



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-321993-25

Development	Castletroy Link Road
Location	between the L1116 Golf Links Road, Ballysimon and the L5173 Groody Road, Kilbane, Limerick.
Planning Authorities	Limerick City and County Council
Applicant	Limerick City and County Council
Type of Application	Application under Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended
Prescribed Bodies	National Transport Authority Office of Public Works Transport Infrastructure Ireland Uisce Éireann
Observers	Brian and Eileen Coates Caisleán na hAbhann Residents Association Des Frawley Donal Brennan James Quirke

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Date of Site Inspection 18th July 2025

Inspector Tomás Bradley

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1.0 Introduction

Limerick City and County Council (LCCC or ‘the applicant’) have made an application to An Coimisiún Pleanála (An Coimisiún) under Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended for approval of the Castletroy Link Road (‘the proposed scheme’).

The proposed scheme has an overall approximate length of approximately 680 m and will run between Golf Links Road (L1116) and Groody Road (L5173) in the townlands of Ballysimon and Kilbane, Limerick.

A corresponding application for compulsory purchase for the proposed scheme is being progressed in parallel under ABP-322343-25.

1.1 Pre-Application Consultation

LCCC originally lodged a pre-application consultation request under section 51A of the Roads Act 1993, as amended. One meeting was held. The prospective applicant withdrew the pre-application consultation request on the recommendation of the An Coimisiún’s representative, who indicated that the process should only be utilised where it has been conclusively determined that an EIAR is required to be produced. A determination in relation to whether the project is strategic infrastructure development or not is not required under the Roads Act.

The Commission should note that the applicant made formal requests for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening directions under Section 50 of the Roads Act, 1993 (as amended) and Article 250 (1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

In respect of EIA., An Coimisiún under ABP-312427-22 directed that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and that the preparation and submission of an EIA Report (EIAR) is not required.

In respect of AA, An Coimisiún under ABP-312428-22 directed that it cannot be ruled out that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites and that the preparation and submission of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is required.

1.2 Further Information

In July 2025, the applicant provided a response to observations. The observers were given an opportunity make a submission on this in August 2025. On the basis of all the information received from the applicant and observers, it is considered there is no issue arising that lacks clarity or detail or are so complex as to require Further Information be requested from the applicant or indeed the observers and the applications can be satisfactorily assessed based on the information provided.

1.3 Oral Hearing

There were no requests for an oral hearing to be held in respect of the proposed scheme in submissions made by observers. I am satisfied that no oral hearing is required. Written evidence has allowed for a proper and full assessment of the case without recourse to an oral hearing. It is considered that there is no issue arising that lacks clarity or detail or are so complex to require a hearing. The holdings of an oral hearing is, of course, entirely at the discretion of the Commission.

2.0 Site Location and Description

The proposed scheme consists of construction of a link road between Golf Links Road (L1116) and Groody Road (L5173) in the townlands of Ballysimon and Kilbane, Limerick and has an overall length of approximately 680 m. The Golf Links Road (L1116) links the Dublin Road (R455) to the Old Ballysimon Road. The Groody Road links the Dublin Road (R455) to the Ballysimon Road (R527).

The proposed scheme primarily leads to the R527 Regional Road (which leads into the N24 National Road) which is the main inter-urban between Limerick and Waterford. There is also a junction (Junction 29) for the M7 Limerick Dublin Motorway on the R527/N24. As a result, the existing roads network accommodates foot, cycle, bus and general traffic for Limerick City Centre and also University of Limerick (UL).

Overall, the site is located within an urbanised environment and in proximity to the residential suburbs of Ballysimon, Monaleen and Castletroy. There is a mix of other uses in proximity including commercial (Northern Trust (off Groody Road), City East Retail Park (off Old Ballysimon Road), Garryglass Industrial Estate)) and community (Castletroy Golf Club (off Golf Links Road), Limerick Educate Together, Bon Secours Hospital (under construction) (off Groody Road)).

The site for the proposed is predominantly agricultural lands enclosed by trees and hedgerows. The River Groody (EPA Code: 25G05) runs to the west of the proposed scheme. A lesser order and shorter stream, Peafield (EPA Code: 25P36) runs to the south and joins the Groody River. This river is liable to flooding and has been modelled under the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment Management (CFRAM) Programme. The River Groody flows north and meets the River Shannon (EPA Code: 25S01) which is part of the Lower River Shannon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code: 002165).

At the Groody Road side, the proposed scheme ends at an existing roundabout at the junction with Caisleán Na hAbhann. On the Gold Links Road side, the proposed scheme ends at the T-junction with School House Road. The Groody Road carries the 310 Bus Service from Sarsfield Street (Limerick City) to the National Technology

Park (Castletroy). The Golf Links Road carries the 304A Bus Service from Raheen to UL.

There are several residential receptors adjacent to the proposed development including Caisleán Na hAbhann, Fox Hollows, Ashfort, Glantán estates and other residential dwellings along Golf Links Road and School House Road

There are a number of built heritage features on this site including a ritual site - holy well (SMR Record: L1005-034001) which is identified on 1938 edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map as Mary Madalene's Well. This is also recorded as a Protected Structure (RPS) (RPS 1633) on the Limerick City and County Development Plan 2022-2028.

3.0 Proposed Scheme

The proposed development consists of:

- A new distributor road of approximately 680m in length with a cross-section consisting of 9.7m wide carriageway including a 3.5m wide bus lane, footpaths, segregated cycle-track, planted verges with 1 in 2 road embankment side slopes
- Upgrading of both the Schoolhouse Road/Golf Links Road junction and the Kilbane roundabout to a signalised protected junction arrangement
- Tree and vegetation removal with tree re-planting and associated landscaping works
- Provision of new surface water drainage and associated works required including an attenuation pond to the western side of the scheme with 2m high paladin fencing, access tracks and access gate to agricultural lands
- Proposed realignment of the existing open drainage channels including 3no. box culvert crossings
- Provision of bus stop infrastructure with toucan crossing facility for pedestrians & cyclists
- Fencing, LED public lighting, safety barriers, road signage, traffic signal poles and all associated site development work

These details of the proposed scheme are set out in the relevant Public Notices, which accompanied the planning application.

Once commenced, it is expected that the construction phase will take approximately 18 months.

3.1 Development Objectives

The proposed scheme will provide a strategically important link road required for connectivity in the Castletroy area as well as releasing landlocked zoned lands for development in this rapidly growing suburban district.

The proposed new distributor road will include Active travel and Bus stop infrastructure providing facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport to serve the planned growth for Limerick East in a sustainable manner.

3.2 Documents supporting the Proposed scheme

The following documents were submitted to the An Coimisiún in the first instance in support of the proposed scheme:

- Cover Letter
- Planning Report
- Public Notices
- Prescribed Body Notifications
- Natura Impact Statement
- Environmental Report
- Appendices
 - Appendix A: An Bord Pleanála Directions
 - Appendix B Biodiversity Management Plan
 - Appendix C Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan
 - Appendix D Noise Survey Results
 - Appendix E Tree Survey Report
 - Appendix F Photomontage Booklet
 - Appendix G Archaeological & Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment
- Stage 2 Road Safety Audit
- Public Lighting Report
- Planning Drawings

The applicant responded to submissions (as set out in Section 7.0 of this report) in July 2025 and submitted the following information:

- Flood Risk Assessment
- Responses to Submissions

4.0 Planning History

A review of the relevant local authority planning portal and the An Coimisiún's case files was carried out the in August 2025 to collate any relevant, recent (within 10 years) planning history for the site. There are no notable planning applications on the site itself.

A detailed planning history is provided in Section 6 of the Planning Report submitted by the applicant. This is noted.

There are a significant number of planning applications in proximity to the proposed scheme which include large residential, domestic residential such as alterations to existing houses, commercial and community development. This is to be expected in such urban locations. These are all noted and considered in the context of the assessment below – in particular the cumulative and in-combination assessments.

5.0 Policy Context

The Commission should note the following European, national and regional level policies and guidance which will be relied on in the assessment below.

5.1 National

5.1.1 Climate Action Plan 2024 (and Climate Action Plan 2025) (DECC, 2025)

The CAP25, builds on CAP24 and sets out a roadmap to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050. CAP25 continues to seek the implementation of carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings that were introduced under the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, 2021*. Sector emission ceilings were approved by Government in July 2022 for the electricity, transport, built environment – residential, built environment – commercial, industry, agricultural and other (F-gases, waste & petroleum refining) sectors. Finalisation of the emissions ceiling for the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector has been deferred from July 2022.

Citizen engagement and a strengthened social contract between the Government and the Irish people will be required around climate action. Some sectors and communities will be impacted more than others. A just transition is embedded in CAP25 to equip people with the skills to benefit from change and to acknowledge that costs need to be shared. Large investment will be necessary through public and private sectors to meet CAP24 targets and objectives.

The electricity sector will help to decarbonise the transport, heating and industry sectors and will face a huge challenge to meet requirements under its own sectoral emissions ceiling. CAP25 reframes the previous pathway outlined in CAP24, CAP23 and CAP21 under the Avoid-Shift-Improve Framework to achieve a net zero decarbonisation pathway for transport. This is a hierarchical framework which prioritises actions to reduce or avoid the need to travel; shift to more environmentally friendly modes; and improve the energy efficiency of vehicle technology. A National Demand Management Strategy was commenced in 2023 with the aim of reducing travel demand and improving sustainable mobility alternatives.

5.1.2 Cycle Design Manual (NTA, 2023)

The Cycle Design Manual 2023 replaced the previous 2011 National Cycle Manual and draws on the experience of cycle infrastructure development over the past decade and international best practice to help deliver safe cycle facilities for people of all ages and abilities. The Manual is intended as a live document that will be updated to reflect emerging best practice.

Chapter 2 of the Manual sets out the five main requirements of safety, coherence, directness, comfort, and attractiveness) that designs should fulfil to cater for existing cyclists and to attract new cyclists to the network.

Chapter 3 of the Manual addresses wider cycle network planning. Designing for cycling is covered in Chapter 4,

The Manual makes a single reference to BusConnects under protected junctions, where it is noted that a small number of such junctions have been implemented in Ireland and many more are currently being planned under active travel schemes around the country and on BusConnects corridors in Dublin and regional cities. The Manual anticipates that the continued rollout of protected junctions will improve junction consistency and coherence on the cycle network.

5.1.3 National Sustainable Mobility Policy (DoT, 2022)

The purpose of this document is to set out a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel and public transport to support Ireland's overall requirement to achieve a 51% reduction in carbon emissions by the end of this decade.

A key objective of the document is to expand the bus capacity and services through the BusConnects Programmes in the five cities of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford; improved town bus services; and the Connecting Ireland programme in rural areas.

5.1.4 National Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan 2022-2025 (DoT, 2022)

This action plan sets out specific goals and associated core actions to deliver the National Sustainable Mobility Policy.

5.1.5 National Development Plan 2021-2030 (as updated in July 2025) (DPE, 2021)

The NDP Review contains a range of investments and measures which will be implemented over the coming years to facilitate the transition to sustainable mobility. These measures include significant expansions to public transport options, including capacity enhancements on current assets and the creation of new public transport links.

5.1.6 National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (DoT, 2021)

One of the key challenges identified within this document relates to transport and the ability to maintain existing transport infrastructure whilst ensuring resilience of the most strategically important parts of the network. Population projections are expected to increase into the future and a consistent issue identified within the five cities of Ireland is congestion. Given space constraints, urban congestion will primarily have to be addressed by encouraging modal shift to sustainable modes.

Within the cities, frequent and reliable public transport of sufficient capacity and high-quality active travel infrastructure can incentivise people to travel using sustainable modes rather than by car.

The revised NDP 2021- 2030 sets out details of a new National Active Travel Programme with funding of €360 million annually for the period from 2021 to 2025. A new National Cycling Strategy is to be developed by the end of 2022 and will map existing cycling infrastructure in both urban and rural areas to inform future planning and project delivery decisions in relation to active travel.

5.1.7 Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DHLGH, 2019)

This Manual provides guidance on how to provide a balanced design for urban streets. To encourage more sustainable travel patterns and safer streets, the Manual states that designers must place the pedestrian at the top of the user hierarchy, followed by cyclists and public transport, with the private car at the bottom of the hierarchy. The following key design principles are set out to guide a more place-based/ integrated approach to road and street design.

- To support the creation of integrated street networks which primate higher levels of permeability and legibility for all users, and in particular more sustainable forms of transport.
- The promotion of multi-functional, place based streets that balance the needs of all users within a self-regulating environment.
- Quality of the pedestrian environment.
- Greater communication and cooperation between design professionals through the promotion of a plan-led multidisciplinary approach to design.

The manual recommends that bus services should be directed along arterial and link streets and that selective bus detection technology should be considered that prioritises buses. It is noted that under used or unnecessary lanes can serve only to increase the width of carriageways (encouraging greater speeds) and can consume space that could otherwise be dedicated to placemaking /traffic calming measures.

5.1.8 National Planning Framework Project Ireland 2040 (as revised in April 2025) (DHPLG, 2018)

The National Planning Framework (NPF) establishes the fundamental national objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050,

Managing the challenges of future growth is critical to regional development. A more balanced and sustainable pattern of development, with a greater focus on addressing employment creation, local infrastructure needs and addressing the legacy of rapid growth, must be prioritised. This means that housing development should be primarily based on employment growth, accessibility by sustainable transport modes and quality of life, rather than unsustainable commuting patterns.

National Strategic Outcome 4 (NSO 4) of the NPF recognises that Limerick and other cities and major urban areas are too heavily dependent on road and private, mainly car based, transport with the result that the roads are becoming more and more congested. The NDP makes provision for investment in public transport and sustainable mobility solutions to progressively put in place a more sustainable alternative. Furthermore NSO 4 provides support to develop a comprehensive network of safe cycling routes in metropolitan areas to address travel needs.

5.1.9 Permeability in Existing Urban Areas Best Practice Guide 2015 (NTA, 2015)

Among the priorities of the NTA are to encourage the use of more sustainable modes of transport and to ensure that transport considerations are fully addressed as part of land use planning. This guidance demonstrates how best to facilitate demand for walking and cycling in existing built-up areas.

5.1.10 Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 – 2020 (DoT, 2009)

This is a government document that was prepared in the context of unsustainable transport and travel trends in Ireland. The overall vision set out in this policy document is to achieve a sustainable transport system in Ireland by 2020.

To achieve this the government set out 5 key goals

1. to reduce overall travel demand,
2. to maximise the efficiency of the transport network,
3. to reduce reliance on fossil fuels,
4. to reduce transport emissions and
5. to improve accessibility to transport.

To achieve these goals and to ensure that Ireland have sustainable travel and transport by 2020, the Government sets targets, which include the following:

- 500,000 more people will take alternative means to commute to work to the extent that the total share of car commuting will drop from 65% to 45%
- Alternatives such as walking, cycling and public transport will be supported and provided to the extent that these will rise to 55% of total commuter journeys to work.

5.2 Regional

5.2.1 Regional Spatial Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES)

The Regional Spatial Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES) sets out the strategic plan and investment framework for the region which includes Limerick Chapter 6 (Section 2) of the RSES sets out the role of transport networks to improve the sustainable movement of people and goods. Objectives address the NPF's

National Strategic Outcomes of Enhanced Regional Accessibility, Sustainable Mobility and High-Quality International Connectivity The Section also sets out priorities for the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy.

The following Regional Policy Objective (RPO) are noted.

Table 1: Policies and Objective of the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy	
Policy/Objective	Detail
RPO 151	Integration of Land Use and Transport
RPO 152	Local Planning Objectives
RPO 157	Local Transport Plans (LTP)
RPO 159	Role of Transport in Enabling Access for All
RPO 160	Smart and Sustainable Mobility
RPO 162	Multi-Modal Travel Integration
Section 6.3.6.4	Priorities for the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy
RPO 168	Investment in Regional and Local Roads
RPO 169	Strategic Road Network Improvement Priorities
RPO 171	Bus
RPO 174	Walking and Cycling

5.2.2 Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS) 2040

This Strategy sets out the framework for the delivery of the transport system required to further the development of the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area as a hub of cultural and social development and regeneration; as the economic core for the Mid-West; as an environmentally sustainable and unified metropolitan unit; as a place where people of all ages can travel conveniently and safely; and a place that attracts people, jobs and activity from all over Ireland and beyond.

The LSMATS was prepared by the NTA in collaboration with LCCC, Clare County Council, and Transport Infrastructure Ireland. The cooperation of Irish Rail was also a key input.

The strategy identifies a link road between Childers Road and Golf Link Road:

A requirement for a link road from the Childers Road to Golf Links Road via Bloodmill Road and Groody Road has been identified in order to serve new development areas in this location and in order to provide for an additional public transport route from the City Centre towards Monaleen and onwards towards Annacotty. This public transport route would require a new bus-only link from Garryowen onto Childers Road. Parts of this link will be delivered in the short term, subject to further planning and appraisal, with the remaining sections (including the bus-only link) to be progressed in later phases of the strategy.

5.3 Limerick City and County

The Limerick City and County Development Plan 2022-2028 was adopted by the Elected Members of Limerick City and County Council at a Special Meeting on 17th June 2022 and came into effect on 29th July 2022.

5.3.1 Zoning Objectives

The proposed scheme is located in area for which lands have been zoned 'New Residential', 'Education and Community Infrastructure' and the 'Groody Valley Wedge'

Table 2a: Zoning Objectives of the LCCDP	
Policy/Objective	Detail
New Residential	Objective: To provide for new residential development in tandem with the provision of social and physical infrastructure. Purpose: This zone is intended primarily for new high quality housing development, including the provision of high-quality, professionally managed and purpose built third level student accommodation. The quality and mix of residential areas and the servicing of lands will be a priority to support balanced communities. New housing and infill developments should include a mix of housing types, sizes and tenures, to cater for all members of society. Design should be complimentary to the surroundings and should not adversely impact on the amenity of adjoining residents. These areas require high levels of accessibility, including pedestrian, cyclists and public transport (where feasible). This zone may include a range of other uses particularly those that have the potential to facilitate the development of new residential communities such as open space, schools, childcare facilities, doctor's surgeries and playing fields etc.
Education and Community Infrastructure	Objective: To protect and provide for educational, training and adult learning, community, healthcare, childcare, civic, religious and social infrastructure. Purpose: To protect existing and allow for expansion of a wide range of educational facilities, services and related development. To facilitate sustainable development of community infrastructure and create an inclusive high quality of life. This land use will provide for community facilities, healthcare services, childcare, religious, social and civic infrastructure, ancillary purpose-built accommodation such as residential care or institutions to support the main use only, and other facilities.
Groody Valley Wedge	Objective: To preserve and protect the Groody Valley from development. Purpose: To maintain the area's importance in preventing the encroachment of the built up area of Limerick City and to retain its important role as a wildlife corridor and a flood management zone.

It is noted that it is the plans zoning principle to ensure new residential development is provided in tandem with services, investment in infrastructure including transport and the provision of employment, together with supporting amenities and services;

A wider site in which the scheme is proposed is identified as Site 71 in the Residential Settlement Capacity Audit – Site 71.

Notwithstanding the zoning objectives, both an Indicative Link Road and Cycleway/Walkway is identified on maps between Groody Road and Golf Links Road along the general route of the proposed scheme.

5.3.2 Specific Policy Objectives in respect of Castletroy Link Road

Chapter 7 of the LCCDP relates to sustainable mobility and transport, and aims, during the lifetime of the Plan, to strengthen the links between land use and transportation planning and will seek to promote sustainable transport, through the management of the road network in Limerick, by providing attractive, inclusive and connected walking and cycling networks, improving permeability within settlements, supporting car-share facilities and the use of electric vehicles and securing investment in public transport highlights that the sustainable and efficient movement of people and goods is crucial for the success and vitality of the city, along with the need to move away from private car and fossil-fuel-based mobility to reduce the negative impacts of transport and climate change.

There are numerous policies in Chapter 7 of the LCCDP which support the principle of the proposed scheme including.:

Table 2b: Policies and Objective of the LCCDP	
Policy/Objective	Detail
Objective TR O43 Upgrade works/New Road Schemes	It is an objective of the Council to provide for and carry out sustainable improvements to sections of the national, regional and local road network, to address deficiencies in respect of safety, alignment, structural condition or capacity where resources permit. The following schemes shall be included: • School House Road to Kilbane Roundabout, Groody Link Road;
Objective TR O44 Link Roads	It is an objective of the Council to: a) Support and complete delivery of new and improved link roads and junctions accommodating public transport, cycle and pedestrian connections, including new road links as outlined in LSMATS. The layout and design of such works shall have cognisance of the context and interface with surrounding land uses in compliance with the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DoECLG 2019) 2020 DMURS Interim Advice Note – Covid -19 Pandemic Response and TII Publication DNGeo-03084 The Treatment of Transition Zones to Towns and Villages on National Roads; b) Ensure proposals make provision for the accommodation of bus services along the most significant link routes, which shall include identification of bus stopping and turning areas, as well as carriageway capacity and through routes. It should be noted that the alignment of the new roads in the Plan is indicative only. These roads shall definitely be

	aligned as part of the detailed design and development process. Similarly, the location of junctions is indicative and the exact position for construction purposes will be dependent on detailed design;
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Related policies include

Table 3: Policies and Objective of the LCCDP	
Policy/Objective	Detail
Policy TR P3	Integration of Land Use and Transport Policies
Policy TR P4	Promotion of Sustainable Patterns of Transport Use
Policy TR P5	Sustainable Mobility and Regional Accessibility
Policy TR P7	Sustainable Travel and Transport
Objective TR O1	Climate Proofed Transport Infrastructure
Objective TR O2	Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets
Objective TR O4	Universal Design
Objective TR O5	Limerick – Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy
Objective TR O6	Delivering Modal Split
Objective TR O7	Behavioural Change Measures
Objective TR O8	Walking and Cycling Infrastructure
Objective TR O9	Limerick Cycle Network
Objective TR O11	Enhanced Public Transport
Policy TR P11	Road Safety and Carrying Capacity of the non-national Road Network
Objective TR O37	Land Uses and Access Standards
Objective TR O38	Improvements to Regional and Local Roads
Objective TR O42	Roads and Streets
Objective TR O46	Limerick City Centre Traffic Management Plan
Objective TR O51	Roadside Signage
Objective TR O52	Directional Signage
Objective TR O53	Noise and Transportation

5.3.3 Specific Policies in respect of Natural Heritage

Chapter 6: Environment, Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure and of the LCCDP considers a range of policy objectives to protect and conserve natural and built heritage features. These policies are noted.

The following site specific objectives are noted:

Table 4: Site Specific Natural/Built Heritage Policies and Objective of the LCCDP	
Objective	Site
Landscape Character Area	Shannon ICZM
Protected Structures	Mary Madalene's Well (RPS 1633)

5.3.4 Limerick Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030

The Limerick Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030 recognises that in addition to legally designated sites there are numerous habitats across the city that have conservation value for biodiversity, including public parks and open spaces, rivers, canals, and embankments. A key aim of the plan is to focus the efforts and

resources of LCCC, public sector bodies, nature conservation groups and others to protect and enhance biodiversity and halt biodiversity loss in Limerick and to further incorporate the free ecosystem services that biodiversity provides.

6.0 Legal Context

Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora ('the Habitats Directive') is European Community legislation aimed at nature conservation. The Habitats Directive requires that where a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a European site(s), (and where the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary to the nature conservation management of the European site), the plan or project will be subject to AA to identify any implications for the European site(s) in view of the site's Conservation Objectives. The Habitats Directive is transposed into Irish law by Part XAB of the PDA, and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (PDR).

Section 177AE sets out the requirements for the AA of developments carried out by or on behalf of local authorities. Where AA is required, the local authority shall apply to the Commission for approval. A proposed development in respect of which an AA is required shall not be carried out unless the Commission has approved it with or without modifications.

The Commission, as competent authority, is required to determine that the proposed development shall not adversely affect the integrity of a European site and in doing so shall consider the NIS, any submissions or observations received and any other information relating to the likely effects on the environment; the likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area; the likely significant effects on a European site..

7.0 Observations

7.1 Prescribed Bodies

7.1.1 National Transport Authority

- The NTA notes the stated function of the proposed Castletroy link road, which is to provide connectivity in the Castletroy area as well as releasing landlocked zoned lands for development.
- The proposed new distributor road will include active travel and bus stop infrastructure providing facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. It is therefore the view of the NTA that the proposed development, by providing additional connectivity for sustainable modes, is aligned with Measure RS3 of the LSMATS – Principles for the Provision of New Roads.
- The NTA is currently working with Limerick City and County Council in the preparation and delivery of the BusConnects Limerick programme, which will include enhanced bus services as well as bus infrastructure. It is noted that the proposed development includes bus lanes and stops. The NTA acknowledges the potential provided by the provision of bus infrastructure in the proposed development and will consider this in the implementation phase of BusConnects Limerick.
- The NTA is of the view that the proposed development is consistent with the principles of LSMATS and will provide an opportunity for improved sustainable transport connectivity in Limerick City.

7.1.2 Office of Public Works

- OPW maintains the channel adjacent to the proposal and that the proposal is adjacent to a channel that is critical to flood management in the area.
- In order to gain access for the purpose of maintaining said channel, a condition of any Grant of Planning Permission at this location should be included to maintain a 10 Metre wide strip of land running parallel with Channel CI, should be provided to facilitate access and maintenance activities in the immediate area.
- The applicant may have to apply for other statutory consents including under Section 50 and Section 9 of the Arterial Drainage Act 1945, as amended.

- OPW would consider the flood risk assessment as addressed in the Planning Application Report and Non-Statutory Environmental Report, accompanying the planning application, to be inadequate.
- The Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) should address the potential impacts of the proposed development on the surrounding catchment. Specifically, it should evaluate the effects of the loss of permeable ground, alterations to existing ground conditions and topography, and changes to natural drainage patterns and impact on ground water.
- It is recommended that the Developer/ Planning Authority/ An Coimisiún Pleanála satisfy themselves that an appropriately detailed study is undertaken to appropriately identify the relevant flood extents and flood zones and impact the development may have on surrounding lands in accordance with the Planning System and Flood Risk management Guidelines.

7.1.3 Transport Infrastructure Ireland

- Having reviewed the proposed development, TII advises that the Authority has no specific observations to make in relation to the subject application.

7.1.4 Uisce Éireann

- Uisce Éireann records indicate that there is an existing 225/375 mm foul sewer within the development site. Uisce Éireann does not permit build over of its assets and the separation distances as per Uisce Éireann's Standards Codes and Practices must be achieved. Therefore, further information is requested as follows.
- The applicant must engage with Uisce Éireann's Diversions team to assess feasibility of build over and / or diversion. The outcome of the engagement with Uisce Éireann's diversions team shall be submitted as a response to this Further Information request.
- The applicant shall submit revised plans and layouts clearly indicating separation distances as per Uisce Éireann's Standards and Code of Practices have been achieved to accommodate the existing infrastructure within the site.

7.2 General Observations

7.2.1 Brian and Eileen Coates

- The observation notes the inclusion of limited Noise Reduction measures on a section of the new road. These are welcome and it would be in the public interest if this mitigation would be implemented on the full extent of both sides of the road.
- The proposed plan includes extensive loss of trees and hedges to facilitate the development. At the same time, the new route of traffic will cause increased noise and air pollution, both of which are detrimental to public health and well-being. Trees and hedges are natural air filters, and the observer hopes that the mitigation of noise and air pollution will include far greater use of these important resources.

7.2.2 Caisleán na hAbhann Residents Association

This submission sets out a number of observation in respect of the proposed scheme and corresponding requests that they would like to see implemented including:

- Traffic Light Junction – it is requested that the traffic light signals be programmed to prioritise the Caisleán na hAbhann exit when a car approaches so that long queues do not develop.
- Traffic Light Location – the layout of the traffic light signals for the Caisleán na hAbhann need to take into account the nature of the steep hill and blind 90 degree turn at the entrance into the minimum visibility distance.
- Traffic Monitoring – it is requested that proper, multiday traffic impact assessment with car monitoring of the Groody Road and Groody Road roundabout to take into account the TII and Limerick Plan is carried out. During peak times both morning and evening the traffic congestion is significantly high at the Groody Roundabout for which this development will be based, and a proper assessment needs to be carried out.
- Increased Traffic congestion due to design – it is requested that the proposed scheme include two lanes at the Caisleán na hAbhann exit so that people can exit left or straight if a car is unable to turn right due to traffic congestion on the

Good Road toward the University of Limerick (i.e. split the lane just at the lights on the junction).

- Drainage Issue - Fix the waste water issue at the entrance to the estate. There is a manhole cover on the road as you enter the estate that is regularly blocked causing waste water to drain onto the road.
- Construction Plan – More details on the plans for ensuring residents can exit and enter the estate during the phase of construction for the entrance.
- Groody Road to Towlerton Turn – the right turn lane from Groody Road toward Towlerton is not sufficient. Please reconsider the need for traffic lights at this junction, and just leave it as a roundabout,
- Trees along Groody Road – Do not remove any trees along the Groody Road as part of the construction of this new Junction.

7.2.3 Des Frawley

- The absence of a solid boundary wall exposes the observer's property to unauthorised access, vandalism, and potential trespassing. With increased pedestrian and vehicular traffic, the risk of anti-social behaviour and crime rises significantly. A properly constructed boundary wall is essential to maintain privacy, deter unwanted intrusion, and ensure the safety of Mr Frawley's family and property.
- The development introduces bus lanes, cycle tracks, and increased traffic, all of which contribute to higher noise levels. While the proposed environmental noise barrier is beneficial, it does not fully address the impact on Mr Frawley's home. A solid boundary wall would serve as an additional noise-reduction measure, preventing disruption to daily life and ensuring a better quality of living. Additionally, dust, debris, and pollution from traffic will directly affect Mr Frawley's home, further underscoring the necessity of a protective wall.
- While the inclusion of a biodiversity zone is noted, it raises specific concerns regarding property boundaries and maintenance. Without a clear and solid demarcation, there is a high likelihood of overgrown vegetation encroaching onto Mr Frawley's property, leading to maintenance difficulties and potential pest infestations. A properly built wall would ensure a clear division, allowing for effective upkeep of both the biodiversity zone and Mr Frawley's property.

- The plans already include proposed boundary walls for certain sections of the development. This raises the question of consistency—why some properties are being afforded this protection while others are being overlooked. It is requested that the same standard of protection be applied to Mr Frawley’s property to ensure fairness and equal treatment among affected homeowners.
- Given these concerns, it is formally request that the plans be revised to include the construction of a boundary wall along Mr Frawley’s property line. This addition would mitigate the negative impacts outlined above and ensure that the property is protected from security risks, environmental pollution, and encroachment from the biodiversity zone

7.2.4 Donal Brennan

- Within its own terms, the traffic model for the project contains errors in terms of its traffic projections. These errors in turn affect the projections for air and noise impacts of the project.
- The traffic model restricted itself to a very narrow area of study. Areas which would contribute traffic to the road were excluded from the study. This further compounded the errors in predictions for air quality and noise impacts.
- This proposed project is one element of a multi-stage project by the Council. For example, School House Road was previously known as School House Lane before one of the construction phases. It is submitted that it is not fair (or even legal) to split a project into phases and then exclude earlier phases from the environmental impact of the project. The construction of the link proposed by the Council will complete this overall road project; therefore, the completed project will attract more traffic than the individual isolated elements; therefore, the impacts for factors such as traffic, air, and noise should be evaluated for the entirety of the overall project.
- The proposed project is within a housing area. Some elements of the project (such as the format of the traffic signal supports) are more akin to an industrial environment and are likely to encourage increased speeds in the area (see view 5 in the Appendix F photomontages).
- There are inconsistencies within the design drawings. For example, at the left turn lane at the bottom of School House Road; shows this as a Bus Lane.

Therefore, the general public cannot know what actually is being proposed for the project.

- While bus lanes can be useful in certain scenarios (for example congested urban centre areas with multiple bus routes), an unnecessary provision of a bus lane in a residential area increases the overall land-take and more particularly widens the visual perception of the road; in turn this widened visual perception can lead to a tendency to increased speeds. (Note in comparison how “gateways” and visual narrowing are used elsewhere in the county to help reduce and control speeds.) No traffic based justification has been provided to support the provision of the bus lanes within this project; without such a traffic based justification the provision of the bus lanes should be considered as superfluous. The increased width also adversely impacts the visual aesthetic of the road. The increased width also makes it more difficult for pedestrians to cross the road.
- The submission also contains a suggestion as to how to further improve the continuity of the cycle lanes in this overall project.
- the planning history relating to the subject site and the surrounding area have not been adequately covered in the Council’s report.
- Compensatory measures need to be considered across the full length of the overall project – in particular in relation to road traffic noise and air quality.

7.2.5 James Quirke

- There should be at least 10 speed ramps put on the proposed road and at least 10 speed ramps put on the adjoining road between Cairnsfort housing estate and the Schoolhouse Road to slow down traffic given that children play in the area and the speed at which cars travel on the road poses a danger to them. There are speed ramps on the 'top half' of the Golf Links Road and on the Schoolhouse Road and there is simply no logic or rationale for there not being speed ramps on the 'lower half' of the Golf Links Road.
- The proposed development will lead to increased pollution which is not in line with Ireland's climate targets. By building this road it will encourage more people to use their car when the focus should be on encouraging people to use public transport and active transport (such as walking and cycling) as opposed to 'facilitating' them polluting.

- The observer walks the road late in the evening where the proposed development is planned and there are several bat colonies which are a protected species under EU law (specifically the Habitats Directive) and this development will adversely affect their habitat.
- There are several types of plants which are protected under the EU Habitats Directive growing on the site of the proposed development and these should not be interfered with.
- There are at least two badger setts on the lands, and these are protected under law. The proposed development would interfere unduly with the badger setts habitats.
- The proposed development displays a complete disregard for biodiversity loss and ecological crisis. The development site has links to the Shannon Estuary and contains areas of protected species such as otters, swans, bars and lamprey within the zone of influence of the development.
- In Mr. Quirke's view the proposed road development would be likely to have significant effects on the integrity and conservation status of European Sites and Mr. Quirke would request that an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) be carried out to properly assess these risks .
- Mr Quirke would have serious concerns about the potential impact of the proposed development on a European Site, namely the Lower River Shannon SAC.
- There is already exceptionally heavy traffic down by Northern Trust and the BMW car garage at rush hour times and the proposed development will only serve to exacerbate the traffic congestion .
- The proposed development is unsightly and will interfere unduly with residents right to peaceable enjoyment of their property. The proposed development will give rise to noise and air pollution.

7.2.6 Kathryn and Mark Collins

- This proposed road is designed to carry significant traffic day & night in the area and is described as providing a link and a relief valve, to other heavily congested roads. The observers are concerned that the noise pollution and vehicle lights will be intense and therefore request that the proposed environmental noise barrier, which is on the left side if approaching from

schoolhouse road; be extended another 150m to match the proposed barrier on the Fox Hollow side. additional tree planting/natural screening should also be put on the opposite side.

- From the drawings provided and 3D artist impressions provided the proposed road appears to be very high behind Fox Hollow. Is this necessary? What is the reason for this? Can the height of the road be reduced and reduce noise disturbance and visual impact?
- There is no indication on the drawings that there will be speed ramps or what the speed limit will be. This will be necessary to stop the road becoming a short cut/racetrack.
- Golf Links Road currently experiences significant queues at both the Dublin Road junction and the Old Ballysimon Road Junction. The observer is genuinely concerned that this new road will add to this congestion and would welcome any supports that will reduce speed and congestion
- Please include some additional safety measures/some signage (prepare to stop) on the lane or change of surface to indicate the end of the off-road lane and that cyclists must follow the lights when using the on road cycle lanes
- It is estimated that the construction phase will be approximately 18 months. This will cause significant noise, dust and disruption. Local residents should have a liaison person within the council because of this.

7.2.7 Liam Hickey

- The development is in breach of the EU Habitats Directive and is in breach of the EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. There is no EIAR
- The surveys and reports are inadequate
- The planning application documents are not available on An Coimisiún's website and there is no dedicated website by the developer for this particular planning application.

7.2.8 Lucy-Anne Foley

Please refer to Section 7.2.5 James Quirke above.

7.2.9 Matthew Ryan

- Request the installation of effective acoustic barriers along all the sections of the road. Such barriers have been proven to significantly reduce traffic noise and would help preserve the tranquillity of the neighbourhood.
- Proposes the implementation of strategic landscaping measures, including the planting of dense, evergreen hedges and trees, to act as a natural screen against vehicle headlights. Additionally, consideration should be given to the design of the road to minimize direct light spill into residential properties
- It is recommended that the incorporation of comprehensive landscaping plans include the planting of mature, evergreen vegetation. This approach would serve to soften the visual impact of the road and integrate it more harmoniously into the existing environment.
- It is requested that the Planning Authorities to consider lowering the height of the road where feasible or constructing an embankment with appropriate planting. Such measures would serve to shield residents from both the visual and auditory intrusions associated with the roadway.

7.2.10 Mike McCoy

- Given the home's close proximity and elevated position overlooking the road, Mr. McCoy is concerned about the use of audible pedestrian signals. The home faces the junction and does not currently benefit from any natural sound barriers such as trees or dense landscaping. Mr. McCoy respectfully requests that any signalised crossings near the property include:
 - Directional or low-volume sounders,
 - Time-limited low audible signals (e.g. restricted to daytime hours),
 - Or only the use of tactile-only indicators if feasible.
- Mr. McCoy supports the inclusion of planting and trees in the landscape design. However, this section of Golf Links Road is in a notoriously exposed and elevated area and has acted as a wind trap in recent storms. The immediate neighbour's boundary wall collapsed in a recent high-wind event. Mr. McCoy respectfully requests that:
 - Wind-tolerant, native tree species be selected,
 - Trees be set back at a safe distance from existing private walls,

- And that a layered planting scheme (e.g. lower hedging and shrubs) be considered to balance privacy and safety

7.2.11 Pat and Siobhan Hoare

- It is requested that the height of the proposed road is lowered where possible but particularly to the rear of existing housing, thereby minimising the depreciation in value of adjoining properties;
- It is requested that Durable noise barriers are provided and that a maintenance plan is put in place to ensure that such barriers do not degrade over time;
- It is requested that Embankments to the rear of housing are fully planted with tree species representative of a natural woodland

7.2.12 Pat Hoare Building Contractors Ltd

- The observer does not object to the provision of the distributor road. Rather, requests that the road proposal is amended to ensure that the Council fulfils its 2004 Agreement in providing a vehicular, pedestrian and cycling access spur to the zoned land east and west of the proposed road, along with the provision of foul, surface water and water infrastructure capable of servicing development lands to the east. It is thus requested that the Commission seeks to amend the design of the proposed scheme by means of suitable condition and revised design proposals.

7.2.13 Patrick Hoare

- Raises a specific issue regarding the treatment of the boundary between the development site and the proposed road which is shown in section A-A on the drawing "proposed Layout Cross Sections Sheet 1 of 5
- Given the proximity of the proposed road to the rear of the site, Mr. Hoare believes the provision of a permanent boundary wall is essential. This would serve multiple important functions, including:
 - Ensuring privacy for future residents;
 - Providing security and preventing unauthorised access between the public road and private property;
 - Defining a clear separation between public and private domains; and
 - Reducing visual and acoustic impacts associated with road traffic.

- At present, the plans indicate a proposed biodiversity zone to the rear of the site, situated between the road and the boundary. There are currently several mature trees located along the rear boundary; it is important that any boundary wall construction avoids immediate disruption to existing root systems.
- To that end, Mr Hoare request that the Council provide flexibility in the exact siting of the wall, to allow for it to be set back within the biodiversity zone, to protect tree roots during construction and ensure the delivery of a robust and durable boundary treatment.

7.3 Observations on Applicant's Response

7.3.1 Office of Public Works

- The OPW submission is largely the same as that originally submitted and set out above under Section 7.1.2. No comments were made on the Flood Risk Assessment submitted.
- It is noted that the submission concludes that the OPW does not have any objections to the proposed development but consider that there are items requiring clarification which can be dealt with by 'way of conditions or request for further information

7.3.2 Donal Brennan

- Concerns remain about the traffic surveys as potentially unrepresentative (taken during Covid and the full exercise not repeated) and with the conclusions drawn from the models based on those surveys.
- There is no consideration stated whether any additional traffic accessing Ballysimon or the M7 or the city centre will increase as a result of this new easier route. No explanation is given of how LCCC expect that the traffic will drop on School House Road.
Thes point of what the traffic is/was/will be on School House road is critical to whether there will be an increase of traffic on that road- which in turn impacts matters such as noise mitigation.
- The surveyed traffic on the School House Road in 2021 was 7088 (see figure 6.4 of the original LCCC submission). A 29% Covid factor would bring that figure to 9143 (if one ignores the normal "time of year" adjustments). This number is considerably lower than the predicted traffic on School House Road.

- The premise remains that the 2021AADT on School House road is a little over 9000, and that the projected traffic for the School House Road after the scheme shows an increase rather than a decrease
- The fact that LCCC now seem to claim a different study area to that previously provided does not support confidence in any of their other traffic claims.
- No traffic justification data has been provided to support the Bus Lanes being suggested. Currently there are only two east bound buses per hour – one bus every thirty minutes. This may increase to 4 buses per hour in the distant future.
- The clear alignment of the above mentioned roads together with the land reservations kept in place show that this has been one scheme delivered in phases. This present phase provides the actual link between what has been constructed. Therefore, the Environmental Report should address the entire scheme (not just one individual element) and the impacts of the total scheme on lands and houses adjacent to that overall scheme

7.3.3 James Quirke

- Mr Quirke's submission is largely the same as that originally submitted and set out above under Section 7.2.5

7.3.4 Kathryn and Mark Collins

- With reference to the submission made, concerns and observations remain unchanged from my original observation. This new road will bring significant extra traffic, noise and light pollution, disruption and CO2 fumes pollution to the area.
- The report states on page 5 that the lower part of Golf Links Road will benefit most from traffic congestion, but it is the area near to our home and neighbours' homes that will take on the extra traffic and related pollution.
- There remains concern about how the road will change the environment and therefore request that the original set of observations (which were attached) are considered while determining the case

7.3.5 Liam Hickey

- Going back to the CPO Adare to Annacotty Plan of 2000 Mr Hickey's original Land Certificate Folio No 18959 was never returned. He is requesting the return of this document to his possession.
- The distribution of the proceeds of this CPO at the time have never satisfactorily explained and until such time as he receives a satisfactory explanation he is voicing his objection to this development proceeding.

7.3.6 Lucy-Anne Foley

- Ms Foley's submission is largely the same as that originally submitted and set out above under Section 7.2.8

7.3.7 Matthew Ryan

- With reference to the submission made, concerns and observations remain unchanged from my original observation. This new road will bring significant extra traffic, noise and light pollution, disruption and CO2 fumes pollution to the area.
- The report states on page 5 that the lower part of Golf Links Road will benefit most from traffic congestion, but it is the area near to our home and neighbours' homes that will take on the extra traffic and related pollution.
- There remains concern about how the road will change the environment and therefore request that the original set of observations (which were attached) are considered while determining the case.

7.3.8 Mike McCoy

- Concerns are shared by several immediate neighbours whose properties are similarly positioned at this corner of the junction. The issues raised therefore relate to the collective impact on multiple households in this location.
- The submission has serious concerns that the response does not appear to take into account my specific location, circumstances, or the nature of my original submission.
- References to "reinforced tree planting" and "acoustic fencing" are not proposed in my immediate vicinity.

- The applicant's response provided reads like a generalised statement intended to cover the entire scheme, rather than a site-specific assessment.
- It is requested that specific noise mitigation measures are provided for this junction; and effective landscaping plan is provided, audible pedestrian signals at this junction will be directional and low-volume during the day time, the make, model, and specification of any acoustic fencing and traffic signal system to be installed behind our properties, including its tested noise reduction performance is provided;

7.3.9 Pat and Siobhan Hoare

- The submission continues to seek to ensure that the proposed new road does not adversely impact the residential amenity of adjoining houses and result in a devaluation of property.
- The local authority has not provided an adequate response to the issues raised by our client.
- The request that the embankment is fully planted with tree species representative of a natural woodland is considered completely reasonable. The Council's response that the provision of a fully planted embankment would compromise the integrity of a retaining wall is beyond reasonable, as there are many suitable trees (with suitable root systems) that can be planted proximate to structures.
- The Council's argument that a gradient of 5% is required to facilitate pedestrians and cyclists, as a reason to discount consideration of a reduction in road level is considered inadequate. argument is not an adequate response to negate consideration of a reduction in road level.

7.3.10 Pat Hoare Building Contractors Ltd.

- The submission continues to seek to ensure that the proposed new road has regard to planned future development in the area and that such development can occur in an integrated and coordinated manner.
- The historic transfer of land in the vicinity of the proposal is integral to consideration of matters relating to the development of the road. The Agreement, as entered into by both parties, demonstrates how the provision of

a road could be facilitated and delivered in an integrated and holistic manner by both the landowner and the local authority.

- A Masterplan has been prepared by Pat Hoare Building Contractors Limited for zoned residential land adjoining the proposed road in an attempt to facilitate and ensure integrated and coordinated development. It is entirely reasonable that our client would seek both services and access to land, which is otherwise severed by the proposed Link Road.

8.0 Planning Assessment

8.1 Principle of Development

The proposed scheme is specifically identified as an objective in the LCCDP under Objective TR O43 Upgrade Works/New Road Schemes. This objective explicitly cites School House Road to Kilbane Roundabout. An Coimisiún should note that the proposed scheme is referred to 'Groody Link Road' in the plan, but under this planning application it is referred to as 'Castletroy Link Road'. They are one of the same.

An Coimisiún should also note Map 6: Limerick City and Suburbs (in Limerick), including Mungret and Annacotty - Transport Map of the LCCDP which identifies both an Indicative Link Road and Cycleway/Walkway between the junction of Golf Link Road and School House Road to Kilbane Roundabout. The indicative objective generally aligns with the route of the proposed scheme now before the Commission.

An Coimisiún should also note that the LSMATS has also identified the Castletroy Link Road as part of a wider Childers Road - Golf Links Road scheme. This is intended to serve new development areas in this location and in order to provide for an additional public transport route from the City Centre towards Monaleen and onwards towards Annacotty. It is noted that the NTA, the prescribed body who hold a competence in transport planning in Ireland is supportive of the proposed scheme. It is their view that, the proposed scheme is aligned with Measure RS3 Principles for the Provision of New Roads of the LSMATS and is generally consistent with the principles of LSMATS and will provide an opportunity for improved sustainable transport connectivity between Limerick City. It is also noted that the proposed scheme, due to the provision of bus infrastructure, may be used to enhance bus services in the implementation phase of BusConnects Limerick.

In the general area between Ballysimon Road (R527) and Golf Links Road, there is currently limited permeability for road users. The NTA, in its Best Practice Guide (NTA, 2015) encourages the transformation of such neighbourhoods into permeable ones, where people can walk or cycle through areas safely and conveniently. As an example, were residents of Caisleán na hAbhann, hypothetically and in the future, to attend a school on lands zoned Education and Community Infrastructure at the junction of school House Road and Golf Links Road they would currently have to

travel 2.4 km using public roads (from the estate entrance) despite only being approximately 0.5 km as the crow flies. The proposed road result in a travel distance of approximately 0.7 km. Notwithstanding the wider objectives of the scheme, there is an obvious desire to connect these junctions and provide permeability. The proposed scheme would support this.

The proposed scheme is located within a wider area for which lands have been zoned for several uses including 'New Residential', 'Education and Community Infrastructure', and 'Groody Valley Wedge'. These lands will accommodate population growth in future. A road scheme is not specifically identified in the zoning matrices as being 'generally permitted', 'open to consideration' and/or 'generally not permitted' and therefore, An Coimisiún should consider whether the proposed scheme meets the zoning objectives and purposes.

Table 5: Consideration of Zoning Objectives		
Zoning Objective	Assessment	Recommendation
New Residential	I am satisfied that the proposed scheme meets the purpose of this zoning objective. The plan is clear that zones like this require 'These areas require high levels of accessibility, including pedestrian, cyclists and public transport'. The proposed scheme provides this accessibility to 'new residential' lands. A key objective of the proposed scheme is to provide access to these lands.	The proposed scheme is compliant with the LCCDP and relevant zoning objective for 'New Residential'
Education and Community Infrastructure	I am satisfied that the proposed scheme meets the purpose of this zoning objective. The purpose of the zoning objective has not made any explicit provision for accessibility, including pedestrian, cyclists and public transport. However, it is logical that this	The proposed scheme is compliant with the LCCDP and relevant zoning objective for 'Education and Community Infrastructure'

	is a 'related development' as identified under the purpose of the zoning and access, wider links and permeability would be required to such educational and community infrastructure which has been explicitly set out under Objective TR O43 and can be justified on that basis. The zoning objective is intrinsically linked to the local objective for the proposed scheme in this instance, and the plans objectives needs to be read holistically, rather than selectively.	
Groody Valley Wedge	It is clear that the proposed scheme would is not entirely consistent with this zoning objective which is to 'preserve and protect the Groody Valley from development'. Its purpose is to prevent encroachment of the built up area and retain its use as a wildlife corridor and flood management zone. A road scheme undermines this. However, the plan has clearly envisioned a link road at this location under Objective TR O43 and would occupy a relatively small and peripheral area of the zoned lands. The zoning objectives are intrinsically linked to the local objective for the proposed scheme in this instance, and the plans objectives needs to be read holistically, rather than selectively. The plan clearly provides for the proposed scheme in the context of these zoned lands. I am	The Commission should note that proposed development deviates from the zoning objective for the Groody Valley Wedge, however, when consider both the zoning objectives and specific Objective TR O43 holistically, it is acceptable in respect of the wider vision of the LCCDP and its likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

	satisfied that the proposed scheme would not undermine the achievement of this wider zoning objective. On that basis, I am satisfied that while the proposed scheme deviates from the zoning objective, it is acceptable in respect of its likely effects on the environment and its likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.	
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The Commission should note that the LCCDP is fully supportive of the Castletroy Link Road, and it is its objective (Objective TR O43) to support the delivery of this key sustainable transport project so as to provide an integrated public transport and roads network. The proposed scheme is a key enabler for these zoned lands, facilitating Limerick's overall vision for compact growth and sustainable mobility.

In supporting the Castletroy Link Road under Objective TR O43 specifically, which is the subject of this application, LCCDP in making the plan would have reasonably expected road infrastructure within these common zonings. The zoned lands are dependent on road infrastructure to deliver their objectives.

Overall, I am satisfied that the applicant has met the objective in so far as practicable and that the road scheme would not, in and of itself, undermine the achievement of any zoning objective. The applicant has demonstrated this through the environmental documents and consideration of alternatives locations. The applicant is circumspect in its appraisal to state all amenity impacts cannot be avoided and has provided mitigation in the form of planting at certain locations. However, the road scheme has to be viewed in the context of an existing urban area and highly used landscape adjacent to other public roads and housing schemes.

There is a conflict in policy terms in the plan between zoning objectives and specific objectives in the 'Groody Valley Wedge'. The zoning matrix does not make provision for the road but there is a clear and explicit objective in the LCCDP for a link road at

this location and across these zoned lands. It is logical (and inevitable) that access and wider links and permeability would be required to these zoned lands, notwithstanding the zoning objectives and requirement to preserve and protect the Groody Valley from development in particular. The Commission should be satisfied that it has read and has had regard to the LCCDP. The zoning objectives are intrinsically linked to the local objective for the proposed scheme in this instance, and the plans objectives needs to be read holistically, rather than selectively. The plan clearly provides for the proposed scheme in the context of these zoned lands.

The proposed development has undergone a detailed optioneering process, ensuring that its design respects the character of the Groody Valley Wedge lands and mitigates potential environmental impacts. The vision for Groody Valley Wedge seeks to preserve and protect the Groody Valley from development. It is my view that this development is appropriate on the periphery of the Groody Valley Wedge, and the character, distinctiveness and sense of place will not be unduly impacted.

In conclusion, the Commission should note that proposed development deviates from the zoning objective for the Groody Valley Wedge, however, when consider both the zoning objectives and specific Objective TR O43 holistically, it is acceptable in respect of the wider vision of the LCCDP and its likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The Commission should be satisfied it has *had regard* to the LCCDP and the relevant requirements of the zoning objective and relevant vision for Groody Valley Wedge lands and have assessed the compliance of the proposed development with the elements specified therein. It is recommended that the Commission concludes that the proposed development is not fully consistent with every element of the zoning vision (and therefore zoning objective) of the development plan, but that this does not provide a reason for the Commission to refuse the proposed scheme.

Having regard to the above, the link road is of importance to the transport network in Limerick to facilitate the actual movement of people. The proposed scheme, while of limited scope, allows for increased people moving capacity and the best chance to avoid traffic congestion in future years as the population grows and the demand for travel increases. The proposed scheme also has the potential to reduce Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions as different components of the LSMATS come into effect.

The proposed scheme will therefore make a contribution to carbon reduction, the easing of congestion and the creation of more sustainable travel patterns for the growing population. The improvements to cycle infrastructure will vastly improve the current offer to cyclists and by doing so will significantly increase the modal share. The proposed scheme, therefore, will deliver the physical infrastructure necessary to sustain the projected population growth along and within the area of the route. It will also provide a more accessible public transport facility.

Several submissions do question the principle of road building in the context of climate change and that it may not be in line with Ireland's climate targets. It is their view that by building this road it will encourage more people to use their car when the focus should be on encouraging people to use public transport and active transport (such as walking and cycling). The proposed scheme, while facilitative of private vehicles, is also designed to prioritise public transport and indeed walking and cycling. It is consistent with a range of national level sectoral policies for transport, and it is noted that the NTA acknowledges the potential provided by the provision of bus infrastructure to deliver an improved public transport service to the area. I agree with the NTA that the proposed scheme will provide an opportunity for improved sustainable transport connectivity in Limerick City

In performing its functions in relation to the making of its decision, An Coimisiún should have regard to Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended by Section 17 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, and the requirement to, in so far as practicable, perform its functions in a manner (consistent with Climate Action Plan 2024 and Climate Action Plan 2025 and the national long term climate action strategy, national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans set out in those Plans and in furtherance of the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State). In doing so An Coimisiún should consider the beneficial impacts from the proposed scheme including providing infrastructure for public transport, walking and cycling which will aid in supporting a modal shift from private vehicles. While the scheme in and of itself would only give rise to a minimal indirect net reduction in transport emissions in the area, the Commission should remember that the proposed scheme makes up a

wider strategy, the LSMATS which has be prepared with the aim of facilitating this modal shift at the strategic level and through a cumulation of actions.

In overall conclusion there is an obvious justification and clear need for the proposed scheme which has been clearly demonstrated from a population growth and congestion perspective and in the interests of land use and transport planning integration. It is also clear from the abundance of policy documents and plans at both an EU, national and local level that needs and objectives are supported throughout all levels of government policy.

8.2 Flood Risk

The proposed development is located in an area of flood risk. The applicant has provided a Flood Risk Assessment in Section 5.2.2. of the Environmental Report which was prepared by JBA who have a competence in such matters. This was supplemented by a detailed Flood Risk Assessment submitted in July 2025. The Commission should note that the lands have been fully considered under a Strategic FRA prepared for the LCCDP also. Aside from the OPW, no observations raised flood risk as a ground of objection.

The site is located largely within Flood Zone C, where the probability of flooding from rivers and the sea is low (less than 0.1% or a 1 in 1000 for both river and coastal flooding). In and directly adjacent to the River Groody are areas considered Flood Zone A and Flood Zone B. However, these areas are largely avoided by the proposed scheme. I would consider the proposed scheme as 'local transport infrastructure' and therefore classified as 'less vulnerable development' under the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009).

The CFRAMS extents under the 0.1%, 1% and 10% AEP (Annual Exceedance Probability) scenarios are all similar in that they effect the area adjacent to the River Groody at the Kilbane Roundabout only. The addition of increased risk from climate change does not materially change the flood extent.

There are two recorded flood events within the proposed site. The River Shannon flooded in December 1954, with flood waters extending up the River Groody and surrounding lands to the proposed site area. In December 1999, the River Groody flooded, with flood waters in the western area of the proposed scheme only.

I note a number of lesser order streams in proximity to the proposed scheme which flow into the River Groody, however, having visited the site I would agree with the applicant's conclusion that these are drainage channels. The applicant is of the view that the drainage channels are partially fed by a spring in the western portion of the site. It is noted that these would be culverted as part of the proposed scheme. The applicant is cognisant that they need to seek the relevant approval of the OPW in order to make changes to these. The OPW has made a submission to the planning application reminding the applicant to do same.

As the proposed scheme is partially located in the Flood Zone A, as such a justification test is required under the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009).

An Coimisiún will note, as outlined in Section 8.1 that the subject lands have been zoned for wider uses including residential and designated for the particular use of a road scheme in the operative development plan, the LCCDP. This plan has been adopted by the members of LCCC having regard and taking into account these Risk Management Guidelines and having been subjected to a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

The design of the proposed scheme includes for an increase in site levels to ensure that it is above the flood levels. This proposed scheme will consist of the importation of suitable fill material from stone quarries of the order of 150,000 tonnes to create a road embankment that will vary from 2m to 5m in height and a width of up to 40m, over the 650 linear metre length of the scheme.

Measures are provided to minimise flood risk at this site and elsewhere and in particular to people, property, the economy and the environment as far as reasonably possible. The proposed scheme includes for a range of measures including an attenuation pond and swales. Flood waters will be contained temporarily in an attenuation pond where suspended solids will settle. Catch drains and the toe of the embankment which have been designed to accommodate runoff from a 1 in 100 year flood event. Given the topography of the site, drainage will be to the west, away from properties at Foxhollows and Golf Links Road which are at an elevated point relative to the River Groody anyway.

Only a minor portion of the site is located in Flood Zone A with the majority of this site in Flood Zone B. The development type is also considered 'less vulnerable'. On the basis of the measures provided I am satisfied that proposed scheme can be managed to an acceptable level and that it is compatible with the achievement of wider planning objectives in relation to development of good urban design and active streetscapes. I am satisfied that the risks appear to be low. Any residual risk has been factored into the design.

The submission of the OPW, who have a competence in flood risk matters, is noted and An Coimisiún should place emphasis on this submission but note that the OPW

do not oppose the development in principle. As an additional mitigation measure it seem requested by the OPW that a condition be attached to the grant of any planning permission that a 10 m wide strip of land running parallel with Channel CI, should be provided to facilitate access and maintenance activities in the immediate area. The applicant has provided a 4 metre maintenance strip which would appear reasonable in that it could facilitate a vehicle reaching the river. I am of the view that the applicant should continue to liaise with the OPW in respect of flood design and management given the shared responsibility of both agencies of the state to manage flood risk. Therefore, a condition is attached, should the Commission be minded to grant planning permission in respect of the finalisation of the Construction Environmental Management Plan and liaison with the Office of Public Works. Any documents generated shall be placed on file and retained as part of the public record.

I share the OPW's concern that the initial submission to the Commission in respect of flood risk was inadequate. However, the response to the OPW submission has addressed the potential impacts of the proposed development on the surrounding catchment including the loss of permeable ground, alterations to existing ground conditions and topography, and changes to natural drainage patterns and impact on ground water. The applicant is satisfied that hydraulic modelling confirms there is no increase in risk elsewhere and the development can manage the risk to itself.

On the basis of the information provided by the applicant, relevant mapping and data from the OPW and the nature, characteristics of the site and design of the proposed development– the conclusion of the FRA is considered reasonable. It is considered unlikely, subject to the design mitigation measures, that significant impacts would arise from flood risk.

8.3 Design of the Proposed Scheme

The proposed scheme design is entirely appropriate and generally consistent with the principles in DMURS. The proposed scheme generally includes for 2 m wide footpaths and cycle tracks. The design meets DMURS guidelines for footpath widths and crossing designs. DMURS recommends footpaths should be 2 m wide, with a minimum of 1.8 meters.

The proposed scheme also provides simple pedestrian crossings. This is achieved through the absence of left-slip lanes largely which reduces the number of crossing required for a pedestrian. An improvement will be provided at the Kilbane Roundabout and School House Road junction where there are currently no formal crossings for pedestrians – these will now be signalised crossings. I am satisfied that the applicant has adequately justified the design approach, and it is clear from the layout of the junctions that there will be a significant improvement in terms of safety and accessibility for pedestrians. I

Given the nature of the proposed scheme, its location and traffic speeds, the provision of segregated cycle infrastructure is appropriate. The proposed scheme will provide a safe facility for cyclists of all abilities to utilise and will increase the modal share in favour of cycling. In response to submissions and concern about facilities and tie into the existing road network, it is not possible to retrofit the optimal infrastructure design without considerable impact to existing properties at locations where the road width is narrow.

I am confident that the applicant has aligned the cycle infrastructure with the requirements outlined in the cycle manual and DMURS. Overall, the applicant is expecting to meet the 2m width design for cycle lanes. This width of 2m is set out in the National Cycle Manual and allows cyclists to overtake safely.

I note the inclusion of bus islands which are considered to reduce the potential for conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and stopping buses by deflecting cyclists behind the bus stop, thus creating an island area for boarding and alighting passengers. To address the potential pedestrian/cyclist conflict, a pedestrian priority crossing point is provided for pedestrians accessing the bus stop island area. In addition, a ramp is provided on the cycle track to raise the cycle track to the level of the footpath/island area onto a wide crossing. Suitable tactile paving is also provided at the crossing point.

Having reviewed the detailed design of the proposed island bus stop, I am satisfied that the applicant has had due regard to the requirements of the mobility impaired and has designed this infrastructure accordingly to meet the needs of not only the mobility impaired but also the visually impaired.

In a general sense it is reasonable to expect that there will be instances whereby the optimal design cannot be achieved, particularly at its tie in location, given the proposed scheme is to be retrofitted into an existing urban fabric. The applicant within the documentation provides adequate justification for such reductions.

I note submissions, including from Caisleán na hAbhann, in respect of the retention of the Kilbane Roundabout. While I appreciate roundabouts provide a solution for the flow of vehicular traffic, it is clear having regard to DMURS that they do not provide a safe or convenient options for pedestrians and cyclist. I am satisfied that the approach to junctions throughout the scheme is correct. I have considered this in Section 8.2.2 also.

There is much concern about the height of the proposed scheme, and it is requested that it is lowered for reasons of landscape and visual impact, property devaluation but also to provide access to future development schemes that may occur. The proposed development has been elevated in order to provide a reasonable gradient of not more than 5% to ensure an attractable and usable scheme for pedestrians and cyclists.

The land at this location is undulating between the scheme extents and in order to provide an attractive and usable street for vulnerable road users the gradient is recommended to be less than 5% The advice is consistent with DMURS (and indeed Part M of the Building Regulations). The Commission will note in particular Section 4.4.6 Alignment and Curvature in which it sets out the most appropriate maximum and minimum gradients. DMURS advises that access routes with a gradient of 1:20 or less are preferred. Therefore, a maximum gradient of 5% is desirable on streets where pedestrians are active. In considering this matter, the Commission should consider a wheelchair user travelling on this road or a parent pushing a stroller to appreciate how challenging higher gradients may be. While in certain circumstances a steeper gradient could be designed, I see no reason, given the current environment and greenfield nature of the site, not to provide such an accessible design that will benefit all users.

The gradient would provide suitable surface level and gradient for the road given the existing ground levels which are variable as illustrated in DWG 19025RD-0600-P001 provided by the applicant. In raising the finished surface level of the proposed

scheme, I am satisfied that the applicant has had regard to the implications of same including landscape and visual impact and associated noise, air quality and light pollution impacts. These have been fully considered in the Environmental Report. The embankments have also been appropriately landscaped.

8.4 Impact of Tree Removal and Replanting

The proposed scheme will have a significant impact on the trees and hedgerows along the proposed scheme. The details of the tree removal are set out in Appendix E Tree Survey Report of the Environmental Report and DWG 21781-2-105 submitted. The tree survey, which identified individual trees, groups of trees and garden hedges, was carried out in accordance with relevant standards and categorised. The proposed scheme will require the removal of 33 individual trees, groups of trees and garden hedges. Only one of these trees is considered high quality, four of moderate quality and the remaining twenty-nine trees are of low quality with an estimated remaining life expectancy of between 10 and 20 years.

The antipathy of several observers to the loss of such trees is understood. I note the submission of Caisleán na hAbhann Residents Association who seek to main trees particularly at Groody Roundabout and approaching roads as well as submissions from residents along Golf Links Road.

The local authority has policy measures to protect trees. This includes general measures within the development plans and in particular Objective EH O10 of the LCCDP. Of note is the current the Limerick City and County Tree Policy 2024-2030 which emphasises the need to retain healthy trees wherever feasible and advocating for proposed tree planting and species diversity.

It is acknowledged that there is an inherent competition in policy between schemes such as Castletroy Link Road, which also enjoy widespread policy support, and tree protection. On balance, however, I am satisfied that the applicant has been restrained in its design and has sought to avoid to most significant of impacts to trees. The design of the proposed scheme is well justified, and while may not be desirable to remove trees or hedges that provide an immediate social and environmental benefit, the tree removal is needed to achieve to overall objectives of the scheme - the long term environmental and social benefits of which have been clearly set out and are positive.

I am satisfied that the applicant has sought to mitigate the impact by design which utilises trees where appropriate. However, in the course of such a scheme, all trees cannot be avoided and the loss of up to 33 trees is reasonable and proportionate. The Commission should also note that up to 29 of the 33 trees identified for removal would likely require removal over the next 10 years in any case due to the physiological and structural condition.

Furthermore, to address the loss of arboricultural features, it is anticipated that the landscape plan included with the application will provide a varied selection of new trees and plants along the route. This new vegetation will incorporate a range of tree species that will be selected based on the local environmental conditions at any particular location, as well as considering future site uses, ecosystem service provision, benefits to local communities, and enhancing the current tree population. The Landscape Masterplan (DWG 21781-2-101 to 104) show the proposed landscape plans, including areas of tree removal and locations and details of proposed new tree and vegetation planting. This is an acceptable mitigation and will improve the situation over time as planting becomes established.

It is accepted that the proposed tree replacements do not immediately offset the losses in local amenity, biodiversity, and impacts to the environment. The carbon sequestration attributed to the mature trees will be reduced, as the replacement juvenile trees and species are unlikely to achieve similar levels of sequestration for several decades. The disruption to biodiversity including bats is well documented in the Environmental Report. As is the impact to property along the route, in terms of noise, air quality, light and general amenity and sense of place.

However, I am satisfied that the applicant has provided a robust argument in respect of the wider benefits of the scheme in terms of climate and has factored in tree removal into its consideration of the scheme as a whole. On balance I am satisfied that the applicant has sufficiently considered the reasonable alternatives to the proposed scheme at this location, and the removal of these trees is justified.

It is noted that the removal of trees, vegetation etc. will be minimised in so far as practicable. It is noted that a number of measures are put forward to ensure this in an Arboricultural Method Statement which includes:

- Sequencing Plan

- Tree Constraints Plan
- Root Protection Areas
- Tree Protective Fencing, Barriers & Signage
- Use of Qualified Tree Surgeons
- Use of Appropriate Machinery
- Pre-Commencement Surveys
- Location of Site Compounds away from Trees

It is recommended that a condition be imposed on the applicant to ensure tree removal is reevaluated prior to construction. It is noted that temporary measures can be put in place during construction where boundaries are removed such as hoarding to ensure lands are not left habitually open during this phase. This includes measures for livestock should it arise in certain sections.

There is also a concern in respect of trees that may be planted and whether they are likely to become established or not. I therefore have recommended another condition seeking a five year maintenance plan for the landscape plan to ensure its successful implementation.

In conclusion, having regard to:

- the strong justification for the proposed scheme in which alternative options and the environmental impacts of same were considered.
- the supporting assessment in relevant topics including Air Quality, Climate, Noise & Vibration Population, Human Health, Biodiversity and most significantly Landscape & Visual which provides mitigation measures and includes a landscape plan with replanting.
- the mitigation measures to be implemented which includes replanting of trees and other vegetation, albeit, at a different location which reduces the significance of any impact over the long term.
- the provisions of the LCCDP which seek to protect trees and indeed the requirements set out in the tree strategy adopted by LCCC, and in the absence of alternative options, the need to balance same with an overriding, common good transport objectives in relevant national, regional and local level policies which also support the proposed scheme.

- the submissions received from observer in respect trees being impacted by the proposed scheme.

Overall and with the imposition of conditions, I am satisfied that the impacts are acceptable.

8.5 Impact to Zoned Development Lands

The Commission will note the submission of Pat Hoare Building Contractors Ltd who own/occupy zoned lands immediately north and west of the proposed scheme. The observer does not object to the provision of the distributor road. Rather, requests that the road scheme is amended to ensure that the Council fulfils its 2004 Agreement in providing a vehicular, pedestrian and cycling access spur to the land, along with the provision of foul, surface water and water infrastructure capable of servicing it.

The particulars of the 2004 agreement are not provided to the Commission, and it is unclear what the status of said agreement is. Notwithstanding any agreement, the applicant is now exercising its powers of compulsory purchase in order to acquire these lands. Were the agreement still in effective, there would no requirement for compulsory purchase. On this basis, there is no requirement for the Commission to have regard to it and any conveyancing issues raised by the observer are matters between them and the applicant and should be addressed outside of the planning process.

In terms of access to the development lands, I am satisfied that access can be achieved in future, and the development of the proposed scheme would benefit the landowner. While it may give rise to uncertainty for the landowner at this time, in the absence of a planning application for the future residential scheme on these lands it is reasonably beyond the scope of this scheme to provided defined access and water infrastructure. It is noted that LCCC could facilitate an access, subject to an agreement, should the need arise in the future as part of any future planning application by Pat Hoare Building Contractors Ltd. Details with respect to water infrastructure is between the objector and Uisce Éireann. In both cases, access and water infrastructure, I am satisfied that the proposed scheme does not prohibit its integration in future.

I appreciate the concern of the observer in respect of design, most notably the embankments and level of the proposed scheme. The land at this location is undulating between the scheme extents and in order to provide an attractive and usable street for vulnerable road users the gradient is recommended to be less than 5%. The advice is consistent with DMURS (and indeed Part M of the Building Regulations). The Commission will note in particular Section 4.4.6 Alignment and Curvature in which it sets out the most appropriate maximum and minimum gradients. DMURS advises that access routes with a gradient of 1:20 or less are preferred. Therefore, a maximum gradient of 5% is desirable on streets where pedestrians are active. In considering this matter, the Commission should consider a wheelchair user travelling on this road or a parent pushing a stroller to appreciate how challenging higher gradients may be. While in certain circumstances a steeper gradient could be designed, I see no reason, given the current environment and greenfield nature of the site, not to provide such an accessible design that will benefit all users.

The proposed scheme has been through an iterative design process to take into consideration a number of design factors and environmental constraints including flood risk. The design of the proposed scheme as presented in this planning application is the most appropriate design and I am satisfied that the proposed scheme would not prohibit a wider scheme on Pat Hoare Building Contractors Ltd. lands and any former agreements in terms of provision of accesses and can be agreed separately.

While the observer has advanced an indicative masterplan, it is considered that in the absence of a planning permission for same or for any residential scheme on these particular lands, I see no reason why it cannot be amended now with the benefit of a detailed design for the proposed road scheme. Again, I see no requirement to fulfil the request of the observer to amend the design of the proposed scheme by means of suitable condition and revised design.

8.6 Impact to Services incl. Foul Sewer

The Uisce Éireann submission notes that there is an existing 225/375 mm foul sewer within the site. The diversion of the existing foul sewer from its current location is the preferred option by LCCC subject to the agreement of Irish Water. The Active Travel

in LCCC team will fully engage with Uisce Éireann Asset Diversions Section prior to detail design stage to develop a common solution.

While this is noted, the applicant has not provided any specific detail of whether separation distances as per Uisce Éireann's Standards Codes and Practices can be achieved. On this basis, should the Commission be minded to grant planning permission, I would recommend a condition be attached that requires that the applicant engage with Uisce Éireann and submit revised plans clearly indicating separation distances as per Uisce Éireann's Standards and Code of Practices have been achieved to accommodate the existing infrastructure within the site.

While preferably this matter should have been dealt with prior to the submission of any planning application, I see no reason why this matter cannot be addressed between two agencies of the state post-consent but prior to commencement of development.

Separately I note the concern of Caisleán na hAbhann Residents Association who are seeking a drainage issue in respect of wastewater at the entrance to the estate addressed under this planning application. There is a manhole cover on the road as you enter the estate that is regularly blocked causing waste water to drain onto the road. This would appear to be an operational issue with an existing drain sewer and may not be addressed under this planning application. A complaint should be made to the relevant operational authority for wastewater in this instance to resolve the matter.

8.7 Impact to Residential Amenity

8.7.1 Fox Hollows

There are a number of submissions from owner/occupiers of properties at Foxhollows, immediately north of the proposed scheme. This includes Des Frawley and Pat and Siobhan Hoare. These residential properties and rear gardens would have bound directly onto the proposed scheme.

The observers primary concern is the impact to their property, its residential amenity and the enjoyment of their rear gardens. It is their view that impacts will arise due to noise, air and light pollution arising from the proposed scheme. There are also security concerns.

In order to address these concerns, the observers seek alternative boundary treatments including a solid boundary wall. I note that the noise barriers can take the form of proprietary acoustic screens, solid block walls, earth berms or other solid structures – either way I am satisfied that these will be of a durable nature and would not degrade rapidly. These will be located at the road rather than the boundary between these properties and the proposed scheme. This noise barrier which, while primarily for noise mitigation will, at 2.5 m in height, also serve the function of preventing to some extent unauthorised access, vandalism, and potential trespassing. The area to the rear of Foxhollows will also benefit from proposed natural screening in addition to the existing screening at the properties. It is not proposed to provide a solid boundary wall at the boundary with Foxhollows and on the basis of the noise barrier and proposed and existing hedgerows I do not see an immediate requirement for same.

The requirement for a solid boundary wall is also raised in the context of noise impact. However, as stated the noise barrier could in fact be a solid block wall. This is an appropriate mitigation measure for the noise impact to the dwellings at Foxhollows and is located at the closest reasonable location to the noise source rather than the property boundary where it would have a lesser ability to mitigate the actual noise impact. Again, on the basis of the noise barrier and proposed and existing hedgerows I do not see an immediate requirement for a solid block wall at the boundary.

In terms of air quality and in particular dust, debris and pollution from traffic, a solid block wall would have limited use in preventing same. Again, on the basis of the noise barrier and proposed and existing hedgerows I do not see an immediate requirement for a solid block wall at the boundary to prevent dust, debris and pollution specifically. It is noted that, overall, the proposed scheme would have a neutral impact on air quality.

Mr Frawley raises specific concerns about maintenance of the property boundary particularly as a result of the screening and biodiversity areas which may become overgrown. Trees and hedgerows are ordinarily part of road schemes and have made up boundaries between property for centuries. The maintenance of same would be an ongoing matter between LCCC and the property owners as is likely the case between Mr. Frawley and all his other neighbours presently. Should vegetation

encroach Mr Frawley property, he would be entitled to cut back same in order to maintain his property, as is his right. However, such a concern would not justify a solid boundary wall in this instance. It is unlikely a road scheme would generate a pest infestation, and measures can be put in place outside of the planning process to manage such an issue were it to arise.

I note the concern in respect of the embankments to the rear of Foxhollows and the request that these are fully planted with tree species representative of a natural woodland. It is noted that these will be planted as per the recommendations in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025. This is entirely appropriate and satisfactory.

Mr Frawley notes that the plans already include proposed boundary walls for certain sections of the proposed scheme however, this is not the case. At Foxhollows all properties will have their existing boundary maintained. It is noted that at No. 5 Foxhollows, a reinforced concrete retaining wall is proposed which is offset from the actual property boundary.

8.7.2 Ashfort

There is one submission from Mike McCoy an owner/occupier of a property at Ashfort, immediately south of the junction of the Castletroy Link Road, Golf Links Road and School House Road. This residential property and rear garden would have bound directly onto the proposed scheme.

The observers primary concern is the impact to their property, its residential amenity and the enjoyment of their rear gardens. It is their view that impacts will arise due to noise generated from audible pedestrian signals. No noise barrier is proposed at this location; however, specimen trees are proposed. It is noted that audible pedestrian signals are typically used for those who are blind, or vision impaired to facilitate safe crossing. The volume of the beeping is set to a default 55 dB but can be adjusted based on the ambient noise level to ensure its audible but not overly intrusive to nearby residential properties.

I am satisfied LCCC will sequence the audible signals appropriately, as they do for controlled crossings throughout the city and the Mr McCoy may bring it to the attention of LCCC or make a complaint should it become a nuisance. The noise impact will be minimal due to the distance of the property to the signal and the

intervening environment which includes a solid block wall which will be supplemented by the proposed specimen trees.

I would be hesitant to condition the audible direction, audible volume, audible duration or removal of such a function in a planning permission given the important function of the audible signal and the specific requirements it has. It is an operational issue which can be amended should I give rise to nuisance.

Mr McCoy welcomes the proposed specimen planting however notes that the location is elevated and exposed to wind. I am satisfied that the species identified in the planting schedule are appropriate and the location of same is suitable. There are a variety of reasons what they may not establish fully including high winds. A condition is attached for monitoring the landscaping measures should the Commission be minded to grant planning permission.

8.7.3 Golf Links Road

There are a number of submissions from owner/occupiers of properties along the Golf Links Road, to the south of the proposed scheme. This includes Brian and Eileen Coates, Kathryn and Mark Collins and Matthew Ryan. These residential properties and rear gardens would have views of the proposed scheme.

The observers primary concern is the impact to their property, its residential amenity and the enjoyment of their rear gardens. It is their view that impacts will arise due to noise, air and light pollution arising from the proposed scheme.

The observers note the inclusion of noise reduction measures on other sections of the roads at Fox Hollow in particular; however, it is unclear to them why has not been extended to the southern section of the proposed scheme . The observers are of the view that this mitigation would be beneficial if implemented on the full extent of both sides of the road or extended another 150 m to match the proposed barrier on the Fox Hollow side.

It should be noted that these observers on Golf Links Road are outside the extents of the proposed scheme and do not adjoin it. The rear gardens are approximately 100m south of the proposed scheme. It is noted that given this distance of these properties to the proposed scheme that only one, Location 47 and 48, was included in the noise modelling. I am generally satisfied that Location 47 and 48 is representative of all these properties. Given the predicted noise level and magnitude of change which is

minor and negligible, in both a 2025 and 2040 scenario respectfully, no mitigation was required based on TII guidance. While the observers seek extension of noise reduction measures, which is effectively fencing, it is not needed for noise reduction at this location. I agree with the applicant that it is the results of the noise model that should dictate the length or extent of the noise barrier.

These properties do have views toward the proposed scheme from their back gardens. This visual impact will be mitigated by the replanting proposed as part of the scheme which will mature over time. The proposed scheme is in an urban environment and will have street lighting and vehicle using the road will generally use dipped headlights. Given the distance between these residential properties and rear gardens and the proposed scheme, the intervening land which is zoned residential/community, the existing screening at these properties which could be supplemented the impacts from light pollution would be minimal in the context of an urban environment.

The removal of trees has been addressed above in Section 8.4 above. Golf Links Road will not be overly impacted by their removal save for the visual impact. While the trees do serve an important ecosystem function in terms of air quality, overall, the proposed scheme would have a neutral impact on it.

Due to the nature of the proposed scheme and the proximity of established residential areas changes to existing views from residential properties will arise. The nature of the works necessitates the removal of existing trees and mature vegetation which, in many locations, cannot be replaced. Generally, I would be of the view that the proposed scheme when assessed in the context of the existing urban area and road network would not impact, to any material degree, the existing landscape character. Although the scale of the changes close to the proposed scheme will be considerable, these changes will diminish rapidly with increasing distance from the project. I am satisfied that the landscape scheme is comprehensive, and no additional planting is required.

8.8 Impact to Traffic

8.8.1 Methodology

I am satisfied that the traffic monitoring carried out by the applicant is complete and robust and proportionate to the scale of the proposed scheme. It applies the relevant

guidelines including TII (2014) Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines. I note Section 6.2 of the Environmental Report which sets out the methodology applied to the traffic assessment modelling which includes use of software, namely Paramics Discovery and LinSig. These are commonly used software. While many observers question the traffic modelling including Caisleán na hAbhann Residents Association and Mr Brennan, they fail to propose any other approach or method which may be suitable or commonly used.

In its response (page 4) of July 2025, the applicant has further explained its methodology and provided details on its modelled assumptions which are again entirely reasonable. It is notable that the applicant has not factored in the targeted reduction for modal shift under LSMATS (40-50% reduction in car usage in Limerick Urban). This in my opinion provided a robust methodology in which the Commission can assess the proposed scheme.

Mr Brennan in his response to the applicant's response, remains unsatisfied with the evidence provided by LCCC. This submission is noted and has been considered in the context of this traffic assessment. Generally, the potential for traffic impacts to arise from the proposed development is accepted, however the likelihood and significance of those impacts are not considered adverse. The proposed development will not resolve traffic congestion in this area in and of itself, but it should alleviate some of the pressures through a more permeable road network. In particular, this assessment is satisfied in relation to the effectiveness of the design which includes management of traffic through controlled signals and active travel measures which will promote a longer term modal shift.

I note observers also question the extent of the study area used in the methodology. Again, I am satisfied in this report that the extent is appropriate and capture fully the routes vehicles chose following completion of the proposed scheme and in particular includes the main trafficked routes. The Commission should be satisfied that the extents of the analysis put forward is suitable for an identified scheme and any expansion of said study area would be unwarranted in that context and begin to resemble an area based analysis for a transport strategy (like LSMATS) rather than a specific scheme whose need has been established through such studies.

Overall, I am stratified in the methodology applied by the applicant and the traffic modelling is robust and complete. The modelling is suitable for application in other topics also including the assessment of air quality and noise impacts.

8.8.2 Junction with Caisleán na hAbhann

I note the submission of the Caisleán na hAbhann Residents Association who have a number of specific concerns and requests in how the proposed junction at the entrance to their estate will operate. The submission is effectively concerned that the traffic lights, which replace a roundabout, will prioritise traffic on Groody Road and from the Castletroy Link Road and result in increased queuing for residents.

In respect of the roundabout itself, I am satisfied that the intervention is entirely appropriate and generally consistent with the principles in DMURS (Junction Design). While the existing roundabout may have served vehicular traffic well at this location up to now, there is a safety issue arising for pedestrians and cyclists who find roundabouts more difficult to navigate where there is a lack of controlled crossings/cycle facilities. Given the spatial constraints and amount of land-take required for roundabouts, a signalised junction is more appropriate given the requirement to introduce safe facilities for pedestrian and cyclists.

The use of large roundabouts should be restricted to areas with lower levels of pedestrian activity. Large roundabouts are defined in DMURS as those with radii greater than 7.5m, the current roundabout has an inscribed circle diameter/radius, of approximately 34m/14m. Where large roundabouts currently exist, road authorities are encouraged, as part of any major upgrade works, to replace them with signalised junctions. Otherwise, roads authority should retrofit them so that are more compact and/or pedestrian and cycle friendly, as is appropriate. However, given the multi-modal objectives for this scheme, which also requires facilities for pedestrian and cyclist this would not be possible.

The Groody Road and Castletroy Link Road will be more trafficked owing to their distributor function, whereas Caisleán na hAbhann is a residential estate and cul-de-sac. On this basis I do not recommend the Commission make a condition in respect of traffic light sequencing and timing. However, the observer should be aware that it is within the operational remit of LCCC to monitoring queuing time / delays at each junction and record traffic flows on the road network when the proposed scheme

becomes operational. Should residents of Caisleán na hAbhann find issue with queuing times, the issue should be brought directly to LCCC rather than address under an infrastructural planning application. I also note that the technology installed at the junction will utilise smart technology including loop technology to optimise the operation and sequencing of the traffic lights to prevent excessive cueing.

Overall, I am satisfied with the design of the junction of Groody Road and Castletroy Link Road and that the traffic lights are appropriately positioned despite the descent from Caisleán na hAbhann and the 90 degree turn just before the proposed traffic lights. The speed limit in the estate is 30 km per hour which is an appropriate speed to ensure safe stopping and braking before the traffic lights. While this junction may be congested at peak times, the proposed scheme is intended to reduce this congestion and distribute traffic elsewhere and will also lessen congestion for some trips generated through public transport as well as walking and cycling.

I note the request for additional turning and slip lanes to serve access and egress to Caisleán na hAbhann. In particular, it is requested that a left turning lane is provided for egressing the estate. While I understand the basis of the request, it should be noted that the design of the proposed scheme is compliant with DMURS which advises the left turn slips should be omitted. It is the view in DMURS that they generally provide little extra effective vehicular capacity but are highly disruptive for pedestrians and cyclists. On the basis of the design of the cycle lane and footpath, I am satisfied that the proposed scheme is designed appropriately in this regard and that the volumes of traffic from Caisleán na hAbhann would not warrant such a facility.

During construction, the residents of Caisleán na hAbhann will experience disruption as a result of the proposed scheme, however, access will be generally maintained through the construction phase, save for minor closures to carry out works at the junction. I do not consider that the impact the construction phase would significantly impact residents of Caisleán na hAbhann. I am satisfied that the Construction Plan is sufficiently detailed for planning purposes, and it is up to the appointed contractor to provide additional details post consent and pre-commencement. Should the Commission be minded to grant planning permission, a condition to finalise the Construction Environmental Management Plan, including a Construction Traffic Management Plan should be implemented and placed on file.

I note concern in relation to the right turn lane from Groody Road toward Towlerton also. The observer considers the right turn lane too short and that it would simply function better as a roundabout rather than signalised junction. I am satisfied that the length of the right turn lane is proportional to the expected volumes and confines of the existing environment and road network. I am also satisfied based on the applicant's traffic modelling which concludes that the junctions will operate within capacity.

8.8.3 Road Safety

There are several requests for speed ramps to be placed on the proposed scheme to control traffic and indeed on adjoining roads approach the proposed scheme. While such vertical deflections can be successful in reducing speed in neighbourhood settings, I am satisfied they are not required at this time and the speed limit of 50 km per hour would be enforceable. Similarly, there is requests for additional signage for a number of matters, particularly to control cyclists. The Stage 1 Road Safety Audit for the Proposed Scheme is included as part of the planning application and does not identify any problems or concerns associated with speed or signage. I note the concerns in relation to driver and cyclist behaviour on roads generally, however, the enforcement of same are wider driver behaviour issues and would be subject to general rules of the road and policing by An Garda Siochana. It is noted that speed limits can be reviewed and amended at any time.

There is concern regarding queuing at junction at both the Dublin Road and Old Ballysimon Road. These junctions are either end of the Golf Links Road. It should be noted that in the do nothing scenario, traffic continues to increase which would result in increased queuing at these junctions in any case. This increase occurs simply as a result of new development in the area including residential schemes. The proposed scheme will distribute traffic more efficiently and avoid certain junctions. The modal shift provided for in the scheme will only serve to improve the operation of the road network in the future.

8.8.4 Provision of Bus Lane

Mr Brennan's submissions question the principle of the bus lane in particular which in his view is more suited to congested urban centres and given this is a residential area it is not required. This view has no basis on policy which advocates for the

provision of bus lanes in proximity to residential areas. It is notable that LSMATS identifies the future provision of a link road for a specific bus service between Limerick City Centre and destinations to the east of the city. The corridor will form part of the B2 bus route that will operate every 30 minutes in time.

It is accepted that under-used or unnecessary lanes can serve only to increase the width of carriageways (encouraging greater vehicle speeds) and consume space that could otherwise be dedicated to placemaking/traffic-calming measures such as planted verges, wider footpaths, cycle tracks or lanes and on-street parking. However, the Commission should note that consideration of this is evident in the design of the proposed scheme, and the bus lane does not run on either side for its entire length. Rather, they are only available on one side on approaches to both junctions at Groody Road and Golf Links Road. On the east bound lane, it only commences between chainage 450 m and 700 m. On the west bound lane, it only commences between chainage 400 m and 0 m. This alternate lane for buses will have the effect of narrowing the carriage way width and controlling speeds on approach to signalised junctions.

In any case given the lands are zoned, existing and future population and community and key destinations in the area it is my view that a bus lane is justified and the roads authority would be justified in provided a bus lane for its entire length. There are a number of key destinations being served by buses in this area including commercial (Northern Trust (off Groody Road), City East Retail Park (off Old Ballysimon Road), Garryglass Industrial Estate)) and community (Castletroy Golf Club (off Golf Links Road), Limerick Educate Together, Bon Secours Hospital (under construction) (off Groody Road)), University of Limerick. There is sufficient space available presently to provide this infrastructure and the proposed scheme is representative of integrated land use and transport planning advocated for in policy.

It is accepted that the traffic based justification provided by LCCC to support the provision of the bus lanes within this project is lacking and the case for it could have been made more explicit. However, traffic based justification should not be the only catalyst for bus infrastructure provision and the policy vision for Limerick under the LCCDP and LSMATS are clear in their objectives to improve the efficiency of the bus network in Limerick.

The applicant in my view is fulfilling the LSMATS which identifies a link road between Childers Road and Golf Link Road which is needed '*in order to provide for an additional public transport route*': The applicant is also fulfilling its own development plan and specifically *Objective TR O44 Link Roads for which it is the objective*

Support and complete delivery of new and improved link roads and junctions accommodating public transport, cycle and pedestrian connections, including new road links as outlined in LSMATS.....

[Emphasis Added]

and

Ensure proposals make provision for the accommodation of bus services along the most significant link routes, which shall include identification of bus stopping and turning areas, as well as carriageway capacity and through routes.....

[Emphasis Added]

These scheme has also been designed to the NTA Preliminary Design Guidance Booklet for BusConnects Core Bus Corridors and the NTA Cycle Design Manual.

On this basis I am satisfied that the democratically made plan, the LCCDP, has provided the justification for the proposed scheme and its bus infrastructure and to not provide it would contravene the plan.

8.9 Impact to Biodiversity

Chapter 3 of the Environmental Report identifies, describes and assesses the potential direct and indirect impacts of the proposed scheme on biodiversity during its construction and operation phases.

The application is accompanied by a NIS, and I refer the Commission to the appropriate assessment in Section 11 of this report for matters related specifically to the Birds Directive and Habitats Directive.

The proposed scheme is located in a largely suburban environment albeit the lands are undeveloped and in agricultural use. There are residential, areas bounding the site. There is semi natural habitat within the site which contains improved grassland, scrub, hedgerows and treelines

8.9.1 Methodology

Multidisciplinary habitat and fauna surveys were completed at the site in 2020, 2022, 2023 and 2024. Bird surveys also occurred in 2019 and 2021. The applicant has provided details of the survey campaign in Sections 3.5 of the Environmental Report. I am satisfied that the methodology applied is appropriate to the proposed scheme and enables the Commission to complete an assessment of it.

8.9.2 Habitats

The applicant has identified the following habitats, which align with Fossitt (2000) classification:

- FW4 Drainage ditch
- FP1 Calcareous/Petrifying Spring
- GA1 Improved agricultural grassland
- GS1 Dry calcareous and neutral grassland
- GS4 Wet grassland/Molinia Meadow
- GM1 Marsh
- FS1 Reed & Large Sedge Swamp
- WN6 Wet willow-alder-ash woodland
- WS1 Scrub
- WL1 Hedgerow
- ED2 Spoil & Bare Ground

No non-native invasive species have been recorded along or adjacent to the proposed scheme. There is no evidence of otters at the site in which the proposed scheme is located however, it is acknowledged that the River Groody is suitable for otter.

The magnitude of loss has been quantified in Table 3.7 of the Environmental Report and a significance applied to it which ranges from moderate to negligible. It is noted the largest percentage loss of each habitat from the overall area of the habitat occurring within and adjacent to the proposed scheme amounts to 50% in the case of tall herb swamp. This assessment is considered acceptable and reasonable, and the impact of the loss would not result in any indirect impact to other species like bats and otters.

8.9.3 Badgers

No field signs indicating the presence of badgers or their setts were noted. While I note the submission of Mr. Quirke who contends that there are at least two badger setts on the lands, no evidence has been provided, and I would remind the Commission of the extensive survey campaign undertaken by the applicant over a period of several years.

8.9.4 Bats

No bats were recorded emerging from the mature trees surveyed during the tree emergence survey. No bat activity was recorded during the April 2020 manual bat activity surveys. During automatic monitoring within the proposed road alignment a minimum of five species were recorded. It is noted that Leisler's bat and Common pipistrelle rely on the wetland habitats in the vicinity of the proposed alignment for foraging.

The applicant is of the view that in the absence of mitigation the project will have the potential to result in an impact of moderate magnitude to bats and particularly Common pipistrelle as a result of the loss of high value foraging habitat. Local bats population are of local importance (higher value) and a moderate magnitude effect to this receptor will result in an impact of negative minor significance. I am satisfied with this assessment of the potential impacts which is based on survey and disagree with Mr Quirke's contention that the impact may be adverse, given the absence of roosts at this time.

The applicant has set out mitigation for bats including temporal restrictions on felling of trees with roost potential and pre-commencement surveys by a qualified ecologist should works commence during the bat activity season. It is also noted that the loss of wetland, grassland and woodland habitat will be compensated with a Biodiversity Management Area (BMA) to the west of the proposed scheme surrounding the proposed attenuation pond. Additional areas of broadleaf woodland habitat will also be provided at the Eastern and Western extents of the scheme which provide a suitable foraging habitat for bats.

The applicant will be aware of its legal obligation to obtain a derogation license under Regulation 54 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2021 in respect of certain activities related, in this instance in

particular, to bat and otter species. In the context of this proposed scheme, the applicant's extensive surveys campaign and qualified ecological impact assessment report prepared by competent experts, no derogation licence is required at this time, and I see no reason why the applicant should have such a licence granted before the approval of the consent to this proposed development in the absence of any physical evidence for activity of bats and otter in particular. I note that the applicant has committed to pre-commencement survey during bat activity season and the qualified ecologist should recommend that they immediately cease any works should such species be found and until the appropriate course of action is identified, which may include the requirement to seek a licence for the completion of the construction works.

This is an entirely proportionate mitigation to the risk identified and the Commission should be satisfied that the proposed development will not cause harm to the environment and can agree with the scientific evidence put forward by the applicant.

8.9.5 Conclusion

While the proposed development will result in some biodiversity loss. I am satisfied generally, in respect of other fauna and species, that whilst fauna present will have habituated to the environment within a built-up urban area, construction works will inevitably result in noise, vibration and lighting whereby impacts will arise on species present. These impacts, while potentially significant by way of disturbance, would be short-term and would not be continuous. Notwithstanding, the impacts cannot be avoided. Best practice construction methods including appropriate placing and cowl of construction lighting will be employed.

Overall, I am conscious this is zoned lands under the LCCDP. While certain areas on in the site, particularly along the River Groody and in areas of trees and hedgerows, will be impacted, the lands at these locations are already managed for agriculture. However, again the design and route for the proposed scheme has been chosen through an iterative design process which typically avoided the most sensitive receptors and are on agricultural lands.

8.10 Impact to Water, Land, Soils and Geology

Chapters 4 and 5 of the Environmental Report identifies, describes and assesses the potential direct and indirect impacts of the proposed scheme on water, land and soils

during its construction and operation phases. This topic has numerous interactions with other chapters of the Environmental which are addressed in separate sections of this assessment including biodiversity in particular.

There are potential impacts through disturbance of the site and an increased risk of pollution events to soil and water. It is noted that the River Groody and several streams feeding it are in proximity to the site. The construction phase of the site will involve management of discharges and emissions to ensure they do not cause pollution or deterioration in the status of surface water or groundwater bodies. These impacts will be temporary and short-term and would be controlled as part of best practice construction measures outlined in the CEMP, the comprehensive monitoring arrangements which are undertaken by the applicant. There is no likelihood of impacts to geological heritage sites.

It is considered unlikely, subject to mitigation measures, that significant impacts would arise on soils and water.

The applicant will implement its CEMP which will provide best practice construction methods to be employed. These are detailed in Appendix C to the Environmental Report. The CEMP includes details on the project organisation and responsibilities, project communication and co-ordination, analysis of potential impacts, environmental control measures, control of pollution, watercourses, construction management information construction scheduling, site traffic/deliveries, waste mitigation measures, air and noise control measures, sensitive receptors, invasive species, monitoring and emergency procedures.

Following the implementation of the mitigation and monitoring measures it is considered post-mitigation impacts will not be significant.

8.11 Impact to Landscape and Visual

It is accepted the proposed scheme will be a novel intervention in the landscape and there are potential impacts in respect of residential amenity predominantly related to landscape or visual impact. However, in the context of residential amenity, it is considered that the proposed development will be reasonably screened with existing treelines and hedgerows as well as supplemental planting – such planting will provide screening and privacy to the residential dwellings which may not have been available previously.

While the proposed development will be a significant intervention in the landscape and there will be an impact from the proposed scheme, the road will not become a prominent feature on the skyline and will be visually contained between existing field boundaries. The impacts will not be significant owing to the existing screening, and in addition, the applicant is proposing additional planting of hedgerows to further screen these views.

The landscape at the location, which is increasingly becoming developed, has the capacity to absorb the proposed development in the context of the wider area which is already intensively used for a variety of uses. While the observers are right to be concerned about the landscape and visual impact, the impact is not considered significant and road scheme are a common feature in built up areas and read as part of the urban fabric

Overall, it is considered the visibility of the proposed development is unlikely to draw attention to itself and even if noticed, is unlikely to detract from the visual character of the area, residential amenity and indeed adjacent built heritage features like Mary Magdalene's Well.

8.12 Impact to Archaeology

It is considered that the proposed scheme, on the basis of information submitted in the Environmental Report and submission received on the file, and subject to mitigation and monitoring measures, would not be likely to have significant effects on archaeology, cultural heritage & architectural heritage.

It is noted that Mary Magdalene Well (RPS Reg No 1633) is adjacent to the proposed scheme. There will be no direct impact, and I am satisfied that the any visual impact would not be significant due to the existing trees surrounding the well.

8.13 Other Matters

8.13.1 Construction Period

The concerns in respect of unremitting construction phase impacts over 18 months is noted. The construction timeframe and various activities therein are managed through the CEMP. Many observers request community liaison during the construction phase, and I agree that this would be a worthwhile measure to communication on works that are proposed and timing/scheduling of same. A

condition for same is attached should the Commission be minded to grant planning permission

8.13.2 Availability of Documentation

I note Mr Hickeys submission that the planning application documents are not available on An Coimisiún's website and there is no dedicated website by the developer for this particular planning application.

The Commission will note that a copy of the plans and particulars including the Natura Impact Statement was available for inspection and/or purchase at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy, from 3rd March to 17th April, 2025 during public opening hours (excluding bank holidays) at the Customer Services Desk, Limerick City & County Council, Merchant's Quay, Limerick, V94 EH90 and at the Planning and Environmental Services Department, Limerick City & County Council Offices, Dooradoyle Road, Limerick, V94 WV78. Plans and particulars of the proposed development was also available for inspection online during the above timeframe at <https://mypoint.limerick.ie>.

I am satisfied the applicant, and the Commission has met the statutory requirements in terms of making documentation available.

9.0 Water Framework Directive Assessment

The subject site is located in the Shannon_(Lower)_060 surface waterbody and Limerick City East ground waterbody. The proposed scheme is adjacent to two watercourses, namely Groody (EPA_Code: 25G05) and Peafield (EPA_Code: 25P36). These watercourses are tributaries and drain into the Shannon (Lower) (EPA_Code: 25S01). It is noted that the 2016-2021 status of both watercourses is moderate. The WFD risk for the Shannon_(Lower)_060 surface waterbody is currently under review and its status is moderate and Limerick City East ground waterbody is considered at risk.

I have assessed the proposed scheme and have considered the objectives as set out in Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive which seek to protect and, where necessary, restore surface & ground water waterbodies in order to reach good status (meaning both good chemical and good ecological status), and to prevent deterioration.

Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any surface and/or groundwater water bodies either qualitatively or quantitatively.

The reason for this conclusion is due to the nature and location of the proposed works, which is are largely confined, the detailed consideration of alternatives for the alignment of the proposed scheme which considered water impacts as a criteria and generally avoided impacted to same.

Where impacts cannot be avoided detailed surface water control measures and best practice construction methods are included in the design. During operation, surface run off will be appropriately treated through interceptors and attenuation ponds prior to entering waterbodies.

I conclude that on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development will not result in a risk of deterioration on any water body (rivers, lakes, groundwaters, transitional and coastal) either qualitatively or quantitatively or on a temporary or permanent basis or otherwise jeopardise any water body in reaching its WFD objectives and consequently can be excluded from further assessment.

10.0 Environmental Impact Assessment (Screening)

The proposed scheme was screened for EIA under ABP-312427-22 directed that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment and that the preparation and submission of an EIA Report (EIAR) is not required.

While the direction remains entirely valid and it is not intended to revisit it, I am conscious that in the intervening years since 2022 there has been legislative changes to Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

S.I. 383 of 2023 Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2023 has been introduced which, amends Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the PDR, by inserting 'Projects for the restructuring of rural landholdings'. This now requires consideration.

It is considered that this class of development may be applicable. which includes:

Projects for the restructuring of rural land holdings, undertaken as part of a wider proposed development, and not as an agricultural activity that must comply with the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Agriculture) Regulations 2011, where the length of field boundary to be removed is above 4 kilometres, or where re-contouring is above 5 hectares, or where the area of lands to be restructured by removal of field boundaries is above 50 hectares

It is not considered that the proposed scheme is a project for the restructuring of rural landholdings. The landholdings, while agricultural, are not rural being located within the urban area and settlement boundary of Limerick City and on zoned lands under the LCCDP.

Notwithstanding this, the Commission will note that the proposed development will include the removal of up to 600 m¹ of field boundary (i.e. trees and hedgerows). This is well below the 4 km threshold. Such removal is primarily associated with an east-west hedgerow in the centre of the site and does not result in the amalgamation

¹ This is an overestimate and worst case scenario based on Drawing 21781-2-105 Hedgerow and Tree Loss

or enlargement of existing fields. It is also considered that significant effects on biodiversity are not likely as a result of such works.

There are earthworks required in order to raise the ground level to facilitate the construction of the road, however, it is considered that this would not amount to or intended to be 'recontouring'. In practice the ground levels across this area do not vary significantly and no significant excavation will be required. The requirement to raise the ground level is driven by flood risk.

In respect of the last clause, it is not considered that the proposed development is a project for the restructuring of rural land holdings, undertaken as part of a wider proposed development, where the area of lands to be restructured by removal of field boundaries is above 50 hectares. The overall site is less than 5 ha in total; there is no restructuring occurring – any removal does not result in the amalgamation or enlargement of existing fields.

The observers raise the issue that the road scheme is larger than that identified and the applicant are effectively splitting several road scheme that make up the wider project. I disagree with the observer in this respect and am satisfied that the proposed scheme is clearly identified as an individual project, despite its connectivity to other existing and planned scheme, in the LCCDP which itself was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment.

It is therefore a matter for the applicant to present and apply for planning permission as they see fit. It is considered that the applicant has been explicit and circumspect to assess the individual project in their Environmental Report as well as with other existing and planned schemes cumulatively under each topic of the Environmental Report. The same applies in terms of the in-combination assessment under AA. The management of individual projects in the manner is commonplace and inevitable for state agencies who are undertaking large programmes of works across different locations.

I note the submission of Liam Hickey who is of the view that the proposed development is in breach of the EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. While there is no EIAR, and to be clear, none is required, the applicant has provided an Environmental Report which provides sufficient information in order assess the

environmental impacts completely and robustly outside of the EIA Directive framework.

I have also considered other proposed scheme cumulatively and in the context of 'project splitting' which is raised in submissions, notably by Mr Brennan. The proposed scheme is part of a wider programme under LSMATS and LCCDP which has identified a number of transport improvement schemes for Limerick City including a wider link via Bloodmill Road to Childers Road. These are clearly different projects under a wider programme of works set out in LSMATS and indeed the LCCDP. However, it is considered that the projects in the strategy are not functionally interdependent with each other and the Castletroy Link Project arises from a distinct need and is not integral to any other. It is reasonable that LCCC in seeking to apply a transport strategy would take individual distinct needs and present these to the planning system as required – this is inevitable for organisations undertaking large capital works programmes like local authorities. It is not considered that 'project-splitting' occurs.

The term 'project splitting' is associated with avoidance of EIA requirements. As noted, the proposed scheme is not of development that requires an EIAR, in of itself, and there is no associated works (like hedgerow removal) or ancillary development associated with the proposed development that would result in it requiring an EIA.

The planning application, including the Environmental Report and NIS, have been explicit and circumspect to present and assess the overall programme of works and in particular Planning Reference No. 19546 which provides for the roadway, from the City East Roundabout on Groody Road across the 'Towlerton Development Lands' to the north-western boundary of the lands. The cumulative impacts and in-combination effects has been factored into the assessment for the subject application.

It is not considered that 'project splitting' is occurring.

In conclusion, a mandatory EIA is not required and the direction under ABP-312427-22 remains valid.

11.0 Appropriate Assessment

The applicant has submitted a NIS which is dated January 2025 as part of the particulars supporting the planning application. The documentation is in line with current best practice guidance and provides adequate information to allow a complete examination and identification of any potential significant effects of the development, alone, and in combination with other plans and projects on European sites.

The documentation was prepared by Doherty Environmental Consultants Ltd. on behalf of LCCC, who are scientifically and technically competent to do so and the qualifications and experience of the authors of the report and various appendices associated with it are suitable and relevant. I am satisfied that all survey work has been undertaken and prepared by competent experts also in line with best practice and scientific and technical methods.

The application documentation includes information required in respect of the methodology applied, a description of the existing sites and 'Stage 2' assessment. The scientific assessment to inform AA is presented in Sections 6 of the NIS submitted to the Commission as part of the application.

The conservation objectives of the various Qualifying Interests (QI) features and Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species are listed. Impact pathways are identified and the assessment of likely significant effects which could give rise to adverse effects on site integrity presented. Mitigation measures are presented from Section 7.0 of the NIS under each site heading. An assessment of potential in-combination effects is presented in Section 6.3 of the NIS.

The NIS submitted with the application concluded that, following the application of the detailed mitigation measures, the proposed scheme would not either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, adversely affect any European Site.

The requirements of Article 6(3) as related to AA of a project under Part XAB of the PDA are considered fully. The areas addressed in this assessment includes an AA of the implications of the proposed scheme on the integrity of each European site.

The observations on the proposed development received by the Commission were circulated to the applicant for comment and its response is noted. Regard is had to the said submissions.

The proposed scheme is not directly connected with European Sites and therefore it needs be determined if the development is likely to have significant effects on European site(s). I am satisfied that all possible European Sites that could in anyway be affected have been considered by the applicant. I am also satisfied that all potential impact mechanisms have been considered and appropriately assessed within the NIS document.

The Commission should satisfy itself that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site before consent can be given.

11.1 Receiving Environment

The general receiving environment has been described in Section 4.0 of the NIS. It is not intended to repeat it here. The site of the proposed scheme is not located within any designated areas; however, it is located adjacent to the River Groody (and Peafield Stream) which is a tributary of the River Shannon. I am satisfied that the survey campaign was appropriate in terms of methodology. I do not agree with Mr. Hickey who observes that the surveys and reports are inadequate – no evidence on how or why they may be inadequate is provided by Mr Hickey.

Field surveys were conducted field between November 2019 and September 2024. The River Groody is in the: Shannon (Lower)_060 Waterbody and has a moderate status based on EPA monitoring which occurs upstream of the proposed scheme and is considered to be at risk of not meeting its water quality objectives.

The proposed development site comprises predominantly improved agricultural grassland and disturbed ground habitat. There is also a wetland complex. Several habitats occur, as define dunder Fossit (2000) including drainage ditches (FW4), calcareous spring (FP1) improved agricultural grassland (GA1), dry calcareous and neutral grassland (GS1), wet grassland (GS4), marsh (GM1), reed & large sedge swamp (FS1), wet-willow-alder-ash woodland (WN6), scrub (WS1), hedgerows WL1, spoil & bare ground (ED2).

While passerine species of bird are noted on site, no wetland bird species are present. There is no evidence of snail species and marsh fritillary larvae. Soprano pipistrelle, Common pipistrelle and Leisler's bat species are recorded. Other species on site include fox and common frog. The River Groody supports a small population of breeding Atlantic Salmon and brown trout. No non-native invasive species have been recorded along or adjacent to the proposed road alignment.

Therefore, there is a hydrological connection to the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165) via the Groody River. The distance to it is approximately 2.2 km. The River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (Side Code 004077), which starts at Shannon Bridge in Limerick City, is also located proximity to X km downstream via the River Groody and River Shannon.

11.2 Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1)

In respect of Screening for Appropriate Assessment, An Coimisiún should note that this was completed under ABP-312428-22. An Coimisiún concluded that, on the basis of the information available which is considered adequate to issue a screening determination, it could not be ruled out that the proposed development, either individually and in combination with other plans or projects, would not be likely to have a significant effect on the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165), in view of the Conservation Objectives of the Site and that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and the submission Of a Natura Impact Statement for the proposed development is, therefore, required.

I have reviewed this direction, the receiving environment and relevant European Sites in the ZOI of the development and in the context of habitat loss, degradation, disturbance, displacement and fragmentation and indeed direct injury/mortality. The first test of Article 6(3) is to establish if the proposed scheme could result in likely significant effects to a European site, in which case the development is 'screened in' for further detailed assessment, AA (Stage 2).

On that basis I am satisfied the Commission's direction remains valid and that there is the possibility for significant effects on Lower River Shannon Special Area of Conservation (Site code: 002165), in the absence of mitigation, either arising from the project alone, or in combination with other plans and projects,

It is noted that I have also reconsidered, out of an abundance of caution, the following sites:

- River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (site code 004077),
- Clare Glen SAC (site code 000930),
- Glenomra Wood SAC (site code 001013),
- Glenstal Wood SAC (site code 001432),
- Tory Hill SAC (site code 000439)
- Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains SPA (site code 004165) and
- River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (004077) -

I am satisfied again that the direction remains correct, and they can be screened out given there is no hydrological connection, a material distance and no interaction between the proposed development and these sites. This is considered to be a reasonable determination by the applicant. I note several other sites which are within a nominal distance of 20 km, however, there is an absence of a source-pathway-receptor and there is no physical interaction. While mobile species may be a QI or SCI of said site, said species have limited foraging range and would not interact with the site. Any water quality deterioration beyond the River Shannon would not reasonably be a factor as a result of the marine process including dispersion and dilution and foraging preferences of its SCI bird species in the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (004077) in particular.

Since the publication of the direction by An Coimisiún, there may have been minor design updates and updates to land plans used in the overall assessment of the proposed scheme. However, I am satisfied that the conclusions of the AA Screening direction remain unchanged.

Having regard to the conclusion of the Commission's screening direction, submissions, the nature, size and location of the proposed scheme and its likely direct, indirect and cumulative effects, the source pathway receptor principle and sensitivities of the ecological receptors, I concur with the applicant's screening determination.

In summary, the potential impacts identified would effect the Lower Shannon SAC (Site Code: 00216). Further analysis in the AA (Stage 2) is required to determine the

significance of such impacts to these sites and QIs and to apply any mitigation measures to exclude adverse effects.

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

11.3 Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2)

The following objective assessment of the implications of the proposed scheme on the relevant conservation objectives of the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165) is based on the scientific information provided by the applicant and taking into account submissions on nature conservation. It is based on an examination of all relevant documentation and submissions, analysis and evaluation of potential impacts, findings conclusions. A final determination will be made by the Commission.

This assessment has had regard to relevant guidance including:

- Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) (2021) AA Screening for Development Management: OPR Practice Note PN01
- EC (2021) Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites. Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EC.
- EC (2018) Managing Natura 2000 sites. The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2010) AA of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities
- NPWS (2010) AA under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.

All aspects of the project which could result in significant effects are assessed and mitigation measures designed to avoid or reduce any adverse effects on site integrity are examined and evaluated for effectiveness.

A description of the sites and their Conservation Objectives and QIs/SCIs, including relevant attributes and targets for these sites, are set out in Section 7 Assessment of Potential Effects of the NIS.

The NIS outlines the methodology used for assessing potential impacts on the habitats and species within the European Sites that have the potential to be affected

by the proposed development. It predicts the potential impacts for these sites and their conservation objectives, it suggests mitigation measures, assesses in-combination effects with other plans and projects and it identifies any residual effects on the European sites and their conservation objectives. The NIS was informed by the following studies, surveys, and consultations:-

- Desk top study
- Ecological surveys carried out on various dates).

The report concluded that, taking into account the project design and the implementation of mitigation measures identified in the NIS, the proposed development will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 site. Having reviewed the NIS and the supporting documentation, I am satisfied that it provides adequate information in respect of the baseline conditions, clearly identifies the potential impacts, and uses best scientific information and knowledge to assess any potential impacts. Details of mitigation measures are provided, and they are summarised in Section 7 of the NIS. I am satisfied that the information is sufficient to allow for an appropriate assessment of the proposed development.

11.3.1 Assessment of Sites

The following tables summarise the information considered for the AA and site integrity test. I have taken this information from that provided by the applicant within the NIS. I expand on certain issues further in my report

Table 6: Appropriate Assessment Summary Matrix			
Detailed Conservation Objectives available: https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites			
Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165)			
Summary of Appropriate Assessment			
QI	Conservation Objectives	Potential Adverse Effects	Mitigation Measures
<i>Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time [1110]</i>	Maintain	The site of the proposed scheme is a material distance from this specific marine-based qualifying interest and outside the ZOI. This QI is generally found in the outer or middle of the Shannon Estuary. In the event of a pollution event, I am satisfied that given the relatively confined nature of the proposed scheme, intervening fluvial and marine environment and marine process including dispersion and dilution, there is no likelihood of potential effects on this QI.	Not required.
<i>Coastal lagoons [1150]</i>	Restore		
<i>Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]</i>	Maintain		
<i>Reefs [1170]</i>	Maintain		
<i>Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]</i>	Maintain		
<i>Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]</i>	Maintain		
<i>Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]</i>	Maintain	The site of the proposed scheme is a material distance from this specific marine-based qualifying interest and outside the ZOI. This QI is generally not found east of the Mague Estuary.	Not required.
<i>Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]</i>	Maintain		
<i>Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima) [1330]</i>	Restore		

<i>Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410]</i>	Restore	In the event of a pollution event, I am satisfied that given the relatively confined nature of the proposed scheme, intervening fluvial and marine environment and marine process including dispersion and dilution, there is no likelihood of potential effects on this QI.	
<i>Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) [6410]</i>	Maintain	This QI is not hydrologically connected to the site of the proposed scheme and generally found upstream of Limerick City. There is no likelihood of potential effects on this QI.	Not required.
<i>Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0]</i>	Restore	This QI is not hydrologically connected to the site of the proposed scheme and generally found upstream of Limerick City on the Mulkear River. There is no likelihood of potential effects on this QI.	Not required.
<i>Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</i>	Restore	The site of the proposed scheme is a material distance from this specific freshwater based qualifying interest and outside the ZOI. This QI is restricted to the Cloon sub-river catchment on the northern side of the estuary. There is no likelihood of potential effects on this QI.	Not required.
<i>Estuaries [1130]</i>	Maintain	The potential release of contaminated surface water runoff and/or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or	The applicant will appoint and Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) who will have responsibility for ensuring the implementation and

		operation, has the potential to affect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment of the rivers and estuary. The nearest estuary habitat would be approximately 10 km downstream of the proposed scheme and may be impacted.	supervision of the mitigation measures. Design Mitigation A 2m wide vegetated buffer strip is proposed on either side of the proposed scheme to intercept surface water run-off from the road.
<i>Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]</i>	Maintain	The potential release of contaminated surface water runoff and/or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or operation, has the potential to affect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment of the rivers and estuary. The nearest mudflats and sandflats habitat would be approximately 10 km downstream of the River Shannon and River Groody confluence and may be impacted.	The design of the culvert crossings will be to the standards outlined in TII Guidelines (NRA, 2008a). An Environmental Operating Plan (EOP) will be produced and implemented by the appointed contractor.
<i>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculon fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260]</i>	Maintain	The potential release of contaminated surface water runoff and/or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or operation, has the potential to affect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment of the rivers and estuary.	Water Quality Implementation of best practice guidance, particularly the CIRIA and IFI guidance documents. A Construction & Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and shall

		The habitat is recorded in the Limerick Canal and may be impacted.	include measures for pollution prevention including handling of substances, spill containment and clean up equipment including bunds, spill aprons/kits, drip trays. A Pollution Prevention Plan (PPP) and Emergency Response Plan will be implemented and monitored by the site manager. Measures will be implemented to collect, attenuate, settle and treat surface water runoff prior to discharge from the site (i.e. surface swales, settlement ponds, silt dams and check dams, interceptors). A 25m buffer from watercourses for the storage of all equipment, materials and chemicals Wet concrete operations will be carried out in dry conditions. Standard dust suppression measures will be implemented during periods of dry weather.
<i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) [1095]	Restore	The potential release of contaminated surface water runoff and/or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or operation, has the potential to affect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment of the rivers and estuary.	
<i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]	Maintain		
<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099]	Maintain	The tributaries of the Lower River Shannon, are considered suitable spawning habitat for this species and may be impacted.	
<i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106]	Restore	The potential release of contaminated surface water runoff and/or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or operation, has the potential to affect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment of the rivers and estuary.	
		While no suitable salmon spawning habitat occurs in the vicinity of the project site, there may be impacts further downstream.	
<i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	Restore	The potential release of contaminated surface water runoff and/or an accidental spillage or pollution event into any surface water features during construction, or	

		operation, has the potential to affect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment of the rivers and estuary. Such an event has the potential to affect mobile species like otter that commute, forage and rely on water quality in the relevant watercourses. There is potential for a reduction in air quality within the immediate vicinity of the construction works may occur as a consequence of dust deposition associated with construction activities. There is also a potential impact based on the predicted levels of noise, vibration lighting, visual disturbance and human activity associated with the proposed scheme and taking into account the sensitivity of the otter species to disturbance effects. It is noted that no evidence of otter activity was recorded along the proposed road alignment or along the drainage ditches that flow through or adjacent to the project site or along the River Groody generally.	Measures will be Implemented during the Provision of the Culverts including plant inspections, defined/fenced work areas. All works associated with the instream works will be undertaken in accordance with the Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) Guidelines on the Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and Adjacent to Waters. Instream works will be timed to be completed during the open season for instream works. The surface water management system which includes a hydro carbon interceptor is designed to ensure no untreated surface water for the proposed scheme enters water courses during construction.
Overall Conclusion: Integrity test			

The applicant determined that following the implementation of mitigation, the construction and operation of this proposed scheme alone or in combination with other plans and projects will not adversely affect the integrity of these European sites.

Based on the information provided, I am satisfied that adverse effects can be excluded. Adverse effects from water contamination and sediment release can be effectively prevented by mitigation measures ensuring the protection of the watercourses and existing surface water pipes. No increase in existing runoff rates will occur and appropriate treatment will ensure runoff quality.

The containment of dust, which will not impact all qualifying interest of otter and will occur in a limited area adjoining works areas, compounds and haul routes, can also be controlled via mitigation measures to avoid or adequately contain dust.

The proposed scheme would not delay or prevent the attainment of the Conservation objectives of the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165).

Based on the information submitted, surveys carried out analysis provided I am satisfied that no uncertainty remains.

11.3.2 Potential for Adverse Effects

Having reviewed the development proposal I submit that the main aspects that could adversely affect the conservation objectives of the above-mentioned European Sites include:

- Impacts as a result of reduction of water quality through construction or operational related pollution events (e.g. chemicals, oil/fuel, cementitious materials etc.) or sediments/silt runoff.
- Construction in the vicinity of could result in disturbance to and potentially displacement - this may arise from noise, vibration, lighting, air, dust and/or any form human activity.
- Impacts as a result of deteriorated air quality and dust deposition

The associated effects of a reduction of surface water quality, albeit unlikely, could potentially extend distance downstream of the location of the accidental pollution event or the discharge. The potential changes to water quality from pollution and sedimentation of watercourses and given the proximity of the River Shannon, during the construction phase could potentially result in adverse effects on the downstream habitat degradation/effects on QI species and habitat degradation.

Based on the information provided and mitigation measures included in relation to protection of water during the construction period, adverse effects from water contamination and sediment release can be effectively prevented by mitigation measures ensuring the protection of the relevant watercourses and pipe networks which drain into the River Shannon.

In terms of the operational phase there will be no net increase in existing runoff rates and appropriate treatment will ensure runoff quality. An attenuation pond is to be provided to serve the proposed scheme. There will be appropriate treatment prior to discharge.

In addition to the forgoing, I also consider it important to examine the potential for impacts to arise in relation to noise and vibration disturbance arising from construction works and in relation to Air Quality deterioration arising from both construction works and the operational phase of the development.

Potential Adverse effects in relation to noise disturbance and vibration have been examined and are not considered to be likely to give rise to significant adverse effect due to the distance of Natura 2000 sites and known ex-situ sites from the proposed works. Noise levels arising from construction would attenuate to existing background noise levels at that distance.

As construction works is undertaken during normal daylight working hours, impacts to species like otter, who are nocturnal in habit is unlikely. I am satisfied that otter can (in many circumstances) tolerate high levels of human presence and disturbance, displacement of otter from their habitat is extremely unlikely to affect the local otter population. As such no disturbance impacts arising from noise and vibration are considered likely.

In addition to the foregoing, consideration was given to the potential for adverse effects to occur in relation to habitat degradation as a result of air quality. I note that the unmitigated ZOI for air quality effects arising from the proposed scheme has the potential to extend 50m from the Proposed scheme boundary, and 500m from construction compounds during the construction phase, and up to 200m the proposed scheme boundary during the operational phase. I am satisfied that the Standard dust suppression measures that will be implemented during periods of dry weather is appropriate to mitigate adverse effects.

The proposed scheme has no potential for impacts as a result of habitat loss / fragmentation given the minimal land take for the proposed development relative to the abundance of alternative suitable habitat. The proposed development lies down gradient of the main waterbody and will not influence ground water conditions. Due to their absence on site, there is no potential for invasive species to spread or be introduced, during construction and/or routine maintenance / management works, to terrestrial habitat areas in European sites downstream. I am satisfied that there is no potential for direct Injury/mortality of any species.

11.3.3 In Combination Assessment

Chapter 6.3 of the NIS addresses the potential for in combination effects to arise. The potential is considered in the context of other permitted and planned development in the area as well as the existing/approved plans and programmes.

The primary concern I would raise in an in combination context would be any effects from water contamination and sediment release from other plans and projects in the water catchments and other catchments that are connected to the Shannon Estuary. Were there a cumulation of events this would result could adversely effect the water quality and in turn the QIs that rely on it.

This being said, plans are projects, as identified by the applicant and following my own consideration of the planning history for the area, would have and/or will be subject to the relevant regulatory process in order to receive consent or permission. The city and county development plans have clear policies and objectives for the protection of water quality and European sites. It should be noted that the relevant development plan was itself subject to AA.

'It is accepted that the NIS was written at a point in time and proposals come and go in the planning system while any proposed development is being assessed by the Commission. I have reviewed the relevant planning registers in June 2025 to ensure no other projects arose. I note the submission of the local authorities also who identify certain projects. These are all noted and considered in the assessment.

It is accepted that if construction works for other projects may coincide with the proposed development there would be an increased likelihood of a pollution event. These construction impacts are well understood and readily mitigated, as demonstrated by the applicant. In any case construction periods are generally temporary and often short-term and with appropriate management provisions being made through the relevant CEMPs which will be updated throughout construction will ensure avoidance of effects.

I note overlap between construction works and the development of residential schemes on these lands may occur. I submit that the substantive in combination impacts which could potentially arise would be associated with the construction periods of the projects should they overlap or occur sequentially. There would be potential for impacts on water quality and also potential for in combination effects on air quality arising from construction dust in addition to increased noise and vibration which would impact species and habitats where projects overlap or are in the vicinity of one another. The mitigation measures including CEMPs should result in the

impacts being avoided in the context of European sites. There is also a material distance between these residential schemes and European sites in any case.

Having regard to the nature and extent of the projects the likely in combination effects arising and to the mitigation measures proposed including CEMP, , I accept the conclusions that there would be no significant in combination effects. I am satisfied that a robust and detailed assessment of the potential for in combination effects to arise has been carried out.

11.3.4 Mitigation Measures and Monitoring

A summary of mitigation measures is presented in the table above. Full details are provided in the NIS. I consider that all measures proposed are implementable and will be effective in their stated aims. Furthermore, where deemed necessary a suitably experienced and qualified ecologist will be employed by the appointed contractor. The ecologist will advise the appointed contractor on ecological matters during construction, communicate all findings in a timely manner to the LCCC and statutory authorities, acquire any licences / consents required to conduct the work, and supervise and direct the ecological measures associated with the proposed scheme.

11.4 Appropriate Assessment Conclusion: Integrity Test

In screening the need for AA, it was determined that the proposed scheme, which intends to development the Castletroy Link Road had the potential to result in significant effects on Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165), and that AA was required in view of the conservation objectives of that site.

Following a detailed examination and evaluation of the NIS all associated material submitted with the application as relevant to the AA process and taking into account submissions of third parties, I am satisfied that based on the design of the proposed scheme, combined with the proposed mitigation measures, adverse effects on the integrity of the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165) can be excluded with confidence in view of the conservation objectives of those sites.

This conclusion is based on the following:

- A detailed assessment of all aspects of the proposed scheme that could result in significant effects or adverse effects on European Sites within a ZOI of the development site.
- Consideration of the conservation objectives and conservation status of QI habitats and species.
- A full assessment of risks to QI habitats and species
- The proposed scheme site has been scientifically verified as not being of significance to or an area favoured by SCI bird species at any stage of the wintering or summer seasons.
- Application of mitigation measures designed to avoid adverse effects on site integrity and likely effectiveness of same.

The proposed scheme would not undermine the favourable conservation condition of any QI feature or delay the attainment of favourable conservation condition for any QI habitats and species for the Lower River Shannon SAC (Site Code: 002165).

12.0 Recommendation

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

13.0 Reasons and Considerations

In performing its functions in relation to the making of its decision, the Commission had regard to:

- (a) Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive) and Directive 79/409/EEC as amended by 2009/147/EC (Birds Directive) which set the requirements for Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora throughout the European Union
- (b) Directive 2000/60/EC, the Water Framework Directive and the requirement to exercise its functions in a manner which is consistent with the provisions of the Directive, and which achieves or promotes compliance with the requirements of the Directive.
- (c) The relevant provisions of EU Directive 2014/52/EU amending Directive 2011/92/EU (EIA Directive) on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment,
- (d) Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended by Section 17 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, and the requirement to, in so far as practicable, perform its functions in a manner (consistent with Climate Action Plan 2024 and Climate Action Plan 2025 and the national long term climate action strategy, national adaptation framework and approved sectoral adaptation plans set out in those Plans and in furtherance of the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the State).

The Commission also had regard to the following in coming to its decision:

- (e) National planning and related policy, including:
 - the National Development Plan 2021-2030,
 - Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework, as revised April 2025,
 - the Department of Transport National Sustainable Mobility Policy, 2022,
- (f) Regional level policy, including:
 - Regional Spatial Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES)
 - Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS) 2040
- (g) local planning policy, including:
 - Limerick City and County Development Plan 2022-2028 and Objective TR O43 Upgrade works/New Road Schemes and zoning objectives for 'New

Residential', 'Education and Community Infrastructure' and most particularly 'Groody Valley Wedge'

- Limerick Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030
- (h) the nature, scale extent and design of the proposed development as set out in the planning application and the characteristics and pattern of development of the area,
- (i) the entirety of the documentation submitted by the Limerick City and County Council in support of the proposed scheme, including the Environmental Report and the Natura Impact Statement, the range of mitigation and monitoring measures proposed and in particular to robust response to submissions made in July 2025
- (j) the submissions made to An Coimisiún Pleanála in connection with the planning application, under the initial statutory consultation in May 2025 and a subsequent submission period in August 2025,
- (k) the likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which it is proposed to carry out the proposed scheme and the likely significant effects of the proposed development on European Sites, and
- (l) the report and recommendation of the Inspector, including the examination, analysis and evaluation undertaken in relation to planning and sustainable development, appropriate assessment and, water framework directive assessment and the compulsory acquisition.

Proper Planning and Sustainable Development

It is considered that the proposed scheme would accord with national, regional and local planning and that it is acceptable in respect of its likely effects on the environment and its likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment: Stage 1 :

The Commission agreed with and adopted the screening assessment and conclusion carried out in the Inspector's report that the *Lower River Shannon SAC* (Site Code: 002165) is the only European Site in respect of which the proposed development has the potential to have a significant effect.

Appropriate Assessment: Stage 2:

The Commission considered the Natura Impact Statement and associated documentation submitted with the application for approval, the mitigation measures contained therein, the submission on file, and the Inspector's assessment. The Commission completed an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposed development for the affected European Site, namely the *Lower River Shannon SAC* (Site Code: 002165) in view of those Sites' conservation objectives. The Commission considered that the information before it was adequate to allow the carrying out of an appropriate assessment.

In completing the appropriate assessment, the Commission considered, in particular, the following:

- i. the likely direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposed development both individually or in combination with other plans or projects,
- ii. the mitigation measures which are included as part of the current proposal, and
- iii. the conservation objectives for the European Sites.

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

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

Conditions

1. The proposed scheme shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where any mitigation measures or any conditions of approval require further details to be prepared by or on behalf of the local authority, these details shall be placed on the file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. All mitigation, environmental commitments and monitoring measures identified in the Natura Impact Statement shall be implemented in full as part of the proposed scheme.

Reason: To protect the integrity of European Sites.

3. All mitigation, environmental commitments and monitoring measures identified in the Environmental Report, including the Biodiversity Management Plan, Tree Survey Report and Archaeological & Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment Report shall be implemented in full as part of the proposed scheme. Prior to the commencement of development, details of a time schedule for implementation of mitigation measures and associated monitoring shall be prepared by the local authority and placed on file and retained as part of the public record.

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

4. Prior to the commencement of development a finalised Construction Environmental Management Plan, including a Construction Traffic Management Plan, shall be prepared. The plan shall incorporate all mitigation measures as set out in the Environmental Report, the Natura Impact Statement and the conditions set out herein and shall include details of

compliance and details and schedules of monitoring supervision and reporting to the relevant statutory agencies. In finalising the Construction Environmental Management Plan the local authority shall liaise with Office of Public Works. These documents shall be placed on file and retained as part of the public record.

Reason: To protect amenities, public health and safety.

5. The following nature conservation requirements shall be complied with:
- (a) The works shall be carried out in compliance with the Inland Fisheries Ireland document “Guidelines on protection of fisheries during construction works in and adjacent to waters.”
 - (b) No in-stream works shall be undertaken without prior consultation with Inland Fisheries Ireland, and the works shall only be undertaken between October and June (inclusive).
 - (c) No vegetation removal shall take place during the period 1st March to 31st August (inclusive).
 - (d) A pre-construction mammal and bird survey by a suitably qualified ecologist shall be carried out before works commence.
 - (e) A pre-construction bat survey shall be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist during the active bat season.
 - (f) Any destruction of bat roosting sites or relocation of bat species shall be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist under a Derogation Licence granted by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
 - (g) All plant and machinery used during the works should be thoroughly cleaned and washed before delivery to the site to prevent the spread of hazardous invasive species and pathogens.

Reason: In the interest of biodiversity and nature conservation.

6. A suitably qualified ecologist shall be retained by the local authority to oversee the site set up and construction of the proposed development and implementation of mitigation measures relating to ecology set out in Natura Impact Statement and Environmental Report. The ecologist shall be present

during site construction works. Upon completion of works, an ecological report of the site works shall be prepared by the appointed ecologist to be kept on file as part of the public record.

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

7. Drainage arrangements, including the attenuation and disposal of surface water, and flood risk management shall comply with the requirements of Uisce Éireann and the Office of Public Works for such works and services as appropriate.

Reason: In the interest of public health and to ensure a proper standard of development

8. Prior to the commencement of development, the local authority shall submit the relevant information, as required, to Uisce Éireann in order to ensure any diversion/replacement/build over/under works are in compliance with Uisce Éireann Standards and Code of Practices.

Reason: In the interest of public health and to ensure a proper standard of development

9. The site shall be landscaped in accordance with the comprehensive scheme of landscaping submitted. Final details of which shall be placed on the file and retained as part of the public record including details on:
 - a. Existing trees, hedgerows, shrubs, walls, specifying which are proposed for retention.
 - b. The measures to be put in place for the protection of these landscape features during the construction period. Tree protection measures for all existing trees shall be put in place prior to the commencement of development or phases of development.
 - c. The species, variety, number, size and, details and locations of all proposed trees and shrubs and walls prior to implementation.

- d. Hard landscaping works, specifying surfacing materials, street furniture, signage and finished levels.
- e. A timescale for implementation

All planting shall be adequately protected from damage until established. Any plants which die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased, within a period of five years from the completion of the development shall be replaced within the next planting season with others of similar size and species.

Reason: In the interest of residential and visual amenity.

10. (a) The local authority shall also employ the services of an appropriately qualified arboriculturist and landscape architect for the full duration of the proposed works to ensure measures related to tree and landscaping works are implemented appropriately.
- (b) Trees to be felled shall be examined prior to felling and demolition to determine the presence of bat roosts. Any works shall be in accordance with the TII Guidelines for the Treatment of Bats during the construction of National Road Schemes.

Reason: In the interest of environmental and wildlife protection.

11. No ground clearance shall be undertaken, and no vegetation shall be cleared during the bird breeding season from the 1st day of March to 31st day of August.

Reason: In the interest of local biodiversity.

Professional Declaration

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

Tomás Bradley,

Senior Planning Inspector

30th September 2025