use (movements and operating hours), compared to existing.
- The development would be in clear contravention of the SDCC Development Plan. Including in terms of zoning, IE10 Objective 1 and IE10 Objective 2, which require a balanced approach to development at Weston Airport, having regard to ensuring the least possible inconvenience to local communities in terms of noise and other relevant impacts.
- Proximity to residential areas should be noted as should the protection of residential amenity. Numerous residents have voiced concern regarding the development.

Location

- Reasonable consideration has not been given to alternative locations for the proposed SAR base, with only Dublin Airport and Baldonnell (Casement) considered as alternatives.
- There is another reasonable alternative to the proposed site. This refers to the existing heliport and helicopter maintenance facility just north of Dublin Airport that was shortlisted by the existing operator of the SAR helicopter service.
- This alternative location would address training operations, future expansion, and have a shorter distance to the coast. There would be benefits in terms of

less hours flown, reduced emissions, less disturbance and reduced flights over the city centre and less risk of accident by intensifying operations over a congested area.

Hours of Operation

- The airport does not currently operate outside the hours of 08:00-20:00. Proposed operation on a 24/7 basis would injure to the amenity of residents and businesses in the local area and would contravene the CDP, would be contrary to the zoning, and would represent the intensification of development that is not in line with the proper and sustainable development of the local area.
- These matters have been raised on previous applications and conditions were used to restrict hours and safeguard amenity. Conditions to restrict operating hours or movements in this case would impact on the effectiveness of the emergency service.
- It is not possible to strike a balance between successful operation of the SAR facility whilst protecting local amenity.
- The nature of SAR is unpredictable, and the number of flights estimated to take place between 08:00am and 08:00pm could change significantly. It would represent a significant intensification of duration of daily activity and late/early flight operations should be considered on the context of the presiding zoning of the area and proximity to residential zoned land. This would materially contravene the CDP.

Noise

- The addition of 24 hour operation every day of the year with a significantly higher noise output than existing typical aircraft operating at Weston would result in a significant increase in noise (in the order of 2.53 times existing levels) over the course of the year.
- There are anomalies in movement numbers referenced in the noise assessment.
- Noise levels are acknowledged to exceed WHO recommendations for internal and wakening from sleep with frequency stated to be once or twice a night and no more than twice per month. In accepting these parameters, a limit would

need to be imposed, and this would be contrary to the flexibility necessary for the SAR, rendering Weston unsuitable.

- Night training missions would likely exceed the night movements stated in the noise assessment.
- The noise assessment does not draw on real world comparisons between existing levels and the noise of the proposed aircraft and higher movements.
- The acoustics report notes that wind and vibration buffeting corrugated sheets on stables significantly agitates horses and helicopters are known to cause noticeable structural vibrations to buildings within 0.5-1 nautical mile, even when hovering.
- The reduction in EPDB is overly generous in favour of the Applicant.
- Residents have previously experienced impacts from occasional visits to Weston by the existing Dublin SAR helicopter, this would turn from occasional to a multiple daily occurrence.

Intensification of Use above Proposal

- Recently introduced additional night training requirements for HEMS operations will increase the level of nighttime operations significantly above those stated, equating to at least 110-145 per annum at night equating to minimum 2 movements (1 night departure and 1 arrival) every 2-3 days or 20-30 night movements per month on average contrary to the stated number of night movements (no more than twice per month) stated in the noise assessment.

Piecemeal Development and Comprehensive Plan

- The proposal represents piecemeal uncoordinated development that is unacceptable in the absence of a comprehensive plan for future development of the aerodrome. The need for such a plan was identified in a previous Board decision (PL09.235146).
- This would be contrary to the zoning designation and not in accordance with the proper and sustainable development of the area and contrary to IE10 Objective 1 of the SDCC CDP.
- There would be additional aircraft movements, particularly in year 1 due to additional training, additional flights needed due to the lower carrying capacity

of the smaller helicopters, and Bristow's own media release which states the site would be the maintenance base for the fleet of 6 helicopters.

Impact on Bloodstock Business

- The material intensification of use of the subject site and 24/7 operation would have a severe detrimental effect upon the safe and continued operation of the local bloodstock businesses in the area.
- There are businesses where highly sensitive livestock are stored in a direct flightpath of the runway at Weston Airport.
- Lights, noise and flightpaths passing overhead of paddocks and stables during the night/early morning would pose a severe detrimental and torturous health risk to livestock, consisting of mainly younger animals who will be unaccustomed to such sudden light and noise pollution and accompanying vibration within these times periods.
- Rural businesses in this sector are invaluable to an industry which generates revenue of over 800 million per year for the Irish economy and is a nationally significant business source of employment in rural Ireland.
- Employees work primarily with yearlings and foaling mares, there are significant health and safety concerns regarding employees handling the horses during exercises where they will not have experienced such restraint and close contact previously and would not be accustomed to the visual, vibration or noise disturbance proposed. This has not been considered in the acoustics report.
- Disturbances will not take place in a scheduled and uniform manner, they would be erratic.
- The subject application and accompanying report, including the noise mitigation measures within it, show a clear lack of knowledge with regard to the operation of local equine business and of yearlings, and how they react to such disturbances, putting forward a non-realistic and dangerous theory that these horses will become accustomed to such disturbance.
- The report does not note the proposed operation of the subject development during prime foaling months of September and April which would result in SAR Helicopters passing directly over paddocks, posing significant health and safety risks for foaling mares, staff and veterinarians during this period.

- The conclusions of the Veterinary Report submitted by Mr Doyle (Appeal 3) are clear in that the subject proposal represents detrimental impacts due to associated noise and light pollution stemming from the development.
- ED18 Objective 1 of the current South Dublin County Development Plan supports agricultural enterprise, noting that is an objective "to support and facilitate sustainable agriculture, horticulture, forestry and at rural enterprises at suitable locations in the county".
- The site bounds Kildare and it should be noted that the Kildare CDP consistently references the importance of safeguarding the viability and safeguarding operations of the bloodstock industry which is important economically.
- No report has been submitted from a veterinarian or equine specialist which addresses the impact on the business or if the yearlings and foaling mares can become "accustomed" to such visual and noise disturbance.
- The proposal contravenes ED18 Objective 1 as well as the subject zoning designation presiding over the area.
- There is an absence of evidence-based research concerning the effects of the proposed development upon yearlings and mares as well as an absence of regard for these young, extreme sensitive, thoroughbred racehorses that are kept and trained on lands immediately adjoining the airport and would be subject to 24hr acoustic and visual disturbance stemming from the proposed SAR development.

Property Value

- The development would result in the depreciation of property values due to the injurious effect on amenity as a result of the intensification of use and associated noise/sound pollution.
- This matter has been taken seriously with regard to previous applications assessed by the Local Authority and the Board (such as SDCC 08/2018/Board Reg. Ref. PL09.235146) where the Inspector concluded that it is reasonable to associate a devaluation of property with a corresponding loss of amenity by reason of increased noise and associated nuisance / disturbance.

- It is submitted in this instance that there is an established precedence on Local Authority and at Board level, that intensification of use of Weston Airport can have clear detrimental effects upon amenity and thus lead to depreciation of property value in the area.

6.2. Applicant Response

6.2.1. Two First Party responses have been received from KPMG Future Analytics, for and on behalf of the Applicant, Weston Aviation Academy Limited, one in response to the Third Party appeals by John Colgan and Helen and John Shackleton, and one in response to the Third Party appeals by Tony Doyle and Pat Toolan. Both responses incorporate specialist submissions by Rose Aviation, CS Consulting Group, and O'Dwyer and Jones Design Partnership. The responses can be summarised under the following headings:

6.2.2. *Location*

- Bristow won the tender, administered by the Irish Coastguard and the Department of Transport, having chosen Weston Airport as their Eastern Base.
- The suitability of the proposed development at this location has been justified.
- Weston Airport, and the location within, is the optimal location to facilitate SAR operations in Dublin and more appropriate than other proximate airports.
- Suggestions by the Appellants of alternative locations are subjective and do not take into account the regulatory and operational requirements for an SAR base.
- The nature of SAR operations requires a quick response time, from receiving the notification to being airborne and in transit. Secluding the SAR hangar from other general aviation at Weston greatly enhances response times.

6.2.3. *Planning Considerations*

- Zoning concerns are inaccurate, the development is permitted in principle.
- In terms of piecemeal development concerns, Weston Airport Outline Business Plan 2021-2024 was submitted as part of the clarification of additional information.
- Roads access arrangements would provide access to the SAR hangar and ensure traffic safety.

- The SAR hangar would form part of the growth strategy for Weston Airport and would contribute to the sustainable consolidation and orderly development of the airport.
- The Applicant has adopted a plan led coordinated approach.
- Weston Airport operates in full compliance with its licence as governed by the Irish Aviation Authority.
- The IAA runs a State Safety Programme (SSP) under the guidelines of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the IAA is overseen by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) which mandates adherence to standards across civil aviation domains including Air traffic Control, Aerodrome Operations, Aircraft operations and Maintenance, Occurrence Reporting, and Rules of the Air.
- Compliance conditions must be addressed prior to commencement, they are time bound and must be fully executed to enable development to proceed.

6.2.4. *Flight Operation*

- New noise abatement procedures are of major significance in ensuring that noise sensitive sites are avoided as far as possible, there would be no overflying of helicopters of the Doyle Farm, and there would be 0.75 km or more horizontal distance between the Doyle Farm and new helicopter routes.
- The SAR base needs to be within 25km of Dublin Airport. Weston Airport meets the proximity requirement and provides unrestricted access to airspace around Dublin, with air traffic facilitation provided by AirNav Ireland at Dublin Airport and the IAC at Casement Aerodrome.
- The IAC letter to the Department of Defence is not directly related to this planning submission and pertains to broader flight coordination matters between Weston and Casement which are already being addressed separately.
- The letter from the Air Corps to the Department of Defence seeks a meeting between the Department and SDCC, it is not an objection, and it is submitted that it is not a planning matter.
- All procedures would explicitly ensure that the SAR helicopter would not penetrate military airspace without prior clearance.

- Historical and ongoing penetrations by general aviation at Weston is primarily a matter for the Letter of Agreement between Weston and the Air Corps and does not specifically relate to the SAR helicopter.
- In the highest potential traffic scenario, the SAR hangar would accommodate approximately 580 annual flights, with only 29 flights during 23:00-07:59 hours, based on historical data.
- The Appellants claims regarding unpredictable number of flights is incorrect. Based on data from the Irish Coastguard for 2018-2023, there would not be an unacceptable number of aircraft movements outside of Weston's current operating hours of 08:00-20:00.
- The Appellant's calculations regarding training flights are incorrect. For various reasons (rest periods, duty time and flight time limitations) training flights commence around 17:00 and finish before 20:00 during darkness in October-March.
- Not all flights involve training over the sea, the main training area for overland SAR would be in the Wicklow Mountains. Should the SAR base be located north of Dublin Airport then this would increase flight times.
- Dublin City Centre is not an area of near zero air traffic, there are multiple movements every day, it is within controlled airspace but outside the flightpaths used by Dublin Airport.
- No low flying is allowed to take place at Weston other than that associated with take-off or landing.
- Weston Aviation Academy refute the assertion in the appeal that there is contempt for the neighbouring public. The airport operates under the strictest oversight by the IAA. Training activities are dictated by EASA Standardised Rules of the Air Regulation (SERA), concerning the type of training and how it is to be carried out.
- Reporting points for helicopters have been designed to keep helicopters clear of residential and noise sensitive areas.

6.2.5. *Noise*

- Noise abatement procedures would greatly reduce noise nuisance levels for noise sensitive areas around Weston Airport.

- No significant short or long term noise related impacts are anticipated at the stud farm or any other noise sensitive premises.
- In terms of noise monitoring at the stud farm, baseline sound level monitoring was deemed unnecessary due to the absolute infrequency of movements and the relevant guidance and criteria related to absolute sound levels, however for added robustness, previously obtained survey data from various positions was considered.
- Bristow Ireland would strictly implement noise abatement procedures and commanders are to 'fly neighbourly', which is a voluntary noise reduction programme to create better relationships between communities and helicopter operators by establishing noise mitigation techniques and increasing effective communication.
- Helicopter flight paths do not have to align with the runway, they can fly directly from the reporting point to the runway centre and do not have to maintain runway direction when taking off. Noise sensitive areas can be avoided. Additionally, this would greatly reduce if not negate entirely, the claimed negative impact on livestock by the visual presence of SAR helicopters.
- The comparison of a small executive aviation airport with Dublin Airport is misleading, the scale of aircraft is wholly and materially different with very different levels of operation, movements, associated noise levels and receiving environment.

6.2.6. *Visual Impact*

- The design of the proposal would create a high quality SAR facility that is appropriate to its location and intended use.
- The building would achieve a reduced impression in scale and mass due to material use and setback arrangement.
- There would be suitable screening from Celbridge Road with proposed trees and hedgerows.

6.2.7. *Heritage*

- Considerations for Protected Structures have been embedded in the site selection and design of the scheme.

- The nearest Protected Structure is Westonpark House, c. 250m away from the proposed development. There would be negligible or imperceptible visual impact on the Protected Structure and its setting, taking account of distance and screening.
- Conservation of Protected Structures extends to the buildings themselves and their curtilage. There is no possibility of damage to the fabric of Protected Structures arising from passing aircraft, the proposed SAR hangar, or SAR operations.
- None of the proposed helicopter routes pass over any of the Protected Structures referred to in the appeal by Mr Colgan.
- From an architectural and structural point of view, stone slates if correctly fixed will not rattle in response to normal aviation sound. Those that do have defective fixings and are more likely to suffer significant wind damage during high winds.

6.2.8. *Safety*

- Noise abatement procedures have been developed to ensure helicopters avoid residential and noise sensitive areas. Bristow Ireland have been informed of these procedures and have consented to adopt and strictly enforce them.
- Horses would not be subjected to overhead helicopter traffic or nearby sudden helicopter noise events. The procedures provide for horizontal separations and distances that are in excess of distances considered acceptable at other major stud farms, racetracks and other relevant locations.
- The mission of the proposed SAR base is to promote public safety and no new risk to public or aviation safety has been identified.
- The air accident referred to in the Shackleton appeal was not related to any flying operation at Weston Airport or under the air traffic control of Weston Airport but occurred 47km away at Killucan in Westmeath.
- The Shackleton family received planning permission to construct their house in 1971, directly beside an existing airports boundary and at the end of one of its then three runways.
- SAR helicopters would not fly above the Appellants properties.

6.2.9. *Air Quality*

- The proposed development is not predicted to have any significant effects on air quality and climate.

6.2.10. *Road and Traffic*

- The use of the existing access location is most favourable in ensuring traffic safety. There are no recorded instances of accidents occurring and the junction benefits from clear unobstructed sightlines.
- Extension of the solid centreline road marking is proposed in proximity to the development access to further emphasise the constraint in overtaking close to the access.
- The access is existing and located approximately 75 metres from the new junction with the Celbridge Link Road. Sufficient carriageway width exists along Celbridge Road to facilitate turning movements in and out of the site without impeding the operational flow of Celbridge Road.
- It is highly unlikely that drivers would have visual contact with helicopters during take-off and landing and therefore will not distract drivers.
- Traffic Impact Statement predicts a traffic increase/trip generation of less than 1%, a full traffic Impact Assessment is therefore not required.
- Upgrades have been included that would improve traffic safety, including compliance with DMURS, relocation of the bus stop, and improved facilities for pedestrians.
- Dublin Bus is satisfied with the relocation of the bus stop, this is indicated on revised drawings and secured by condition.

6.2.11. *Property*

- It is submitted that this is not a planning matter, and that Weston Airport has held continuous operation at this location for a period that predates the existence of the vast majority of properties in the local area.

6.2.12. *Equine Issues*

- Weston Airport and the Doyle farm came into existence at the same time and have coexisted since 1935.

- Permission was granted for an additional dwelling on the stud farm in 2022, made no reference to noise insulation and concluded that the development posed no risk to the airport.
- This 2022 application also states that the business is the selective breeding, preparation, and training of dressage horses. It is submitted that dressage horses fall into a less anxious category than racehorses.¹
- Mr Doyle's submission makes selective and misleading quotes from documents dating from an earlier 2009 application. These reports also refer to a Veterinary Report from 2009 that states that potential noise problems in the area can and are being addressed.
- The distance and obstacle clearance heights quoted by Mr Doyle relate to an application to relocate the runway, which was refused by the Board and are not relevant to the current layout.
- It is submitted that two studies have assessed the effects of aviation noise on horses. These studies concluded that horses adapt to the disturbances/flyovers.²
- Some studies have found that horses can and do become habituated to aviation noise and there are instances of well-known locations where helicopters and racehorses are in close contact without adverse effects.
- The two factors most likely to give rise to equine reaction will not occur, there will be no overflying of paddocks by helicopters and horizontal separations will be well in excess of the minimum 250 metres. It is submitted that this is the distance between the helipad at Coolmore Stud in Tipperary and that stud farm's own stable yard. Further examples include Goff's, where the helipad is 250m from the sales ring. Additional examples include racetracks.
- The SAR hangar at Weston would be located four times this distance from the Doyle stud farm and the new helicopter Final Approach and Take-off location (FATO) would be 1.5km from the farm, six times the distance.

¹ Kentucky Equine Research

² US Air Force Combat Command's 'Realistic Bomber Training Initiative' and 'Effect of Noise on Performance, Stress, and Behaviour of Animals'- published by J. Broucek of the Research Institute for Animal Production 2014 (Slovak Republic).

- Significant equine reactions from helicopter startup at the hangar are therefore highly unlikely.
- The Doyle stud farm is already subject to ambient noise from surrounding sources including two busy roads (R403 and R404), three car and crash repair businesses, and an off-road figure of eight track in a directly adjoining field.
- Noise abatement measures mean that equine sensitivities are taken into account, the stud farm would not be subject to overhead helicopter traffic or nearby sudden helicopter noise events.
- In response to Mr Toolan's appeal, it is not suggested that animals would be unaffected by sudden nearby loud noises, but that the separation distance has to be taken into account.
- The SAR helicopter operations will operate on entirely different flight paths to the fixed wing aircrafts at Weston Airport and would not pass overhead of paddocks and stables, they would be at considerable distance and at greater distances than those found acceptable at other major equine locations.
- There is no question of SAR helicopters operating with full lights on, passing overhead or any accompanying vibration at distances of more than 0.75km.
- The provisions of the Kildare County Development Plan quoted by Mr Toolan are not applicable to the proposed SAR hangar, which is wholly within South Dublin County.

6.3. Planning Authority Response

- 6.3.1. The Planning Authority confirms its decision, and the issues raised in the appeal have been covered in the Chief Executives Order.

6.4. Observations

- 6.4.1. Hugh Courtney, Cu-Mor House, Cooldrinagh Lane, Co. Dublin
- 24 hour operation would lead to many more flights, including at night which is not currently allowed under the planning permission.
 - No long term plan is provided, the proposal is piecemeal development.
 - The development raises safety concerns for Casement Aerodrome.

- There would be significant noise and vibration impacts, amendments may be required to comply with conditions re Air Corps and Dept of Defence and the impacts of these amendments on noise and vibration has not been quantified.
- Noise impacts on residential amenity and enjoyment of home.
- No justification for the SAR facility being at Weston.
- The access is currently for emergency purposes only, granted in 2009 when traffic levels were much lower. The risk from traffic using this access has not been fully assessed and the development would result in a traffic hazard.

6.4.2. Councillor Paul Gogarty:

- The proposed development would be an over intensification of the site.
- There is a perception that previous commitments have not been kept and that conditions have either been inadequate or not enforceable.
- The Board need to assess whether the proposed development should only proceed with a corresponding reduction in other activities at the airport.
- Some of the conditions need to be strengthened if the Board are of the opinion that the development would not exceed capacity constraints.
- In terms of the noise surveys, there is no indication who should undertake them or verify them. There is no mechanism to halt flights if noise levels are exceeded, leaving residents open to a lot of unwanted noise.
- Monitoring needs to be effectively carried out and breaches addressed in real time with meaningful consequences.
- Determination would be welcome on whether the Board can request independently audited test flights over a four week period pending approval or rejection of the application, to get full accuracy rather than relying on simulations.
- Condition 12 (Dept of Defence) should include regular annual minuted meetings and if Baldonnell or the IAA express concerns then flights should be halted if concerns are not addressed within one month.

- There is no monitoring or conditions attached to ensure the operator complies with their commitment to restrict night training. A strict, enforceable provision needs to be made.
- Query the monitoring and inspection of the gate access into Celbridge Road, how will this not prejudice the delivery of 6 year roads objectives and upgrades along this stretch.
- The Board should adjudicate on whether the cumulative effect of this development is in the interests of the proper planning and development of the area.

6.5. Further Responses

6.5.1. Each of the Appellants have submitted a response to the First Party responses. These responses generally reinforce and maintain the previously set out grounds of appeal. Substantive new issues are summarised as follows:

6.5.2. Appeal 1 – Helen and John Shackleton

- Unclear how flight rules will be policed.
- Noise abatement procedures noted but there would still be noise.
- Development would be a visual intrusion on a rural area.
- A quick SAR response must have effects on existing flying operations no matter where the SAR is taking off from.

6.5.3. Appeal 2 – John Colgan

- Weston Airport has expanded and aims to develop as the country's premier executive jet port of call.
- Complaints are not dealt with appropriately and some have gone unanswered.
- Maintain that aircraft fly low.
- Weston is an aerodrome as opposed to an airport. The zoning does not permit Weston as an airport or a heliport.
- The assertion that the Doyle farm and Weston Airport coincided from 1935 is mistaken.
- Maintain that vibration from helicopters causes damage to their dwelling (a Protected Structure).

- General aviation would be regarded as passenger and cargo carrying, neither of which are included in Weston's zoning or licence, nor are they carried on now.
- The Letter of Agreement is new information which neighbours are not privy/party to.
- There have been instances of night flying at Weston, this has been reported to the IAA and the relevant Garda station.
- The reason for Bristow choosing Weston is financial. Weston is heavily indebted. This would be an insufficient reason for choosing this location.
- The IAA carry out no enquiries into allegations of low flying planes at Weston and consequently effects no remedial action. It would be in the public good for the Board to refuse permission.

6.5.4. **Appeal 3 – Tony Doyle**

- There remains an absence of a strategic masterplan for Weston Airport as required by the previous Board decision, the development would not be in accordance with development plan objectives for Westin Airport.
- The Noise Assessment is deficient, no noise monitoring has been undertaken at the stud farm, disagree that it was unnecessary to conduct baseline sound level monitoring with no specific guidance referenced, there is a lack of credible data on noise impacts.
- Helicopter VFR Reporting points are materially different to that presented to SDCC, the developer has clearly changed the proposed flight routes. This raises concerns regarding public participation
- No written approval has been provided that the proposed flight paths have been subject to the necessary regulatory approval, nor have they been assessed against those originally submitted to SDCC.
- The operating hours given for Weston Airport are wrong. The correct operating times are weekdays 08:30-16:15 and weekend 09:00-16:15.
- Training flights would take place outside of airport operating times, it is also likely that additional training flights would be needed.
- The report states that noise sensitive sites will be avoided 'as far as possible', which contradicts assurances given.

- Concerns raised regarding the fixed wing jet aircraft element of the proposal.
- It was reported in the press that rescuers have expressed concerns that the plans to introduce a new service by Bristow are rushed and undermine confidence. It was also noted that timelines were compressed. The article also noted that the process of securing requisite approvals was ongoing.
- Dr Leadon's expert submission should be relied upon in all matters relating to thoroughbred horses.
- There was previously another farm between the Appellant's property and the airport.
- Comments that the impact on horses requires management on both sides (the Appellant's and Weston Airport's) indicates that the Applicant is not in full independent control of the development and would be dependent on the Appellant modifying their operations.
- The Applicant's document (ODJ) alludes to the fact that aviation noise can have adverse effects on horses and other animals and fails to address concerns.
- There have been previous incidents at Weston regarding illegal activities and recent fires.

6.5.5. **Appeal 4 – Pat Toolan**

- The Department of Defence can limit air traffic at Weston, this would impact on the SAR facility.
- A recent fire at Weston disabled operations for several weeks. If the SAR were operational at Weston, the Irish Air Corps concerns regarding uncoordinated penetration of military airspace would be realised, due to Weston air traffic control being incapacitated.
- The Appellant has received written confirmation from a known heliport beside Dublin Airport that would be able to accommodate the proposed SAR facility.
- The intensification of use is not explicitly permissible under the SDCC CDP.

6.5.6. Responses to the Third Party appeals have been received from Mr Toolan and Mr Colgan as set out below:

- Pat Toolan in response to the appeals by Helen and John Shackleton, John Colgan, and Tony Doyle.

- John Colgan in response to Third party appeal by Helen and John Shackleton
- John Colgan in response to Third Party appeal by Pat Toolan.
- John Colgan in response to Third party appeal by Tony Doyle

6.5.7. I have considered these responses, which are on file for the Board's information. In my view, no new substantive planning issues are raised.

7.0 **Assessment**

7.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including all of the submissions received in relation to the appeal, the reports of the local authority, and having inspected the site, and having regard to the relevant local/regional/national policies and guidance, I consider that the substantive issues to be considered in this appeal are as follows:

- Zoning
- Location and Development Strategy
- Amenity
- Design and Heritage
- Transport
- Operational Safety
- Conditions
- Other Matters

7.2. **Zoning**

7.2.1. It is stated in the grounds of appeal that the development would be incongruous with the zoning objective for the site on the basis that the site is zoned for rural and agricultural use and that an SAR facility is not permissible. It is further stated that helicopters are intrusive, causing noise and vibration and that the use of Weston Airport for this purpose would not be consistent with either the existing use or the zoning objective.

- 7.2.2. The South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028 categorises the site as Zoning Objective 'RU', which seeks 'to protect and improve rural amenity and to provide for the development of agriculture'. Weston Airport is a long established operation on this site, and I note that there are existing helicopter operations on site. Under the 'RU' zoning objective, aerodrome/airfield is a 'permitted in principle' land use and the CDP further defines this as being 'a defined area of land or water, including any buildings, installations or equipment, intended to be used either wholly or in part for the arrival, departure or surface movement of aircraft'.
- 7.2.3. In my opinion the principle of the proposed SAR facility on lands at Weston Airport is acceptable having regard to the 'RU' zoning objective. Issues regarding potential amenity impacts and intensification will be dealt with in detail in later sections of this report.

7.3. Location, Development Strategy, and Intensification

- 7.3.1. A core issue raised in the appeal is that the location of Weston Airport is inappropriate and that other options, including Casement Aerodrome, have not been considered. It is the position of the Appellants that other reasonable alternatives exist to that of Weston Airport.
- 7.3.2. The appropriateness of the specific site within Weston Airport is also challenged on the basis that the site is far removed from the existing airport facilities, would constitute piecemeal development of the site and would not make sense from an orderly planning perspective. On this matter the Appellants refer to previous Board decisions that state that future development of Weston Airport would more properly be assessed in the context of a comprehensive plan rather than by continuing piecemeal modifications.
- 7.3.3. The Appellants raise concerns that the Weston Airport Outline Business Plan 2021-2024 is not a spatial plan or masterplan, instead being an outline document with no evidence of any engagement and as such falls below what the Board would have expected for a proposed development like this. Further concerns are that the document strongly suggests that the principal intended use of the airport is for executive jets and that there is no mention of SAR facilities. The Appellants therefore consider it impossible to determine whether the proposed SAR facility would be ancillary to the existing use of Weston Airport for executive jets, or whether it would expand at that location.

- 7.3.4. The Applicant argues that the suitability of the proposed development at Weston Airport has been justified and that the location within the airport itself is the optimal location to facilitate SAR operations. It is stated by the Applicant that Weston Airport is appropriate for SAR operations in Dublin and a more appropriate location than other proximate airports. The Applicant notes the alternative locations suggested by in the grounds of appeal but considers that these are subjective and fail to take into account the regulatory and operational requirements of an SAR base.
- 7.3.5. The Planning Authority initially shared the concerns of the Appellants and requested that they be addressed by the Applicant. Justification for the choice of Weston Airport and the location of the proposed SAR facility within Weston Airport were submitted as part of the Additional Information submission and the subsequent Clarification of Additional Information. This included the provision of a business plan to demonstrate that the proposal was considered as part of an overall strategy regarding the future development of Weston Airport.

Locating the SAR at Weston Airport

- 7.3.6. The Department of Transport contract requires that the SAR facilities be located within 25km of Dublin Airport. On that basis, Bristow Ireland considered Casement Aerodrome/Baldonnell and Dublin Airport, in addition to Weston Airport, those being the three facilities within 25km distance of Dublin Airport.
- 7.3.7. I note from the response that SAR services require 24 hour readiness for operational tasking, in addition to operating sufficient training flights which are important for maintaining operational standards and responses, with crews being required to maintain a high level of competence in sea and mountain rescue in all weather conditions and times of day/night. It is submitted that regular training flights are therefore of significant importance, with the bulk of flights operating from the SAR facility being related to training, which requires regular, planned training missions.
- 7.3.8. The current SAR facility is located at Dublin Airport and operational history at the Dublin SAR base provided by the Irish Coast Guard indicates that the majority of taskings occur during the summer months, which coincides with the busiest period of commercial air traffic at the airport. The Applicant's response cites August 2023 as an example where there was c.22,700 flights at the airport (more than 700 per day). As previously mentioned, training mission have to be regular, well planned, and carried

out during the crew duty day which extends from 13:00. At the existing Dublin base, the majority of training flights occur between 14:00 and 18:00, with a further period of regular training between 09:00 and 10:00.

- 7.3.9. I note that SAR operational taskings take priority Air Traffic Control clearance in order to operate without delay. The Applicant submits that there are operational conflicts and potential economic impacts resulting from commercial aircraft operations at Dublin Airport being halted to facilitate an SAR mission, in the context of Dublin Airport being of strategic economic importance. Whilst I accept that this would result in unplanned interruptions to the flow of commercial air traffic, the overall impact economically and in terms of flight delay has not been quantified. In my opinion, based on the information available to me on file, these impacts would be limited in the context of the overall operation of Dublin Airport, particularly given the historic trend with regards to the number of SAR taskings which have fallen year on year from a 2020 high, with taskings falling from 171 in 2020 to 112 in 2023.
- 7.3.10. However, the Board should note that the priority ATC clearance to facilitate SAR taskings does not extend to training flights which have to hold on the ground to await an opportunity in the flow of commercial air traffic. It is submitted that this issue has been compounded by the opening of the North Runway and the additional ATC complexities of a dual runway operation. As previously stated, training flights make up the overwhelming majority of SAR aircraft movements, based on historical figures, and are of strategic importance to the functioning of the SAR facility.
- 7.3.11. As noted in the Applicant's submission, training flights have to be regular and well planned. Bristow Ireland contend that the congestion and limitations in place at Dublin Airport make it challenging to meet the necessary SAR training requirements. The Applicant draws attention to the potential future expansion of Dublin Airport which aims to increase passenger capacity and flight numbers, and it is further submitted that the logistical demands of operating and interfacing with such a large airport contribute to the decision to opt for a less challenging airport, such as Weston. In my opinion, the issues raised by the Applicant with regards to the training flights and the operational conflicts on the ability to carry them out at Dublin Airport are reasonable.
- 7.3.12. Casement Aerodrome/Baldonnell is the headquarters of the Irish Air Corps with all Air Corps military training and operational flight missions controlled from the aerodrome,

with air traffic control and support services for the Garda Air Support Unit (GASU) also being provided by Casement. Issues raised by the Department of Defence and the Irish Air Corps are considered in detail later in this report under the Operational Safety section. The Applicant has ruled out Casement Aerodrome on the basis that the proposed SAR operation would detract from the military use and would conflict with the existing military traffic which is sensitive and of high priority.

- 7.3.13. Casement Aerodrome airspace is a restricted area where civil aircraft flights are subject to specified restrictions which could complicate commercial operations. The area is designated specifically for use by the Defence Forces, and all potential activities from the aerodrome would require permission of the Casement Aerodrome Air Traffic Services (ATS). As such, the Applicant considers that conducting SAR activities from Casement Aerodrome would likely prove challenging, noting that while emergency call outs require airspace priority, routine training operations would be difficult and would unnecessarily interfere with military operations.
- 7.3.14. Part of the of the issue raised by the IAC and Department relates to SAR operations taking precedence over military traffic and potential conflict between several safety of life services, noting that the Garda helicopter operates from Casement in addition to aeromedical services. However, the IAC refute the submission by Bristow suggesting that the nature of the military airspace would prevent the selection of Casement as an operating site, with previous comments raised by the Minister said to be in relation to the operation of an SAR service by the IAC themselves and did not relate to the operation of a SAR base by a civil contractor as part of a national service, confirming that the principle of operating the civilian SAR base at Casement has not been discussed.
- 7.3.15. The IAC consider it contradictory for Bristow to argue that operation from Casement would be impractical whilst at the same time arguing that when operational needs dictate that the SAR has to transit military airspace it will be controlled by military air traffic services in exactly the same way that Dublin Airport air traffic services have been doing for decades. Clearly, there is scope for non-military aircraft to operate from Casement, as evidenced by the stationing of the Garda helicopter there. However, it seems to me that the conflicts referred to by the IAC, which when specifically considering SAR operational taskings from Weston would only require priority access to military airspace when travelling south, would be intensified if the service was

operated from Casement as priority clearance would be required for all taskings, not just those directed south. On the face of it, the decision to discount Casement seems reasonable in my view.

Location within Weston Airport

7.3.16. Weston Airport was reorganised in the mid 2000's with the airport facilities moving from the subject site to a new site to the north-east of the airfield. It is evident from the planning history and previous Board decisions that it has clearly been the intention of the Board to concentrate aerodrome activities to the north-east of the aerodrome, with proposals to develop lands to the south of the airfield that would be reliant on access from the previous entrance onto the R403 (Celbridge Road), being refused on appeal. The rationale being the need to avoid the disorderly development of the aerodrome in addition to resist further activities that would result in an intensification of use on site.

7.3.17. The Planning Authority questioned the appropriateness of the proposed SAR location given that it would change the nature of activity at Weston Airport and initially considered that insufficient information had been submitted to fully justify the proposed location. In responding to the Planning Authority's Additional Information request regarding the need to justify the SAR location within Weston Airport, the Applicant considered three additional sites within the existing airport grounds as follows:

- Alternative Location 1 relates to land on the north side of the runway adjacent to the existing terminal and hangar facilities and accessed from the airport's existing access on Cooldrinagh Lane.
- Alternative Location 2 would be to the south of the existing runway and to the east of the proposed site with either a new access onto the R403 or an access from Cooldrinagh Lane.
- Alternative Location 3 would also be to the south of the existing runway but would be located well to the west of the proposed site, to the west of Westonpark House and accessed from a new access point on the R403.

7.3.18. In my opinion, neither Location 2 or 3 would be appropriate given that they would propose additional development to the south of the runway and require either additional access points from the R403 or, in the case of an alternative access for Location 2, an access from Cooldrinagh Lane that could interfere with aircraft

operations. I therefore agree with the Applicant that these locations would not be suitable.

7.3.19. In terms of Location 1, the Applicant raised several issues that they considered sufficient to discount it as an appropriate location. In summary, these issues included:

- Access to the runway would require a new access onto the existing apron/taxiway.
- Landside access would be limited to the existing airport access road from Cooldrinagh Lane which is used extensively for existing airport operations and a new access point onto Cooldrinagh Lane would be required.
- The site would be adjacent to a refuelling area, raising safety concerns.
- A new access onto Cooldrinagh Lane would require safety measures to be implemented (setback, sight clearance, signage, road markings).
- SAR helicopters would have to access the runway from a farther distance than the proposed site, increasing response times.
- Landside, there is a longer distance from the R403, with three junctions to access the hangar, increasing response times.
- Limited development space and the development would bring increased pressure to the north section of the airport.
- Increased conflict with airport operations during construction.
- SAR would require priority during SAR operation/mission, resulting in disturbance to landside and airside operations at Weston.
- Development at Location 1 would depart from the vision of Weston Airport as a premier executive airport, conflicting with existing and future business aviation uses and limiting future development suitable for the north section of the airport.

7.3.20. The comparison exercise undertaken by the Applicant is rather crude, simply taking the overall site area and transposing it onto the alternative locations rather than interrogating the reordering and positioning the elements that make up the development. In my opinion there is clearly space to accommodate the proposal at Location 1 with appropriate setback from sensitive facilities (noting the location of the existing hangar opposite and its relationship to the refuelling area), as well as set

backs from the boundary with Cooldrinagh Lane to accommodate a site access. In my opinion, the various construction and access related issues raised by the Applicant are not significant and certainly not insurmountable, subject to appropriate design and configuration. I also note that the Applicant's comments on these matters run contrary to previous proposals to develop this land for hangar facilities, which included building adjacent to the refuelling area in addition to new sections of apron and other associated development.

- 7.3.21. I accept the Applicants general contention that the nature of SAR operations requires a quick response time and that this could be enhanced at Weston by secluding the SAR hangar from other general aviation in the proposed SAR position to the south of the airfield. The Applicant therefore considers that Location 1 does not offer these benefits. Central to the Applicant's argument on this issue is that Location 1 would have a longer taxi distance to the take-off point on the runway.
- 7.3.22. In terms of proximity of the proposed site to the departure point, I note and agree that this is a compelling reason in justifying the selection of the proposed site over Location 1. However, the benefits, at least in terms of distance, seem to be more to be fairly neutral overall. Indeed, the various take off and approach routes and procedures set out in the *Noise Abatement Procedures Weston Airport* report by Rose Aviation would seem to negate any overall benefit. For example, westerly vertical and rolling departures clearly indicate helicopters taking off from the threshold of runway 25, which would be markedly closer to Location 1, being located at the north eastern extent of the runway.
- 7.3.23. Although I note that easterly departures would take place from the threshold of runway 7, at the south western extent of the runway, and as such closer to the proposed SAR location. I also note that aircraft movements are generally governed by prevailing weather conditions and that the split in westerly/easterly departures at Weston is 80:20³. In light of the foregoing, in my mind the efficiency benefits of locating the SAR on the proposed site to the south of the runway would be rather muted. Furthermore, SAR operations/missions would take priority over all other traffic and aircraft regardless of location.

³ Weston Airport SAR Facility Noise Assessment – Anderson Acoustics.

- 7.3.24. It seems to me that a significant reason for the Applicant selecting the proposed site over Location 1 is, in large part, in order to safeguard the space for future general aviation development, noting previous applications to develop this land for hangar facilities. In discounting Location 1, the Applicant states that an SAR facility at this location would bring increased pressure to the north section of Weston Airport. However, it is also stated that positioning the SAR at Location 1 would depart from the vision for Weston Airport as a premier executive airport, would conflict with existing and future business aviation uses and operation at this location and would limit future developments suitable for the north section of the airport. Both cannot be true at the same time.
- 7.3.25. There is clearly a finite capacity at Weston Airport in terms of suitably developable land and as such future development has to be balanced. Whilst I completely agree that the principle of an SAR facility at Weston Airport is acceptable and that significant weight should be afforded to the provision of this service, from an orderly development perspective, which is a significant material consideration given the sensitive nature of the airport location and its surroundings in addition to the planning history, Location 1 is clearly the most appropriate and would consolidate development to the existing airport area to the north east of the airfield. It is therefore my opinion that insufficient justification has been provided for locating the proposed development to the south of the airfield and extending airport operations to the southern extent of the aerodrome, and on that basis, I consider that the proposed location would represent disorderly and piecemeal development.
- 7.3.26. In reaching this conclusion I have given consideration to the *Weston Airport Outline Business Plan 2021-2024 (Version 3 – 2023)*. This was submitted in response to the Planning Authority's Additional Information request to demonstrate that the proposal would not represent the piecemeal development of Weston Airport, itself a response to the Board's note on ABP-235146 which stated:

The Board considered that any future development proposals for the aerodrome would more properly be assessed in the context of a clearly stated, comprehensive plan for Weston arrived at in cooperation with the relevant public authorities, including Kildare County Council and South Dublin County Council, rather than by continuing piecemeal modifications.

7.3.27. In my view, the documentation submitted by the Applicant does not amount to any type of considered development strategy, certainly not one arrived at in conjunction with the relevant Planning Authorities and it seems to me that the proposal for the SAR has been added to the 2023 update with limited consideration. Although I do not consider that lack of a comprehensive plan to be a reason for refusal, the business plan submitted by the Applicant does not alter my conclusion that the SAR location would represent piecemeal development, nor does it alleviate my concerns that the proposed location has been arrived at in part to protect the development potential of lands adjacent to the existing terminal and hangar facilities for future general aviation purposes.

Intensification

7.3.28. Concerns are raised that the development would result in an intensification of Weston Airport both in flight numbers and operating hours, that there would be additional aircraft movements to those reported, particularly in year 1 due to additional training needs, the lower carrying capacity of the smaller helicopters, and Bristow's own media release which states the site would be the maintenance base for the fleet of 6 helicopters⁴.

7.3.29. It is stated in the grounds of appeal that the airport does not currently operate outside the hours of 08:00-20:00 and that the proposed 24 hour operation and increased number of flights as a result of the SAR facility would injure the amenity of residents and businesses in the local area, would contravene the CDP, would be contrary to the zoning, and would represent the intensification of development that is not in line with the proper and sustainable development of the local area.

7.3.30. It is noted by the Appellants that these matters have generally been addressed by conditions on earlier planning permissions but that this would not be possible in this instance due to the nature of the use as emergency SAR. The Appellants acknowledge that conditions to restrict operating hours or movements in this case would impact on the effectiveness of the emergency service and that it is therefore not possible to strike

⁴ Reference is made to nine helicopters in the Applicant's documentation. This conflicts with the press release from the Department of Transport and Bristow Ireland which both state 6 no. helicopters. The maximum number of helicopters to be based at Weston would be two.

a balance between the successful operation of the SAR facility and protecting local amenity.

- 7.3.31. The Applicant states that the number of flights proposed would be under the maximum permitted and that there is no regulatory limitation on the operating hours at Weston Airport, with operating hours varying throughout the year on foot of limitations placed on the airport due to the lack of runway lighting. On this matter, the Applicant states that they are pursuing the installation of runway lights and visual aids under Class 32.
- 7.3.32. The Board will note from Section 4 of this report that the South Dublin County Council declared these works to be exempt as part of a Section 5 Declaration. A similar Section 5 has been submitted to Kildare County Council however there is no information available on the outcome of that process. In any event, the proposal before the Board does not propose any alterations to the runway or the installation of lights/navigation aids, these are being pursued under a separate process. So, whilst helicopter activity at night would be dependent on runway lights, the current proposal does not propose these works nor would it serve to enable them. That being said, the operation of flights after 20:00 would represent a clear intensification of the airport. In terms of the SAR facility, key to this is the number of flights, their distribution, and their potential amenity impacts.
- 7.3.33. It is submitted that Weston Airport is licensed by the Irish Aviation Authority for 44,000 aircraft movements per annum. Flight records for 2022 demonstrate that the actual number of movements was c.33,500. The Applicant estimates the number of proposed SAR flights as being between 550-580 per annum, or 1,100 – 1,160 movements. The upper estimate of 580 flights/1,160 movements would equate to 2.6% of the total permitted movements and 3.4% of the actual 2022 flights which I consider would be a modest increase in the context of the existing operations at Weston Airport and well within the permitted flight movement numbers. I am satisfied that the proposed flight numbers alone would not represent a significant intensification in the use of the airport.
- 7.3.34. However, the Board should be aware that the estimated flight numbers provide by the Applicant do not appear to take into account historic trends which show the number of flights at the Dublin SAR base increasing, with training flights increasing significantly year on year and a more modest increase in total flights, driven by a reduction in

operational taskings since a 2020 high. I have set the figures out in the table below for the Board's information (the final two columns are my figures).

Year	Tasking Flights	Training Flights	Total	Increase in training flights over previous year	Increase in training flights over previous year
2018	138	182	320	-	-
2019	127	233	360	28%	12.5%
2020	171	175	346	-25%	-4%
2021	161	255	416	46%	20%
2022	139	334	473	31%	14%
2023	112	423	535	27%	13%

7.3.35. Clearly the estimate of 580 flights per year provided by the Applicant are accurate to a point in time, the Board should therefore approach them with caution given that the clear pattern of increasing flight numbers has not been addressed by the Applicant. The increase in flight numbers is important in two contexts, that of noise impacts and also in relation to the query on night flights, training/night training flight numbers, and intensification raised in the appeal. Noise impacts are addressed in detail separately in this report, however in the context of flight numbers I would note that the noise assessment appears to be predicated on two flights per day. This equates to 730 flights per annum and in my opinion builds in suitable resilience for increasing flight numbers in the context of the 580 upper estimates provided by the Applicant.

7.3.36. The Applicant has estimated the number of night flights based on historic trends and the breakdown of the distribution of flights is given as 83% of flights taking place between 08:00-18:59, 12% taking place between 19:00-22:59, and 5% taking place between 23:00 and 07:59. This reflects the nature of SAR responses being related to daytime leisure activities. Assuming 580 annual flights estimated by the Applicant, it would work out at 481 flights between 08:00-18:59, 69 flights between 19:00-22:59, and 29 flights between 23:00-07:59. At first glance, these figures would seem reasonable with roughly 6 flights per month between 19:00-22:59 and 2/3 per month between 23:00-07:59.

- 7.3.37. On the issue of training flight numbers raised in the appeal, the Applicant's response to the grounds of appeal states that the average number of training flights from 2018-2023 is 241, (based on 1,445 training flights)⁵ and a similar figure is given for Bristow's training schedule which also states an average of 241 training flights per year, of which 53 would be between 17:00 and 20:00. These night training flights would be conducted from October to March and equate to one flight on approximately nine days monthly.
- 7.3.38. However, training flights between 2018-2023 were 1,602, not 1,445 as quoted in the response to the appeal. This contradicts the average number of training flights given in the application documents, which by my calculations equates to 267 per year⁶. The Board will also note that both the 241 given by the Applicant and the 267, based on an average of the figures presented in the application documents across the previous six years, significantly underrepresents the actual number of training flights for 2022 (334 flights), and 2023 (423 flights) and this should also be viewed in the context of the pattern of training flights increasing substantially year on year.
- 7.3.39. The Applicant states that there would be an average of 53 night training flights per year against an average of 241 training flights per year. Using the same methodology and applying it to the 2023 figures, a more accurate estimation of night training flights could be c.93, which would equate to one flight on roughly 15 days per month between October and March and above the 69 flight estimate for total flights after 19:00. On that basis I would agree with the Appellants that there would likely be more training flights than indicated by the Applicant in addition to their potentially being more flights after 19:00 overall when accounting for operational flights as well.
- 7.3.40. Whilst I accept that the overall number of flights would be limited, in the context of the overall operation at Weston Airport and notwithstanding the fact that night training flights only relate to the period from October to March and could be conditioned to be completed prior to 20:00, the inconsistencies and lack of clarity in the reporting figures are such that I would recommend that the Board seek Further Information on this matter in the event that planning permission is granted.

7.4. Operational Safety

⁵ Rose Aviation Comments on Appeals 3 and 4, page 10.

⁶ KPMG/Future Analytics Response to Further Information, Table 2.4, page 5.

- 7.4.1. Various safety concerns have been raised in the appeals, including concerns regarding the risk of accidents, given the site's location next to three large towns and the Leixlip hydroelectric dam. The Department of Defence and the IAC have raised concerns that the development could impact on the operational safety of Casement Aerodrome.
- 7.4.2. Several complaints regarding the past and ongoing operation of Weston Airport have been expressed in the appeals, including that there is no evidence that the airport is operating in compliance with the rules of the air, that there does not appear to be any onsite policing of the airport by the IAA, and that that the airport operates in contempt of its neighbours with regards to low-flying aircraft.
- 7.4.3. The majority of these issues relate to ongoing and past complaints regarding the operation of Weston Airport. Issues regarding air safety and the operation of the airport being undertaken within the terms of its licence and the appropriate air safety regulations are, in my opinion, matters for the IAA and EASA as opposed to either the Planning Authority or the Board.

Casement Aerodrome

- 7.4.4. The Appellants refer to the concerns raised by the IAC and Department of Defence in relation to the potential impact of the development on the safety and operational efficiency of aircraft operating in and around military airspace, stating that the development would be contrary to Policy IE9 of the SDCC CDP and that the condition recommended by the Planning Authority is insufficient.
- 7.4.5. The Irish Air Corps did not respond directly to the Planning Application. Instead, they provided the Department of Defence with a letter setting out their concerns. On foot of this, the Department raised concerns regarding the unauthorised penetration of military airspace by aircraft operating to/from Weston Airport and considered the Aviation Report to be deficient in addressing this issue. The Department recommended that the offer of a meeting between the Department, IAC and SDDC be accepted to ensure that decision makers are fully aware of the technical aspects of the IAC submission.
- 7.4.6. The IAC response to the Department is comprehensive and detailed. A full copy of the IAC response is on file for the Board's information. In summary, the key substantive issues raised are:

- The aviation report fails to address the issue of unauthorised penetrations of military airspace which cause disruption and have required avoiding action to be taken. The report should address how these penetrations might be prevented in the case of increased air traffic operation at Weston Airport.
- Lack of engagement between the report authors and Casement.
- The report focuses solely on the operation of the SAR hangar. Opening hours will increase to 24 hours a day and will increase non SAR traffic.
- Errors in technical charts used.
- Increased aircraft movements at Weston will lead to an increase in the frequency of aircraft manoeuvres that cause restrictions to be imposed.
- The report fails to acknowledge the difference between civil aircraft operations in controlled airspace and military operations in military airspace.
- Military aircraft do not and are not required to conform with civil aviation regulations. It is not appropriate to equate controlled airspace with military airspace.
- In cases where GASU (Police) and/or EAS (aeromedical) are operating, priority transit through military airspace may cause conflict between several safety of life services.
- Limitations imposed on Weston during military activity and provided for in the extant Letter of Agreement (LoA) are necessary to reduce the impact of these movements on operations at Casement and should be included in any future LoA.

7.4.7. The Applicant considers that the aviation report addresses issues with regards procedures to ensure that the operation of SAR helicopters would not penetrate military airspace, including procedures for training and operational flight transit in both visual flying conditions and instrument flying conditions. The report emphasises the need for coordination between the relevant ATC/ATS facilities to ensure there is no conflict between air traffic in the various control areas and states that this is part of an ongoing LoA between Weston Airport and Casement Aerodrome. The Applicant submits that an updated LoA has been agreed in principle and is awaiting sign off.

- 7.4.8. The majority of air traffic at Weston Airport is general aviation, undertaken during the normal operating hours of the airport. Clearly, the proposed SAR facility would result in an increased number of flights in addition to introducing flights at night, which would be outside the normal operating times of the airport. However, the number of additional flights would equate to roughly twelve per week based on historical data which is low in the context of the total permitted number of flights at Weston and the actual number of flights as well, albeit noting my earlier concerns regarding night flight estimates.
- 7.4.9. Furthermore, I disagree with the IAC contention that the operation of a 24 hour SAR facility would result in a consequent increase in general aviation flight numbers, and I am satisfied that 24 hour use could be conditioned to relate to the SAR facility only. In terms of the conditions requested by the IAC, I agree with the Planning Authority that they could not reasonably be imposed on the SAR facility as they would compromise its operation.
- 7.4.10. The Applicant emphasises the need for ATC/ATS coordination between Weston and Casement. Again, I note that only operational SAR traffic would take priority, with no dispensation for training flights. Off base training areas are primarily the Irish Sea and the Wicklow Mountains. For training flights, the SAR aircraft would remain clear of military airspace at all times. For operational/mission traffic, there may be times when the SAR will request a direct routing to the Wicklow Mountains which may pass through military airspace, in which case permission would be requested from military ATS. The Applicant's report notes that the main area of concern is therefore the Wicklow Mountains, as this would require passing through military airspace to ensure as quick a response as possible. I also note that the number of missions in the Wicklow Mountains varies, with 16 missions in 2021, 7 in 2022 and 3 in 2023, some of which were attended to by the Waterford based SAR. The number of operational instances whereby priority transit would be requested through military airspace is therefore very limited.
- 7.4.11. In seeking to address the matters raised by the Department, the Planning Authority imposed condition 12 which reads as follows:
12. Prior to the commencement of the SAR service from Weston Airport, the developer shall engage and have in-person meetings (at least 3 no.) with representatives from the Department of Defence and Air Corps as well as

representatives from Civilian Air Traffic Control Service or Irish Aviation Authority to address the concerns in the submissions received by the Air Corps. Following this consultation, the report submitted by Rose Aviation shall be revised to include details of the foregoing (including meeting minutes) and a revised report provided to the Department of Defence and Air Corps and Irish Aviation Service for comment and thereafter submitted to the Planning Authority for its written agreement.

Reason: To improve understanding and agreement in relation to the operation of the SAR service from Weston and Knock-ons for Casement Aerodrome and having regard to Policy IE9 of the CDP - Casement Aerodrome

7.4.12. The Board should note that the Department's suggestion of a meeting was recommending a meeting between the Planning Authority, Department of Defence and the IAC. It's hard to see the benefit of the condition or the Planning Authority's role in providing written agreement, particularly as the issues raised are not matters that lie with the Planning Authority as they are governed by separate legal codes. As such I am of the view that it would not be appropriate to impose condition 12.

7.4.13. In my opinion, the vast majority of the issues raised by the IAC and Department relate to historical and ongoing unauthorised penetrations of military airspace by general aviation, as opposed to SAR operation. Many of the matters referred to are governed by the LoA between Weston and Casement which is the appropriate route to address the issue of unauthorised penetrations by general aviation. Furthermore, the procedures outlined by the Applicant would, in my opinion, serve to ensure that the SAR helicopter would not penetrate military airspace without prior clearance from military ATS. Overall, it is my view that the issues raised by the IAC relate to the management and coordination of air traffic control, flight routes, and the interface between civil/controlled airspace and military airspace. Respectfully, I would suggest that these are not matters for the Board and are instead matters for the respective air traffic control authorities and the LoA, in addition to the IAA and EASA, noting that unauthorised penetrations of military airspace are a mandatory reportable event to the European Coordination Centre for Aviation and Incident Reporting Systems (managed by EASA).

7.5. **Amenity**

- 7.5.1. The main amenity concerns raised by the Appellants are that the development would lead to significant disruption to residential amenity and local businesses as a result of excessive noise, vibration and disturbance and that this would be exacerbated by the proposal to operate 24 hours, given that night flights do not currently operate from Weston Airport. It is submitted that this would result in a significant intensification in the use of the airport and there are concerns regarding inconsistencies in the Applicant's report regarding flight numbers. Further concerns are raised in the appeals that the development would have unacceptable impacts on the nearby stud farm at Coneyboro (given as Coneyburrow in the noise report) and that the noise and disturbance would impact not only on the horses, but on the health and safety of staff. It is argued that the impact on amenity would result in the depreciation of property values.

Noise

- 7.5.2. The appeal raises concerns that noise levels would be excessive, that there is no aircraft noise competent authority for Weston Airport and that there are discrepancies in the Applicants report. It is noted by the Appellants that noise levels would exceed WHO recommendations internally and waking from sleep.
- 7.5.3. The Applicant argues that there would be no significant short or long term noise related impacts and that noise abatement procedures would greatly reduce noise nuisance levels for noise sensitive areas around Weston Airport.
- 7.5.4. The Board will note that there are various noise sensitive areas immediately bounding Weston Airport, including housing and business at the western extent of the runway along the R404 (including the stud farm referred to in the appeals), and at the eastern extent of the runway on Cooldrinagh Lane and to the east/south east of the R403. Larger residential settlements are found at Leixlip and Kilmacredock to the north in addition to Celbridge to the west/south west.

Relevant Guidance

- 7.5.5. A noise assessment has been submitted by Anderson Acoustics (*Weston Airport SAR Facility Noise Assessment*, dated December 2023) with a further update provided at Additional Information stage. The noise report includes a comprehensive literature/guidance review. Most relevant to the proposal my opinion is European guidance with regards to noise levels as detailed in *European Noise Directive*

(2002/49/EC), in addition to the standards laid down in the *World Health Organisation Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region (ENG)* (2018), and the *World Health Organization Guidelines for Community Noise (GCN)* (1999).

- 7.5.6. The ENG sets out recommended exposure levels for environmental noise, derived by a Guideline Development Group (GDG). Section 3.3 of the WHO ENG guidelines provide specific recommendations for aircraft noise. In terms of average noise exposure, the guidelines strongly recommend reducing noise levels produced by aircraft below 45dB Lden (daytime), as aircraft noise above this level is associated with adverse health effects. For night noise exposure, it is strongly recommended that noise levels produced by aircraft be below 40dB Lnight, as aircraft noise above this level is associated with adverse effects on sleep. To reduce health effects, the GDG strongly recommends that policy-makers implement suitable measures to reduce noise exposure from aircraft in the population exposed to levels above the guideline values for average and night noise exposure. The guidelines state that the differences between indoor and outdoor levels are usually estimated at around 10dB for open windows, 15dB for tilted or half-open windows, and about 25dB for closed windows.
- 7.5.7. The Guidelines note that there is some uncertainty when characterising exposure using the acoustical description of aircraft noise by means of Lden or Lnight and that the use of these indicators may limit the ability to observe associations between exposure to aircraft noise and some health outcomes (such as awakening reactions), noting that the use of noise indicators based on the number of events, such as the frequency distribution of LAmax may be better suited. The Applicant considers that the ENG Guidelines are generally suited for policy making and direction rather than for direct consideration in individual assessments or determinations, noting that the ENG do not consider internal conditions that are of interest (such as at night), and they do not cover helicopters specifically.
- 7.5.8. In regard to the GCN, guidance is provided in terms of internal and external sound levels for various building uses, outlining the potential health impacts associated with noise and recommending internal and external sound levels that would provide an acoustic environment that is conducive to uninterrupted speech and sleep.
- 7.5.9. Daytime thresholds are measured between 07:00 and 23:00 and aim to prevent the majority of the population being moderately or seriously annoyed by noise. Night time

levels, measured between 23:00 and 7:00 seek to ensure good sleep. The GCN states that where the noise consists of a small number of discrete events, the A-weighted maximum level (LA_{max}) will be a better indicator of the disturbance to sleep and other activities. Regarding daytime noise, no LA_{max} figure/threshold is given, instead the following thresholds are given for daytime hours measured over a 16 hour period (07:00-23:00):

Outdoor Living Areas:

- *Serious Annoyance - 55dB LA_{eq,16h}*
- *Moderate annoyance – 50dB LA_{eq,16h}*

Indoor Areas:

- *Speech intelligibility and moderate annoyance – 35dB LA_{eq,16h}*

7.5.10. Night time thresholds are set at a level to secure appropriate levels of sleep and are measured from 23:00-07:00 where it is considered that internal noise levels for bedrooms should be 30dB LA_{eq} for continuous noise and 45dB LA_{max} for single sound events, of which there should be no more than 10-15 occurrences a night. The guidelines equate this to be equivalent to an external level of 60dB with an open window, reflecting the ENG guidelines. The Applicant notes that although the ENG supersedes the GCN, the ENG advises that all GCN indoor guidelines values and any values not covered in the current guidelines remain valid.

7.5.11. Further guidance referred to by the Applicant includes *CAP725 Guidance on the Application of the Airspace Change Process (2016)*, published by the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority. This guidance notes that the effect of familiar events would be small when below indoor event levels of c. 45dB L_{max} and that awakenings would be infrequent below 55dB, applying to indoor conditions. It is stated that outdoor noise is attenuated as it passes into the building, with an attenuation rate of approximately 15dB if windows are open. This would generally accord with the figures given in the GCN where 60dB outside noise level equates to 45 dB internal noise level with a partially open window. Although I note that *CAP725* references the 15dB attenuation with a window open wide and the GCN references a partially open window. Additionally, *CAP725* states that if windows are closed, attenuation rises to between

20dB and 30dB depending on the weight of the glass, whether glazing is single or double, and on the quality of the seals.

- 7.5.12. Further detail on potential awakenings is provided in *CAP725* where it is stated that the United Kingdom Department of Transport commissioned the CAA to carry out research into aircraft noise and sleep disturbance with the objective to determine the relationships between outdoor noise levels and the probability of sleep disturbance, and the variation of these relationships with time of night. This research was undertaken by teams from Loughborough University Sleep Laboratory, the Department of Biological Sciences of Manchester Metropolitan University and the Department of Social Statistics of Southampton University involving sites around Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, and Manchester Airports.
- 7.5.13. The results indicated that aircraft noise events are unlikely to cause measurable rates of sleep disturbance when below 90dBA SEL (approximately 80dBA Lmax). The study demonstrated that in the 85-90dBA SEL range, arousal rates associated with aircraft noise events were not significantly different from the rate during the absence of aircraft noise events. At higher noise levels, between 90 and 100 dBA SEL (approximately 80 and 90 dBA Lmax), the chance of the average person being wakened by an aircraft noise event was about 1 in 75. Whilst included for information purposes, I would advise the Board against drawing any definitive conclusions from this guidance and study given that the study areas and operational environments considered are markedly different to that of Weston Airport.
- 7.5.14. The Board should also be aware that the Applicant references *Hong Kong Planning Standards (2011)* where a large amount of research into helicopter noise has been undertaken. The criterion for helicopter noise outside all domestic/housing premises is given as 85dB. Again, whilst helpful for information purposes, I do not consider that this should be applied to Weston Airport as the environments are not directly comparable.

Background

- 7.5.15. As previously stated, Weston Airport is licensed/permitted for 44,000 aircraft movements a year, equating to 22,000 flights on the basis that each flight operation has two movements (take-off and landing). The Board should note that Weston Airport is the home of the National Flight Centre Pilot Training Academy and the various

training operations including touch and go procedures are excluded from the permitted 44,000 movements, as such, aircraft activity is likely significantly higher.

7.5.16. In 2022, c. 33,500 movements occurred at Weston Airport. I note that this can range significantly depending on weather conditions, where some days there will be no flight movements and on others there will be significantly more movements. However, assuming a standard seven day operation with clement weather, this would equate to an average of 91 aircraft movements a day, against permitted levels of 120 a day (as an average across the year).

7.5.17. The Applicant's noise report includes baseline data from previous sound level measurements and observations taken at 14 locations over five days in August and September 2022. Location 10 (Coneyburrow) is the location of the stud farm and is proximate to Appellants 1, 3, and 4. Location 13 (Leixlip) would be most proximate to Appellant 2.

7.5.18. Table 3.1 of the noise survey sets out the measured daytime noise levels, measured free field, and presented in terms of LAeq,T and LAFmax, noting that at least one aircraft movement was noted during the measurement. Noise levels are considered to be free field when taken at least 3.5 metres from any reflecting surfaces, other than the ground. Table 3.1 considers 11 locations (locations 3-13) with results reported in the range of 46dB – 63DB LAeq, T and between 62dB to 86dB LAFmax. In terms of the specific locations outlined above, the results are as follows:

- Location 10 (Coneyburrow): LAeq,T – 62dB and LAFmax – 86dB.
- Location 13 (Leixlip): LAeq,T 46dB and LAFmax – 62dB.

7.5.19. Table 3.2 presents the ranges for all 14 locations on an event and non-event basis. Event based levels are presented in LAeq,T, SEL (Sound Exposure Level), and LAFmax, whilst non-event based data is presented as LAeq,T. In terms of event based data, the upper dB readings range from 60dB – 79dB LAeq,T, 76dB – 92dB SEL, and 59dB-92dB LAFmax. For the non-event based data the upper LAeq,T range is presented as 51dB – 71dB. Locations 10 and 13 are provided below:

Location	Event			Non-Event
	LAeq,T	SEL	LAmx	LAeq,T

10. Coneyburrow	59 -79	72 - 92	64 - 92	56 – 71
13. Leixlip	44-60	60 - 76	45-59	42 - 53

7.5.20. The table below sets out the EASA type-certification noise data for the AW189 helicopters to be operated by Bristow are presented in Table 3.3. These are presented in terms of the ENPL/EPNdB (Effective Perceived Noise Level) based on defined operating procedures at a 150 metres distance and include a tone correction factor weighting. No SEL or LAmax data were provided but the report notes that these can be estimated, and the smallest difference value has been applied in order to present a worst case scenario.

Operation	EPNL/EPNdB	SEL	LAmax
Take-off	90dB	87dB	77dB
Overflight	95dB	92dB	82dB
Approach	99dB	96dB	86dB

7.5.21. The noise assessment notes that the main experience of receptors will be overflight and that given the minimum height that this would occur would be c.300m, the sound levels would be in the order of 6dB less than the values presented above. Table 3.4 of the Applicant's noise report sets out the overflight sound levels at a height of 300m for the type of helicopter that would be used at the proposed SAR, as set out in the table below:

Scenario	EPNL	SEL	LAmax	Event LAeq,30s	LAeq,1hr (1 event)	Daytime LAeq,16h (4 events)	Night LAeq,8hr (2 events)
External	89	86	76	71	50	44	44
Internal Part open windows.	74	71	61	56	35	29	29

Internal Windows closed	61	58	48	43	22	16	16
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7.5.22. I note here that the Applicant has applied a 1dB reduction rather than the 6dB previously referred to for a distance of 300m. No rationale has been provided for the 1dB reduction, but I am satisfied that this presents a precautionary approach rather than the 6dB reduction referred to earlier.

7.5.23. The sound levels are presented in three scenarios: external, open windows, and closed windows, with a 15dB reduction for partially open windows, which would be in line with the ENG guidance. The Applicant has applied a 28dB reduction for closed windows. The ENG guidance recommends a reduction of about 25dB for closed windows, again, no rationale has been provided for the additional 3dB reduction, but I note that the *CAP725* guidance recommends a 20dB to 30dB reduction dependant on window specification (detailed in Section 7.5.13). Given that the majority of homes have double glazing, based on CSO reports that 94.2% of households have double or triple glazing - *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) Report on Household Amenities and Access to Services 2004-2019*, I find that this allowance, whilst 3dB higher than the ENG, is reasonable on balance.

7.5.24. Tables 3.5 presents sound levels for take-off and approach operations for receptors closest to the airport and demonstrates that the LAeq,16h (daytime) and LAeq,8h (night time) levels would be within ENG guidelines. I also note that the LAm_{ax} figures presented for closed windows would also be below the 45dB requirement. However, the four locations assessed as being the closest receptors does not include Cooldrinagh Lane which in my mind should have been included given it is most proximate to the airport and accommodates several residential properties, including that of one of the observers.

7.5.25. Table 3.6 of the Applicant's noise report details the sound levels for both take-off/landing and overflight, which as stated previously would be most receptors experience of the proposed helicopter facility. Again, Cooldrinagh Lane has not been included. This table presents the sound levels in terms of LAm_{ax} and provides daytime LAeq,16h for both overflights and take-off/approach. The results demonstrate

that even with closed windows, these receptors would experience LA_{max} levels of 48dB. The Applicant considers this to be acceptable in terms of the 85dB criterion referred to in the Hong Kong Planning Guidance, but for reasons set out previously, I do not consider that the environments are comparable. In any event, the LA_{eq,16h} daytime measurements for overflight (x4), take-off and landing demonstrate compliance with the CNG guidelines referred to in section 7.5.10 above and would be well under the 50dB – 55 dB outside limit and 35dB inside limits.

- 7.5.26. The noise report also provides a comparison of the four noise sensitive areas against corresponding baseline data. All of the noise sensitive locations report lower LA_{max} levels when compared to the relevant baseline, when considering take-off and approach. When considering overflight, only Coneyburrow would experience helicopter sound levels below the recorded baseline, with the proposed overflight LA_{max} being 76dB against a baseline of 86dB.
- 7.5.27. The remaining four locations would report LA_{max} levels of 76dB which would be above the recorded baselines of 70dB (baseline position 12), 73 dB (baseline position 6), and 71 dB (baseline position 14). However, whilst this would be above the maximum LA_{max} levels, daytime overflight LA_{eq,16hr} (four movements) would be 44dB, whilst take-off and landing would be between 26dB and 33dB which compares favourably against the baseline LA_{eq} levels of between 52dB and 53dB and the report notes that adding the operational LA_{eq,16h} levels to the baseline levels then the highest increase would be less than 1 dB. Based on these results I do not consider that the limited number of flights would result in any significant amenity impacts. However, I have concerns with some aspects of the report that I will address separately below.
- 7.5.28. In terms of nighttime noise, guidance states that indoor sound levels should not exceed 45dB LA_{Fmax} more than 10-15 times per night. Table 3.5 shows that that the threshold of 45dB would be exceeded in some scenarios, but not when windows are closed, in such circumstances the 45dB limit would be achieved. However, table 3.5 relates to take-off and approach only. When applying the overflight LA_{max} calculations set out in table 3.6, it is clear that even in a closed window scenario, all four locations would breach the 45dB limit, with maximum noise levels modelled at 48dB. However, as stated earlier in this report, night flights between 23:00 and 07:00 would be very few, equating to approximately 2/3 flights a month and therefore significantly below the limit of 10-15 occurrences a night recommended in the GCN. On this matter the

Board should be mindful of my earlier concerns in relation to the accuracy of projected flight numbers and their distribution. That being said flights between 23:00 and 07:00 would relate only to taskings as training flights would be completed by 20:00 and I am satisfied that the impacts would be acceptable in those matters.

- 7.5.29. The noise report correlates these levels to a risk of waking during the night based on the guidance presented as part of CAP725, concluding that in a window closed scenario, the maximum (%) risk of waking would be 5% for overflight, 3% for take-off and approach, and 8% for a combination of all actions. As stated previously, I would advise the Board against drawing any definitive conclusions from this guidance/study given that the study areas and operational environments considered are markedly different to that of Weston Airport. Notwithstanding, I am satisfied that although modelled sound levels would be above the 45dB limit, the level of breach taken together with the potentially limited number of such flights, particularly at night, is such that, based on the figures presented in the noise assessment, the impacts would not be significant.
- 7.5.30. Mitigation measures are outlined in Section 4 of the noise report. This includes issuing pilots with Base Instructions within an Operation Manual, tailored to each airport that Bristow operate from. This manual would include details of local noise sensitive areas and how they should be avoided, including adhering to noise abatement procedures and the requirement to 'fly neighbourly', in addition to operational measures and limitation of night time movements. I note that operational missions are predominantly leisure based and occur during daytime hours with nighttime movements being the exception. Additionally, nighttime training flights would be completed by 20:00 in order to avoid the nighttime period of 23:00-07:00.
- 7.5.31. In responding to the Planning Authority's request for Additional Information in addressing noise impacts at the nearby stud farm at Coneyboro/Coneyburrow and to further avoid noise sensitive areas, the Applicant proposed a revised set of noise abatement routes. The revised noise abatement routes are set out in the report *Rose Aviation Noise Abatement Procedures Weston Airport (March 2024)* with noise impacts considered further by Anderson Acoustics in their response to the information request.

7.5.32. The Rose Aviation report (RA) details that two types of helicopter activity would take place at Weston Airport – general helicopter activity and the SAR helicopters operated by Bristow. The noise abatement procedures would apply to all helicopter activity at Weston Airport and are designed to avoid five ‘no fly zones’, except in circumstances where avoiding them would compromise the safety of the helicopter and its crew. The noise sensitive areas to be avoided are:

1. Ballyouster (to the south west of the airport)
2. Coneyburrow (at the west extent of the runway and the location of the stud farm).
3. Weston Park (residential area to the west of the airport on the south side of Celbridge Road).
4. Captain’s Hill (residential area in Leixlip to the north/north west of the airport).
5. Cooldrinagh Lane (at the east end of the runway and in close proximity to the airport).

7.5.33. The noise abatement routes are essentially flight paths and reporting points for helicopters taking off from and approaching the airport. Five reporting points are proposed (north, north west, east, south, and west), all designed to avoid direct overflight of the areas referred to above. Further details are provided regarding vertical departures/landings and rolling departures/landings. A vertical departure/landing means the helicopter ascends/descends vertically. A rolling departure/landing essentially means the helicopter maintains forward movement as it departs/lands.

7.5.34. The supplementary noise report submitted by Anderson Acoustics details sound measurements modelled at ten locations, including the five locations set out in detail above at section 7.5.32. It should be noted that some of the locations have changed from the initial noise assessment, given the updated flight path information and that baseline figures are not available for all locations. The modelled results demonstrate that five locations would see internal noise levels of 45dB or below and I note that the internal L_{Amax} level at Coneyburrow/stud farm would be 37dB which would be an improvement on the 48dB report in the initial noise assessment. The internal sound levels for the remaining five locations would be between 46dB and 49dB. Again, this would be in excess of the 45dB limit set out in the GCN, but given the potentially low

number of night flights, it would not exceed the threshold of 10-15 times a night. The noise report estimates the probabilities of waking from sleep (in a close window scenario) to be 0% for Ballyouster, Coneyburrow, and Leixlip Park (noise sensitive areas 1, 2, and 4), a 10% in terms of Weston Way and Cooldrinagh Lane (noise sensitive areas 3 and 5).

- 7.5.35. On the face of it, based on the results set out in the noise report and supplementary response, the proposed development would on balance, avoid having any significant impact on surrounding properties and noise sensitive premises when balanced against the very clear benefits of an SAR facility. However, I note concerns raised regarding the robustness of the various noise reports.
- 7.5.36. In some respects, I share these concerns. As stated in the noise report, baseline modelling was not undertaken, instead the results of a previous study in September 2022 were relied on. By the Applicants own words, not all of the study positions were covered in the same way. No further detail is provided on what positions were treated differently or how the approach taken was not consistent. I also note that no baseline was undertaken for the revised locations set out in the supplementary noise information submitted at Additional Information stage.
- 7.5.37. Furthermore, no detail on the sound equipment or locational characteristics of the measuring positions of the September 2022 baseline study have been provided. Whilst the report states that these were conducted free field, the photographs submitted as part of Mr Doyle's appeal and referred to by his noise consultant would reasonably appear to contradict best practice set out in NG4⁷, being located under and beside trees/mature hedgerows. I cannot verify the veracity of the information provided by Mr Doyle, nor does the noise assessment provide any background information on the baseline study to counter the issue.
- 7.5.38. In any event, whilst baseline figures are helpful in terms of providing a comparison to current sound levels, the modelled sound levels are, in my opinion, the figures that are of critical importance. Whilst updated baseline figures would have been of assistance in terms of the completeness of information, I am satisfied overall that there is sufficient

⁷ EPA Guidance Note for Noise (NG4).

information on file to allow an assessment and determination of the potential noise impacts.

- 7.5.39. Vibration impacts have been raised by several of the Appellants however no consideration is given to vibration in the noise assessment and no substantive information or confirmation has been submitted on the matter in response to the appeals. The Board could opt to seek Further Information on this matter in the event that planning permission is granted. However, vibration from helicopters is generally related to noise levels and in my opinion, having regard to the modelled noise levels of the helicopters together with separation distance (vertical and horizontal), I consider it very likely that there would be no significant adverse impacts in terms of vibration.

Equine Issues/Stud Farm

- 7.5.40. The grounds of appeal raise extensive issues regarding potential impacts on the stud farm at Coneyboro. The key issue on this matter is that the development would impact on the operation of the business and the health and wellbeing of the horses due to disturbance as a result of helicopter noise which would be exacerbated by increased flight movements above the stud farm. The appeal by Mr Doyle is supplemented by an expert report from Dr Desmond Leadon of the Irish Equine Centre detailing the various impacts noise can have on horses and concluding that the proposed development would have significant impacts on the Coneyboro stud farm.
- 7.5.41. The Applicant refers to studies that have assessed the effects of aviation noise on horses which concluded that horses adapt to disturbances and flyovers. The Applicant considers that the two factors most likely to give rise to equine reaction will not occur as there would be no overflying of the farm by the SAR helicopters and horizontal separations would be significant.
- 7.5.42. The potential impact on the stud farm must be viewed in the context of the existing Weston Airport operations. As noted previously, based on the recorded flight numbers for 2022, there was an average of 91 flight movements per day. The number of daily flight movements associated with the SAR would be minimal by comparison, even accounting for the inconsistencies in the Applicants estimates regarding training and night flights. Clearly, the horses on the stud farm are accustomed to the existing airport operations and again it should be noted that the stud farm is located to the west of the runway and c.80% of flight movements are westerly. The take off area would be a

significant distance from the stud farm. Furthermore, the noise abatement routes categorise the stud farm as a noise sensitive area that is to be avoided. As such there would be no overflight of the farm and modelled LA_{max} sound levels externally are 37dB which would be significantly below baseline event and non-event LA_{max} levels. Whilst I acknowledge that I have raised concerns regarding the baseline noise surveys, the modelled LA_{max} for overflight at 37dB is such that I do not consider that the proposed flight operation would have a significant effect on the stud farm having particular regard to the proposed noise abatement routes and the existing airport operations.

Property Values

- 7.5.43. The grounds of appeal state that there is an established precedence on Local Authority and at Board level, that intensification of use of Weston Airport can have clear detrimental effects upon amenity and thus lead to depreciation of property value in the area. It is submitted that this matter has been taken seriously with regard to previous applications assessed by the Local Authority and the Board (such as SDCC 08/2018/Board Reg. Ref. PL09.235146) where the Inspector concluded that it is reasonable to associate a devaluation of property with a corresponding loss of amenity by reason of increased noise and associated nuisance / disturbance.
- 7.5.44. I note the previous Board decision referred to by the Appellants. Whilst the Inspector noted that there was merit in the Planning Authority's conclusions with regard to a possible devaluation of property, neither the Inspector nor the Board concluded that the development would have a negative impact on property values. In my opinion, whilst the current proposal would potentially have adverse impacts on amenity, I do not find that there is any clear evidence that the amenity impacts would have any significant demonstrable effect on property values.

7.6. Design and Heritage

- 7.6.1. The grounds of appeal raise concerns that the location and size of the proposed hangar would cause serious visual intrusion to the rural area and would be clearly visible from Celbridge Road. Further concerns are raised regarding the impact of the proposed development on nearby Protected Structures.
- 7.6.2. The subject site is located within Landscape Character Area 2 (LCA) (Newcastle Lowlands) which has a medium sensitivity. The CDP notes that the LCA is vulnerable

to urbanising pressures and its character as a rural landscape provides a distinct and important identity for this area. To conserve its sense of place requires measures protecting the integrity of the agricultural landscape by controls on urban expansion, ribbon development and other sources of erosion and fragmentation and requires site planning guidance on the use of appropriate vernacular styles and treatments in new developments.

- 7.6.3. The main façade of the proposed hangar building would be set back approximately 63 metres from the site boundary on the Celbridge Road frontage with a total height of 11.5 metres for the main hangar facility and a height of 8.4 metres for the wrap around ancillary building (heights to parapet). The ESB substation building and security office building would be set back from Celbridge Road by approximately 17.5 metres with a much lower height of around 3.1 metres.
- 7.6.4. The hangar building would be of a functional design typical of ancillary airport buildings/hangar facilities, and would be of no particular individual design merit, being designed for a specific technical role. However, the design, scale and massing would not in my mind be harmful to the visual amenity of the immediate or wider area. The site itself is well screened to the east and west by existing trees and planting and there are limited long distance views. The only significant and clear views of the development would be from the site entrance on the R403 and together with the significant set-back from Celbridge Road, I am satisfied that there would be no significant adverse impact on visual amenity, particularly when considering both existing landscaping and proposed landscaping.
- 7.6.5. With regard to Protected Structures, I note the seven buildings referenced in the grounds of appeal. The closest of the Protected Structures is Westonpark House which lies approximately 210 metres to the west and benefits from significant screening due to the mature trees on the western boundary of the site, all of which would be retained. Given the generous separation distance and the significant screening provided by the mature trees on the western boundary, I am of the view that the hangar building itself would not have any adverse heritage impacts. The remaining Protected Structures are located much further from the site than Westonpark House and I find that the proposal would have no demonstrable impact on their character or setting. I note the appeals raise concerns regarding potential vibration impacts, the Board will note that these are addressed in the amenity section above.

7.7. Transport

- 7.7.1. The Appellants raise a significant number of transport related concerns in the grounds of appeal. The primary concern is that the development would endanger public safety through the creation of a traffic hazard. These concerns stem from the Appellants' position that the access onto the busy R403 is compromised in terms of visibility and its position close to the junction with the Celbridge Link Road. It is further stated that the proposed access would be contrary to previously imposed planning conditions which limited this access to emergency use only. It is asserted that there has been significant development in the area and that traffic on this route has materially increased.
- 7.7.2. Furthermore, the Appellants consider that the Planning Authority granted permission in the absence of a proper Traffic Risk Assessment and did not give reasons for departing from the previous condition limiting the use of the access to emergency only. Concerns have also been raised that the SAR facility could be distracting to drivers, being positioned adjacent to the public road, that Transport Infrastructure Ireland did not consider that the Further Information adequately addressed its concerns and that the issue of potential relocation of the bus stop remains unresolved.
- 7.7.3. The Applicant considers the use of the existing access to be most favourable in maintaining traffic safety, noting that the site benefits from clear unobstructed sightlines and that there are no records of accidents at the junction. It is stated that the solid centre line would be extended to emphasise the constraint in overtaking close to the junction. In terms of visibility, the Applicant argues that it is highly unlikely that drivers would have visual contact with helicopters during take-off and landing, therefore avoiding driver distraction. The Applicant submits that the level of trip generation is low, that upgrades have been included that would improve traffic safety and that Dublin Bus is satisfied with the proposed relocation of the bus stop.
- 7.7.4. The proposed SAR access onto the R403 is already in existence, having originally served as the main entrance to Weston Airport until redevelopment and relocation of the airport facilities to the north of the airfield in the mid 2000's. The relocation of the airport facilities to the north of the airfield was approved by the Board under appeal reference ABP-131149. Condition 7 of this permission required the access to be permanently closed off within one month of the commencement of operation of the

new facilities to the north-east of the site. The Board subsequently permitted the retention of the access for emergency purposes only. This was confirmed on appeal ABP-233306 where condition 2 stated:

2. The access from the R403 Celbridge Road shall be used only as a supplementary accident and emergency access / egress to Weston Aerodrome. It shall not be used for any other purpose other than as a supplementary accident and emergency access / egress and at all other times shall remain permanently closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic with the gates securely locked. The use of this access for non-emergency purposes, access/egress, loading, unloading or maintenance works is strictly prohibited.

Reason: In the interest of traffic safety.

- 7.7.5. Celbridge Road (R403) has a speed limit of 60km/h and I note that this long stretch of the road is straight with very good visibility in both directions from the site access. This section of Celbridge Road has pedestrian footpaths on both sides, leading to the new signalised junction at the Celbridge Link Road 75 metres to the west. My site inspection was undertaken on a Tuesday, after the morning peak and whilst traffic on the road was consistent, it was not heavy or congested and it is clear to me that the new signalised junction successfully serves to moderate the speed of approaching traffic on the R403.
- 7.7.6. Contrary to the Appellants assertion, TII have not objected to the proposal. There is an on-carriageway bus stop just to the east of the site access. The Planning Authority raised concerns that visibility from the site access could be compromised when buses are stopped. Whilst I agree that this would be the case, this is an identical format to many of the bus stops on this section of Celbridge Road, whereby the bus stop is on-carriageway. Furthermore, buses using this stop have a peak frequency of 20 minutes.
- 7.7.7. There is a risk that it could impact on visibility for vehicles turning right to proceed west along Celbridge Road. Whilst it could reasonably be expected that drivers would wait until a stopped bus moves off before checking visibility and exiting the site, the Applicant has proposed to move the bus stop slightly further to the east and fully recessed from the carriageway, following a request from the Planning Authority. I note that this is outside of the red line plan but inside of the blue line plan. Documentation

has been provided that Dublin Bus are agreeable to the change and the Planning Authority are also supportive. With the bus stop alterations proposed I find that suitable sightlines would be retained, even when buses are stopped.

- 7.7.8. The Applicant has assessed trip generation from first principles in the Traffic Impact Assessment. The facility would include 18 staff operating a standard 09:00-17:00 working day in addition to six crew working 24 hour shifts from 13:00-13:30(+24hrs). On a worst case scenario, based on working patterns/parking capacity and assuming all office staff travel to the site by car at peak hours, the Applicant considers that maximum trip generation would be 18 arrivals in the morning peak and 18 departures in the evening peak which equates to a 0.9% increase, based on traffic flows from the modelling of the nearby Celbridge Link Road which were used to form a baseline, taking into account the future development of the Adamstown SDZ lands.
- 7.7.9. Given the reduction in car parking secured under the Additional Information request, trip generation would reduce to 14 arrivals in the morning peak and 14 departures in the evening peak, applying the same principles as the Applicant, and would reduce the impact on the road further. Given the improvements that have been undertaken to the road since previous Board decisions, the clear sightlines that are available, and the limited increase in traffic generation, I am satisfied on balance that use of the access would not have a significant impact on the local road network or result in the creation of a traffic hazard, nor do I find that helicopter activity would cause distraction to drivers.
- 7.7.10. The being said, this does not alter my conclusion that the site itself is not the optimum location for developing lands within Weston Airport and I find that the existing junction at Cooldrinagh Lane would be a more appropriate location to direct traffic to an SAR facility or future development at the airport, benefitting from a right turning lane from the R403.

7.8. Conditions

- 7.8.1. The grounds of appeal raise concerns regarding several conditions which are considered to be weak and poorly drafted with particular reference made to Condition 5, 7(1), 7(12), 7(13), and condition 12. I have addressed condition 12 previously. In relation to the remaining conditions, I am of the view that they are acceptable in principle and generally standard.

7.9. Other Matters

- 7.9.1. The grounds of appeal make reference to several enforcement issues and claims that parts of the airport runway do not benefit from planning permission. Enforcement is not a matter for the Board and remains the jurisdiction of the relevant planning authorities who I note have not raised any substantive issues in this regard.

8.0 Appropriate Assessment

8.1. Stage 1 – Screening Determination for Appropriate Assessment

- 8.1.1. I conclude that 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. It is therefore determined that Appropriate Assessment (stage 2) [under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000] is not required.
- 8.1.2. This conclusion is based on:
- Objective information presented in the Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (dated December 2023).
 - The limited zone of influence of potential impacts, restricted to the immediate vicinity of the proposed development.
 - Standard pollution controls that would be employed regardless of proximity to a European site and effectiveness of same.
 - Qualifying interests, special conservation interests, and conservation objectives of the European sites.
 - Distances from relevant European Sites.
 - The absence of a meaningful pathway to any European site.
- 8.1.3. No measures intended to avoid or reduce harmful effects on European sites were taken into account in reaching this conclusion.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1. I recommend that the Board refuse planning permission for the reasons stated below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations

1. Having regard to the location of the proposed development on a site to the south of the airfield in an isolated location separated from the existing airport facilities and associated airport development to the northeast, it is considered that the proposed development would result in the disorderly and piecemeal development of Weston Airport that would facilitate an overall intensification of the airport. The proposal would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

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.

Terence McLellan
Senior Planning Inspector

30th April 2025

Appendix 1: Appropriate Assessment - Screening Determination

Template 2: Screening for Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination

Step 1: Description of the project

I have considered the development (project) in light of the requirements of S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

Site

The subject site is located on lands at Weston Airport, to the south of the existing runway/airfield and bounded by the R403 Celbridge Road. The site is partially brownfield, being the location of the previous Weston Airport facilities prior to relocation in the mid 2000's, and partially greenfield, taking into account previously undeveloped airside lands on its eastern edge. The site is located to the south of the existing runway and abuts a large area of concrete apron which connects to the runway and taxiways. The southern edge of the site is marked by fencing and a high hedgerow/tree line along the boundary with the R403. The western edge of the site is marked by the existing emergency access road, beyond which is grassland with many mature trees and a high mature hedgerow.

Weston Airport is 1km south of Leixlip and 2.5km west of Lucan. The wider airport site is bounded to the north by Leixlip Reservoir, the River Liffey, and the M4 beyond. To the west the airport is bounded by Cooldrinagh Lane and the neighbouring residential properties and small businesses. To the south the airport is bounded by the R403 Celbridge Road and the adjacent Lucan Golf Club course, agricultural lands and the Backweston Laboratory Complex. The western boundary of the site is marked by residential use along the R403 and R404 in addition to commercial use and equestrian use/stud farm.

Waterbodies

There are no watercourses located at or adjacent to the site, the closest waterbody is the River Liffey approximately 370m to the north west of the site and the Backstown Stream c. 40m to the south-east. The site is not located in or immediately adjacent to any European sites. The nearest European site is the Rye Water Valley/Carton SAC (Site Code 001398) c.1.55km to the north and this includes the Rye Water Valley/Carton proposed natural heritage area (pNHA). The Liffey Valley Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) is located c.1.5km to the north-east of the site.

Project

The project comprises the development of a Search and Rescue facility (SAR) to be operated by Bristow Ireland Limited on behalf of the Department of Transport and the Irish Coast Guard Service and Rescue Aviation Service.

The development would incorporate the erection of a part single/part two storey SAR helicopter hangar and ancillary facility with a combined floorspace of 1,984sqm.

The SAR facility would be capable of accommodating two SAR helicopters in addition to a maintenance store, workshop and facilities, operations rooms and offices, staff kitchen, and accommodation for on-shift personnel. Further airside development would include the formation of an apron area to connect to the existing apron, refuelling area, service access area and a subdivided fenced compound to accommodate airside SAR support vehicles.

Landside development would include reconfiguration of the existing vehicular access from the R403 Celbridge Road to facilitate a dual emergency access route, pedestrian footpath and access to the proposed development. This would include a car park for 20 no. vehicles (inclusive of four EV spaces and two accessible spaces), 17 no. cycle parking spaces and all supporting infrastructure and landscaping. A further single storey building would be provided landside (48.9sqm) accommodating an ESB substation, a switch room, and a security office. This would be located at the entrance to the car park.

The development includes all infrastructural works associated with water supply, wastewater drainage, surface water drainage (including connections to the public networks, and on-site attenuation storage).

The project seeks connections to the public systems for wastewater drainage and surface water drainage. Existing water services networks are located proximate to the site. Wastewater arising from the project will be collected and flow, via a foul pumping station within the development lands, to the existing Irish Water sewer located on Cooldrinagh Lane for treatment at Ringsend WWTP and discharged to necessary standards to the Irish Sea.

The proposed surface water management system comprises four catchment areas (access road, car park, building, apron). Limited SUDs interventions will be used (access road and car park) due to the nature of the site within an aerodrome. Run off will be attenuated for the 1% AEP rainfall event, with a 20% allowance for climate change. Petrol/oil bypass interceptors will be used prior to attenuation reducing the risk of pollution. This will ultimately be discharged to the River Liffey using the existing outfall and eventually to South Dublin Bay.

Submissions and Observations

Uisce Eireann raised no objection to the proposal subject to the Applicant entering into a water and waste water connection agreement.

The Water Services section of the planning authority did not cite any objection to the project, following the receipt of Further Information.

The planning authority have completed an Appropriate Assessment Screening of the project. Regard was had to the scale and nature of the development, the location of the development in a serviced area, and absence of a pathway to the European site,

Step 2: Potential Impact Mechanisms From the Project

Field Survey

Field surveys were undertaken on the 6th July 2023 by two suitably qualified ecologists to assess the extent and quality of habitats present on the site and to

identify any potential ecological receptors associated with European sites. The site is located within an area of amenity grass, scrub and recolonising bare grounds. No protected habitats, plant species of conservation importance, or any terrestrial mammals or evidence of mammals of conservation importance were noted on site.

European Sites

The AASR identifies two European sites within a 15km zone of influence:

- Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC (Site Code 001398) c.1km to the north
- Glenmasole Valley SAC (site code: 001209) c.12.9km to the south-east.

Issues considered include habitat loss/degradation, water quality impairment, air quality impairment, noise and disturbance. The development would not affect any Annex I habitats or species. There would be no effects in terms of noise or air quality given the separation distance to the relevant European sites. The AASR notes that water from the Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC, flows downstream to the River Liffey, noting that the development would therefore not impact on the SAC. No impacts are anticipated to the Glenmasole Valley SAC given the intervening distance and lack of pathways.

The following European sites are outside of the zone of influence but hydrologically connected to the site and have therefore been screened in:

- North Bull Island SPA (004006) is c.19.9km to the east.
- South Dublin Bay SAC (000210) is c.17.9km to the east.
- North Dublin Bay SAC (000206) is c. 19.9km to the east.
- South Dublin Bay and River Tolka SPA (004024) is c.16.7km to the east

Having regard to construction and operation, it is not anticipated that the development would have any adverse effect to designated species, habitats or the integrity of European sites. The hydrological connection is relatively weak and the separation distances from the subject site to the European sites of Dublin Bay are considerable. The development would employ petrol/oil bypass interceptors prior to attenuation reducing the risk of pollution, this is a standard pollution control method and does not constitute mitigation for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment. This

will ultimately be discharged to the River Liffey using the existing outfall and eventually to South Dublin Bay.

Effect Mechanisms

- There are no protected habitats or species identified at the site and therefore the likelihood of any significant effect on any European site due to loss of habitat and/or disturbance of species can be reasonably excluded.
- The distances between the subject site and the hydrologically linked European sites are notable of at least c.16km.
- Site development works pose little risk of contamination to water as there are no waterbodies at or immediately adjacent to the site and works would be governed by a Construction Management Plan with standardised pollution control measures.
- Hydrological connections to the European sites of Dublin Bay are relatively weak give the significant distance and dilution effects.

Having regard to the characteristics of the project in terms of the site's features and location, and the project's scale of works, I do not consider there to be any potential impact mechanism which would result in a likely significant effect on any European sites.

Step 3: European Sites at risk

The European sites in closest proximity to the subject site are set out in section 5.6 of this report/ Further European sites are identified in Step 2 above, including two European sites within the 15km ZOI and a further four that are outside of the ZOI but hydrologically linked to the site. For the reasons I have outlined above, I do not identify any impact mechanisms which could have a likely significant effect on any of the identified European sites. As such, there are no European sites at risk of likely significant effect from the project.

Step 4: Likely significant effects on the European site(s) 'alone'

For the reasons outlined above, I conclude that the project would have no likely significant effect 'alone' on the qualifying features of any European site. In the interests of completeness, further appropriate assessment screening in-combination with other plans and projects is required.

Step 5: Where relevant, likely significant effects on the European site(s) 'in-combination with other plans and projects'

The ASSR has identified relevant permissions to be considered as part of an 'in combination' assessment. I have also undertaken a search of the planning register for other relevant applications that may need to be considered

The Applicant's screening report does not identify any significant in-combination effect, and I would agree with this conclusion. I conclude that the proposed development would have no likely significant effect in combination with other plans and projects on the qualifying features of any European site(s). No further assessment is required for the project.

Conclusion and Screening Determination

I conclude that 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. It is therefore determined that Appropriate Assessment (stage 2) [under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000] is not required.

This conclusion is based on:

- Objective information presented in the Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (dated December 2023).
- The limited zone of influence of potential impacts, restricted to the immediate vicinity of the proposed development.
- Standard pollution controls that would be employed regardless of proximity to a European site and effectiveness of same.
- Qualifying interests, special conservation interests, and conservation objectives of the European sites.
- Distances from relevant European Sites.

- The absence of a meaningful pathway to any European site.

No measures intended to avoid or reduce harmful effects on European sites were taken into account in reaching this conclusion.

Appendix 2

Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	320668-24		
Proposed Development Summary	Search and rescue hangar, associated airside infrastructure and all associated site development works.		
Development Address	Lands forming part of Weston Airport, at Celbridge Road, Backweston, Lucan, Co. Dublin, W23 XHF8.		
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)?			
Yes		Part 2, Class 10: Infrastructure Projects Part 2, Class 13: Changes, Extensions, Development, and Testing.	Proceed to Q3.
No			
3. Does the proposed development equal or exceed any relevant THRESHOLD set out in the relevant Class?			
Yes			EIA Mandatory EIAR required

No	✓		Proceed to Q4
4. Is the proposed development below the relevant threshold for the Class of development [sub-threshold development]?			
Yes	✓	Class 10(b)(iv) - Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere. The subject site has an area of 2.21 hectares. Class 10 (d): All airfields not included in Part 1 of this Schedule with paved runways which would exceed 800 metres in length. This would not apply to the proposal which does not relate to the construction of an airfield but rather supplementary development to an existing airport. Class 13(a): Any change or extension of development already authorised, executed or in the process of being executed (not being a change or extension referred to in Part 1) which would:- (iii) result in the development being of a class listed in Part 1 or paragraphs 1 to 12 of Part 2 of this Schedule, and (iv) result in an increase in size greater than – - 25 per cent, or - an amount equal to 50 per cent of the appropriate threshold, whichever is the greater.	Preliminary examination required (Form 2)

		The proposed development would not exceed these thresholds.	
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5. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?		
No		Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q4)
Yes	✓	Screening Determination required

Inspector: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3: Form 3 - EIA Screening Determination Sample Form

A. CASE DETAILS		
An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	320668-24	
Development Summary		
	Yes / No / N/A	Comment (if relevant)
1. Was a Screening Determination carried out by the PA?	Yes.	No EIA required.
2. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?	Yes.	
3. Has an AA screening report or NIS been submitted?	Yes.	An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been received.
4. Is a IED/ IPC or Waste Licence (or review of licence) required from the EPA? If YES has the EPA commented on the need for an EIAR?	No.	
5. Have any other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment which have a significant bearing on the project been carried out pursuant to other relevant Directives – for example SEA	Yes.	Appropriate Assessment Stage 1 Screening Report December 2023 Outline Construction Management Plan December 2023 Construction Waste Management Plan December 2023 Ecological Impact Assessment December 2023 Engineering Services Report December 2023 Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment December 2023 Weston Airport SAR Facility Noise Assessment December 2023 Site Lighting Report December 2023 Traffic Impact Statement December 2023 Utilities & Energy Report December 2023 Noise Abatement Procedures Weston Airport March 2024 SAR Aircraft Impact on Military Airspace July 2024 Non-Technical Executive Summary of Noise Abatement June 2024

		Weston Airport Outline Business Plan 2021-2024 SEA was undertaken by the Planning Authority in respect of the South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028	
B. EXAMINATION	Yes/ No/ Uncertain	Briefly describe the nature and extent and Mitigation Measures (where relevant) (having regard to the probability, magnitude (including population size affected), complexity, duration, frequency, intensity, and reversibility of impact) Mitigation measures –Where relevant specify features or measures proposed by the applicant to avoid or prevent a significant effect.	Is this likely to result in significant effects on the environment? Yes/ No/ Uncertain
This screening examination should be read with, and in light of, the rest of the Inspector's Report attached herewith			
1. Characteristics of proposed development (including demolition, construction, operation, or decommissioning)			
1.1 Is the project significantly different in character or scale to the existing surrounding or environment?	No.	The site is bounded to the south by Celbridge Road and on all other sides by lands of Weston Airport. Opposite the site to the south is Lucan Golf Club. Buildings along Celbridge Road are inconsistent in style, height and setback from the road in a general range of one to two storeys, with some non-residential buildings higher than this. Whilst the proposed development would be different in character and scale to the surrounding environment, I do not consider it to be significantly so in terms of effects on the environment.	No.
1.2 Will construction, operation, decommissioning or demolition works cause	Yes.	The development would result in physical changes to the appearance of the site. Proposed excavation works will cause a minor change in site topography	No.

physical changes to the locality (topography, land use, waterbodies)?		and reuse of excavated materials would result in potentially more pronounced changes in topography as part of a landscaping and screening scheme along the southern boundary of the site, although this would not be significant in the context of the surrounding environment. Construction would be managed through the implementation of the Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Construction Waste Management Plan (CWMP) and final versions could be agreed by condition. In terms of land use the development would be consistent with the zoning objective and the wider aerodrome operation. There are no watercourses located at or adjacent to the site (closest waterbody is the River Liffey approximately 370m to the north west of the site and the Backstown Stream c. 40m to the south-east). Surface water runoff will be collected and attenuated on-site and then discharged to the public surface water network. The development would be connected to municipal water and waste services. I am satisfied that physical changes arising from the project are not likely to result in significant effects on the environment in terms of topography, land use, and waterbodies.	
1.3 Will construction or operation of the project use natural resources such as land, soil, water, materials/minerals or energy, especially resources which are non-renewable or in short supply?	No.	The nature and scale of the development would not result in a significant use of natural resources. Where possible excavated material suitable for reuse would be reused on site in landscaping design and to provide visual screening. Material unsuitable for reuse or not reused would be disposed of to appropriately licenced facilities. While the construction phase will require some use of natural resources, including stone, gravel, aggregates and water, having regard to the limited size and scale of the proposed development, any	No.

		such usage will not be significant and would not be expected to exceed that normally associated with the construction of a development of the scale proposed. Operational demands on natural resources, such as would be required for energy generation and water supply, will be commensurate to the scale and nature of the development and will not be significant. It is not predicted that there would be a significant effect on natural resources as a result of the development.	
1.4 Will the project involve the use, storage, transport, handling or production of substance which would be harmful to human health or the environment?	Yes.	Construction phase activities will require the use of potentially harmful materials, such as fuels and create waste for disposal. The use of such substances would be typical of construction sites. Noise and dust emissions during the construction phase are likely but can be suitably managed through implementation of the final CEMP. The operational phase of the project would involve the transport of aviation fuel. This would be drawn from the airport storage facility, licensed and banded with rotation to the site via a mobile bowser using existing airport infrastructure and taxiways. No additional fuel storage is proposed. Conventional waste could adequately be managed through an Operational Waste Management Plan that could be secured by condition. (OWMP). I do not consider this aspect of the project likely to result in significant effects on the environment in terms of human health or biodiversity.	No.
1.5 Will the project produce solid waste, release pollutants or any hazardous / toxic / noxious substances?	No.	Conventional waste will be produced from demolition and construction activity and will be managed through the implementation of the Construction Environmental management Plan and Construction Waste management Plan. The operational phase of the project will not produce or release any pollutant or hazardous material. As stated previously, the operational phase of the	No.

		project would involve the transport of aviation fuel. This would be drawn from the airport's storage facility, licensed and banded with rotation to the site via a mobile bowser using existing airport infrastructure and taxiways. No additional fuel storage is proposed. An Operational Waste Management Plan would be secured by condition in order to address conventional operational waste. Accordingly, I do not consider the production of waste or generation of pollutants in the project likely to result in a significant effect on the environment of the area.	
1.6 Will the project lead to risks of contamination of land or water from releases of pollutants onto the ground or into surface waters, groundwater, coastal waters or the sea?	Yes.	The project involves site preparation, excavations, reprofiling and construction, and landscaping works. These construction phase activities are associated with contamination risks to land and/ or water sources. Standard construction methods, materials and equipment are to be used, and the construction process would be managed through the implementation of the Construction Environmental Management Plan and Construction Waste Management Plan. Operationally there is a potential risk of contamination of water resources including surface waters, groundwaters, coastal waters, and of flood risk as a result of refuelling. However, subject to appropriate mitigation, including the use of petrol interceptors as proposed, these potential impacts can be adequately mitigated against and I therefore I do not consider this aspect of the project likely to result in a significant effect on the environment.	No.
1.7 Will the project cause noise and vibration or release of light, heat, energy or electromagnetic radiation?	Yes.	Potential impacts in terms of noise, vibration, and light during the site development works would be short term in duration, temporary, localised, and effectively managed through the implementation of the Construction Environmental Management Plan.	No.

		Operationally, it is noted that there would be additional noise from the operation of the SAR, particularly in the evenings. A Noise Assessment submitted with the application demonstrates that significant noise impacts are unlikely, due to the limited extent of movements and proposed mitigation measures. No significant noise and vibration effects are predicted as a result of the proposed development. Notwithstanding my concerns regarding the noise assessment and flight numbers, it is not considered that potential impacts, given the overall limited operation, would result in such impacts that would warrant an EIA.	
1.8 Will there be any risks to human health, for example due to water contamination or air pollution?	Yes.	There is a potential risk of contamination of water resources including surface waters, groundwaters, coastal waters, and of flood risk as a result of refuelling. However, subject to appropriate mitigation, including the use of petrol interceptors as proposed, these potential impacts can be adequately mitigated against. In terms of air pollution, works will be managed through implementation of a Construction management Plan and development works would be short term in duration, with impacts being temporary, localised, and addressed by the mitigation measures. The operational phase of the project will not likely cause risks to human health through air pollution given the limited number of additional movements proposed and the significant separation from the nearest sensitive receptors. Accordingly, in terms of risks to human health, I do not consider this aspect of the project likely to result in a significant effect on the environment.	No.
1.9 Will there be any risk of major accidents that could affect human health or the environment?	No.	Construction would be undertaken in line with the provisions of a Construction Management Plan, in accordance with relevant codes of practice by a suitably qualified contractor. Operationally, the	No.

		airport is licenced by the Irish Aviation Authority. This license and annual audit included approval of the Weston Airport Emergency Response Plan and there is a Safety management System in operation. The SAR operations would be incorporated into this. And the operator would have an independent SMS linked by operational protocols with that of Weston Airport. Prior to the commencement of SAR operations, the operator will have a full Air Operator Certificate. Subject to full compliance with the relevant regulatory framework, the requirements of the Irish Aviation Authority, and the requirements of air traffic control, there is no risk of major accidents given nature of the project and location of the site.	
1.10 Will the project affect the social environment (population, employment)	No.	There would be localised temporary employment activity at the site during development works c. 30 construction workers on site on any given day. Operationally, there would be approximately 40 staff. The development would not be anticipated to have any impact on local population. Accordingly, I do not consider this aspect of the project likely to result in a significant effect on the social environment of the area.	No.
1.11 Is the project part of a wider large scale change that could result in cumulative effects on the environment?	No.	Plans to install runway lights and guidance instruments is noted. There is therefore potential for cumulative effects. However, given the limited number of SAR flights in the context of the overall airport operation and the dispersal of these flights, I do not consider that the proposal would contribute to any significant cumulative effects.	No.
2. Location of proposed development			
2.1 Is the proposed development located on, in, adjoining or have the potential to impact on any of the following: - European site (SAC/ SPA/ pSAC/ pSPA)	No.	The project is not located in, on, or adjoining any European site, any designated or proposed NHA,	No.

- NHA/ pNHA - Designated Nature Reserve - Designated refuge for flora or fauna - Place, site or feature of ecological interest, the preservation/conservation/ protection of which is an objective of a development plan/ LAP/ draft plan or variation of a plan		or any other listed area of ecological interest or protection. An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been submitted in addition to an Ecological Impact Assessment, an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report and Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment. The Appropriate Assessment Screening Report concluded that the project would not have a likely significant effect on any European site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Accordingly, I do not consider the project likely to result in a significant effect on the environment in terms of ecological designations or biodiversity.	
2.2 Could any protected, important or sensitive species of flora or fauna which use areas on or around the site, for example: for breeding, nesting, foraging, resting, over-wintering, or migration, be affected by the project?	Yes.	The site comprises greenfield and brownfield lands. The EclA confirms the site as being of low ecological value. It is not considered to be of high suitability or a site of importance for any Annex I of Annex II species or red listed birds. The development would not result in any significant impacts on ecological receptors onsite or in the surrounding area following the implementation of appropriate mitigation which is set out in Section 5 of the EclA	No.
2.3 Are there any other features of landscape, historic, archaeological, or cultural importance that could be affected?	No.	There are no Architectural Conservation Areas in proximity to the site. There are no archaeological monuments on either the SMR or RMP on the site. There are a number of recorded monuments in close proximity to the site, the closest being Westonpark House, a Protected Structure c. 250m to the west and screened by dense trees. In terms of landscape, the site is located within Landscape Character Area 2 (Newcastle Lowlands) which is of medium sensitivity. The area around the site is characterised by a mixture of land uses including residential commercial,	No.

		agricultural, recreational and industrial. The overall landscape is generally urban fringe with substantial agricultural use and undeveloped lands. The building would be visible by passers by on Celbridge Road and the design of the building would be in context with the airport location. Landscaping is also proposed which would provide a degree of screening on Celbridge Road. Overall I do not consider that the development would give rise to significant visual impacts on the landscape.	
2.4 Are there any areas on/around the location which contain important, high quality or scarce resources which could be affected by the project, for example: forestry, agriculture, water/coastal, fisheries, minerals?	No.	There are no such resources close to the site.	No.
2.5 Are there any water resources including surface waters, for example: rivers, lakes/ponds, coastal or groundwaters which could be affected by the project, particularly in terms of their volume and flood risk?	No.	There are no watercourses located at or adjacent to the site (closest waterbody is the River Liffey approximately 370m to the north west of the site and the Backstown Stream c. 40m to the south-east. Surface water runoff will be collected and attenuated on-site and then discharged to the public surface water network. The site is located in Flood Zone C which has a low probability of flooding. The Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment submitted with the application advises that there are no historic flood events, predicted flooding would not affect the site, there would be no increase to the potential risk of off-site flooding and the likelihood of onsite flooding from hydrogeological ground conditions is minor and within acceptable levels.	No.
2.6 Is the location susceptible to subsidence, landslides or erosion?	No.	The location is not susceptible to subsidence, landslides or erosion.	No.

2.7 Are there any key transport routes(eg National primary Roads) on or around the location which are susceptible to congestion or which cause environmental problems, which could be affected by the project?	Yes.	The site has an access onto the R403 Celbridge Road, a busy regional road connecting Celbridge to the N4/M4 near Leixlip. During the construction phase there would be an increase in traffic activity as construction workers, equipment, materials, and waste are deliver to and leave the site. These works would be temporary and of short duration and would be effectively managed by way of a Construction Management Plan with a final version secured by condition. Operationally, the Traffic Impact Statement predicts an increase in traffic volumes of 0.9%. Therefore the project is not likely to result in a significant effect on the environment in terms of transportation.	No.
2.8 Are there existing sensitive land uses or community facilities (such as hospitals, schools etc) which could be affected by the project?	No.	The closest community facility is Lucan Golf Club. There are no hospitals or schools in close proximity to the site. There are private residential dwellings located to the north east on Cooldrinagh Lane and to the west lining the R403 and R404. Further dwellings lie to the south and south east. It is not anticipated that the development would have any significant impact during the construction phase given the separation distance, the low traffic burden and the short/temporary duration of the works. Operationally there would be potential noise impacts as a result of the SAR helicopter operations. However, as set out previously, subject to the implementation of mitigation measures, the increase in activity at the site is not anticipated to have any significant impacts.	No.
3. Any other factors that should be considered which could lead to environmental impacts			
3.1 Cumulative Effects: Could this project together with existing and/or approved development result in		As noted above, there are plans to install runway lights and guidance instruments. There is therefore potential	

cumulative effects during the construction/ operation phase?		for cumulative effects. However, given the limited number of SAR flights in the context of the overall airport operation and the dispersal of these flights, I do not consider that the proposal would contribute to any significant cumulative effects.	
3.2 Transboundary Effects: Is the project likely to lead to transboundary effects?	No.	There are no transboundary effects are arising.	No.
3.3 Are there any other relevant considerations?	No.	No.	No.

C. CONCLUSION

No real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	☐	ElAR Not Required
Real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	☐	ElAR Required

D. MAIN REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

EG - ElAR not Required

Having regard to: -

1. the criteria set out in Schedule 7, in particular
 - (a) the limited nature and scale of the proposed development on an established airport site and in the context of existing airfield operations.
 - (b) the absence of any significant environmental sensitivity in the vicinity, and the location of the proposed development outside of the designated archaeological protection zone
 - (c) the location of the development outside of any sensitive location specified in article 109(4)(a) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)
2. the results of other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment submitted by the applicant including Appropriate Assessment Stage 1 Screening Report December 2023, Ecological Impact Assessment December 2023, Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment December 2023, Weston Airport SAR Facility Noise Assessment December 2023, Traffic Impact Statement December 2023, and Noise Abatement Procedures Weston Airport March 2024.

3. the features and measures proposed by applicant envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant effects on the environment.

The Board concluded that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment, and that an environmental impact assessment report is not required.

Inspector _____

Date _____

Approved (DP/ADP) _____

Date _____