



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-322336-25

Development

The development will consist of the deepening of 19 ha. of the existing permitted quarry extraction area (Plan File Ref. No. 20/77: ABP-308748-20 & Plan File Ref. No. PL16.SU0132: QD16.QD0009). The applicant is seeking a 25-year permission. This planning application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report.

Location

Cregaree, Cong, Co. Mayo.

Planning Authority

Mayo County Council

Planning Authority Reg. Ref.

2560055

Applicant(s)

McGraths Limestone Works Limited

Type of Application

Permission

Planning Authority Decision

Grant subject to conditions

Type of Appeal

Third Party

Appellant(s)

Sinead O'Brien

Observer(s)

None

Date of Site Inspection

22nd August 2025

Inspector

Ciara McGuinness

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1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site comprises part of McGraths Limestone Quarry, which is located c. 500m northwest of the village of Cong, Co. Mayo. A small southern portion of the existing quarry, including the entrance, is located in Co. Galway. However, the appeal site is located in the north of the quarry holding (c. 62.45 hectares) and is entirely within Co. Mayo. The appeal site has a stated area of 19 ha and is c. 1km from the village of Cong.
- 1.2. The historical and proposed development of the overall quarry lands can be explained by the consideration of the lands in 3 sections. The original quarry area (c. 43.47 ha, referred to as 'Area A' in the application documents) at the southern end of the holding benefits from an established pre-1963 use. An adjacent area (c.10.58 ha, referred to as 'Area B' in the application documents) to the north of the original quarry was granted substitute consent (ABP Ref. SU16.SU0132) and permission to further develop the quarry under a Section 37L permission (ABP Ref. QD16.QD0009) by the Commission in 2017. The remaining area of the site, referred to as 'Area C' (c. 8.4 hectares), located in the northeast corner of the overall holding, has been granted permission for the extraction of material to 5mOD under a Section 34 application (PA reg Ref 20/77/ ABP 308748-20). It is surrounded by 'Area B' to the south, north and west. The proposed development site the subject of this application comprises Area B and Area C combined.
- 1.3. The immediate surrounding area is generally of rural character and mainly consists of agricultural use and one-off rural housing. The wider landscape is dominated by Lough Mask (c. 3km to the northwest) and Lough Corrib (c. 2km to the south). The two lakes are connected by the Cong Canal, which runs along the eastern boundary of the quarry, c. 100m from the proposed extraction area.
- 1.4. Access to the existing quarry is off the R345 Regional Road to the south, which runs between Cong and Clonbur. The entrance / exit area includes offices, a workshop, garage, wheelwash, weighbridge, parking and other ancillary facilities. The original quarry area (Area A) is now host to a variety of processing and manufacturing plant and facilities including a lime plant, processing area, batching plant, asphalt plant and block yard. It also includes a quarry sump, an attenuation sump, and a settlement lagoon in the southeast corner.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposed development involves the deepening of 19ha of the existing permitted quarry extraction area, comprising Area B and C as described above, from 5 mOD to -12 mOD, haulage of material to existing fixed plant for processing, all associated ancillary facilities/works including landscaping and restoration of the site. The total recoverable reserve of limestone from within the proposed extraction area (5 m OD to -12 m OD) has been calculated as c. 7 million tonnes. It is stated that the proposed development will not result in an increased extraction rate, and the applicant is seeking a 25-year permission. Whilst the proposed works relate to the extraction area only, a description of the associated activities in the existing quarry also follows in the interest of completeness.
- 2.2. Blasting will be used at pre-determined times at the application site to fragment the material to a manageable size. The recovered rock from the active face will be then processed in a similar manner to that already occurring on site using existing site infrastructure and plant. The blasted rock will be crushed and screened and conveyed to stockpiles for subsequent loading to trucks by loading shovels.
- 2.3. The excavated material will be used in the ongoing on-site manufacture of various products including graded aggregates, concrete products, asphalt products, stone and agricultural products. Products are transported to the market in heavy and light good vehicles via the R345 and the wider road network.
- 2.4. Surface water as a result of precipitation at the site will be directed to a sump located at the lowest point of the site, and then onwards to an attenuation sump in the existing quarry floor. Water will be retained here before being pumped to an existing settlement lagoon which facilitates the settling of suspended solids. Water is discharged from the lagoon via a culvert to the Cong Canal in line with a discharge licence granted by Galway County Council in December 2019 (Ref. No. W391/05 R1).
- 2.5. A Landscape & Restoration Plan is included which outlines that the site will be restored to a natural habitat following cessation of extraction operations. At the end of its lifetime, all plant and machinery will be removed, and site boundaries will be secured. Grass/shrub/scrub will be allowed recolonise and the water level will be allowed to return to its natural level.

2.6. The proposed development will provide continued employment of up to 90 no. people directly on-site, in addition to a number of indirect employees such as crushing contractors, HGV drivers, maintenance contractors, local suppliers, etc.

2.7. The application is accompanied by the following;

- Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR)
- Appropriate Assessment Screening Report
- Planning Statement
- Traffic and Transport Assessment

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

Mayo County Council issued notification of the decision to grant permission, subject to 20 no. conditions. The notable conditions of the decision can be summarised as follows:

- Condition 3 requires all mitigation measures in the EIAR to be carried out.
- Condition 4 states that the depth of excavation shall be limited to ‘-12 metres above Ordnance Datum’ and a benchmark established on site as point of reference from which all levels shall be taken.
- Condition 5 sets out the hours of operation.
- Condition 6 requires the developer to keep a record of ‘all materials extracted from the site and produced on the overall site’.
- Conditions 7, 8, 9 and 10 set out procedures and limitations for blasting.
- Condition 11 sets out limits for noise during the operational phase.
- Condition 12 sets out procedures and limits relating to dust emissions.
- Condition 18 states that should the need arise a revised Environmental Monitoring Plan shall be agreed with the Mayo County Council.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

The Planner's Report (dated 21/03/2025) notes that the existing rock quarry is long established in Cong and the proposed development does not expand the sites area. The Planner is satisfied that the proposed development will not result in a significant intensification of on-site activity. Existing traffic volumes associated with previous grants of permission will not be exceeded. Machinery and plant will be retained on site to facilitate the proposed development. The Planning Authority is satisfied with the environmental management system operating within the site. The Planning Authority has no objection to the request for a 25-year permission. It is considered that the submitted EIAR is 'adequate'. The main issues, potential impact and proposed mitigation measures are set out in tabular form in the Planner's Report. It is concluded that having regard to planning history on the landholding, the Environmental Impact Assessment Report submitted with the application, the technical reports received and having considered the likely significant effects and their interaction on the environment as defined in Section 171A of the Planning & Development Acts, that the proposed development would not be likely to have significant adverse effects on the environment.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

Environmental (Flood Risk) – No concerns raised.

Environment (General) – Recommends granting of permission subject to conditions consistent with those attached to PA Reg Ref 20/77.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

An Taisce – It is requested that the development be assessed against Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive.

3.4. Third Party Observations

A total of 3 no. third party submissions were received in relation to the application. The issues raised are similar to those raised in the appeal and primarily relate to the impact on amenity as a result of dust, noise and vibration.

4.0 Planning History

An examination of the planning authority reports and An Coimisiún Pleanála records has established an acceptance that 'Area A' benefits from a pre-1963 authorisation.

The following planning history is relevant to the appeal:

P.A. Ref. 73/1614 – Permission granted by MCC to open the quarry and construct a crushing and block making plant.

P.A. Ref. 91/546 – Permission granted for erection of workshop for storing vehicles.

P.A. Ref. 06/2264 – Permission granted (24th October 2006) for extension to offices and on-site wastewater treatment plant.

P.A. Ref. Q18 – Conditions imposed by MCC in March 2007 on current and future quarrying operations in accordance with the quarry registration process under section 261 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Notable conditions include the following:

- No. 3 - Final quarry floor level to be agreed.
- No. 5 - Records of all extracted materials to be kept.
- No.'s 7 to 12 – Traffic management and safety provisions.
- No.'s 13 to 18 – Control of noise, blasting and dust.
- No.'s 19 to 25 – Control of water pollution.
- No.'s 26 to 27 – Environmental monitoring requirements.
- No.' 29 to 30 – Landscaping and restoration of the site.

P.A. Ref. 09/667 - Permission granted (27th October 2009) for construction of ESB substation.

ABP Ref. QV16.QV0288 - Under section 261A of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Commission confirmed on 16th December 2013 that substitute consent was required for 'Area B', including the submission of a remedial EIS and a remedial NIS.

P.A. Ref. 16/200 – Permission granted (20th July 2016) for erection of an asphalt mixing plant.

ABP Ref. SU16.SU0132 – Substitute consent granted (8th December 2017) for ‘Area B’ (10.58 ha) subject to conditions including requirements for the restoration of the quarry unless a permission for further development is granted.

ABP Ref. QD16.QD0009 – Under section 37L of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), permission was granted (8th December 2017) for the further development of ‘Area B’ of the quarry (10.58ha), subject to conditions. Notable conditions include the following:

- No. 1 - Requires implementation of EIS and NIS mitigation measures.
- No. 2 - Limits the duration to a period of 25 years.
- No. 3 - Limits the permission to Stage 1 only, an extraction depth of 5m OD. (due to challenging configuration of ‘Area B’)
- No.’s 5 to 8 – Controls relating to blasting, vibration, noise and dust.
- No. 9 - An Environmental Monitoring System (EMS) shall be agreed.
- No. 10 - Restoration proposals to be agreed.
- No. 12 - Section 48 Development Contribution to be agreed.
- No. 13 - Section 48 (2)(c) special Development Contribution to be agreed in respect of road improvements to R345 Regional Road.

P.A. Ref. 18/724 – Permission granted (17th December 2018) for extension to workshop/garage and erection of machinery storage shed.

P.A. Ref. 20/77 ABP Ref 308748-20 – Permission granted (21st May 2021) for a 25-year permission for a quarry development over a total area of 8.4 hectares (Area C) comprising the removal of vegetation and overburden, extraction of rock by blasting and rock breaking means, landscaping and restoration of site, all associated ancillary facilities/works.

In addition to the above, it is noted that surface water from the quarry is discharged via a culvert to the Cong Canal in line with a discharge licence granted by Galway County Council in December 2019 (Ref. No. W391/05 R1). It is stated that the asphalt plant operates under an air emissions license granted by Mayo County Council.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. National Planning Policy

5.1.1. National Planning Framework First Revision April 2025

The NPF has been revised and updated to take account of changes that have occurred since it was published in 2018. The latest research and modelling by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), forecasts substantial population growth over the next decade. The NPF now plans for a population of between 6.1 to 6.3 million people by 2040, and for approximately 50,000 units per annum over that period, to meet additional population growth over and above the original 2018 NPF projections.

The NPF states (page 130) that aggregates and minerals extractive industries are important for the supply of aggregates and construction materials and minerals to a variety of sectors, for both domestic requirements and for export. The planning process will play a key role in realising the potential of the extractive industries sector by identifying and protecting important reserves of aggregates and minerals from development that might prejudice their utilisation. Aggregates and minerals extraction will continue to be enabled where this is compatible with the protection of the environment in terms of air and water quality, natural and cultural heritage, the quality of life of residents in the vicinity, and provides for appropriate site rehabilitation.

National Policy Objective 30 seeks to *‘Facilitate the development of the rural economy, in a manner consistent with the national climate objective, through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting biodiversity and the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism’.*

5.1.2. National Development Plan Review 2025

The updated National Development Plan (NDP) sets out increased levels of investment which will underpin the ambitions of the revised NPF. The NDP 2021–

2030 estimated that an annual average of approximately 47,000 direct and 33,000 indirect construction jobs would be sustained by planned investment. With the additional funding now allocated as part of this updated NDP, there will be a further increase in demand for construction workers to deliver the expanded pipeline of projects.

5.1.3. **Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021**

This Act amends the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. It sets out the national objective of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in the period up to 2050. The Act pursues a move to a climate resilient and climate neutral economy by 2050. An Coimisiún Pleanála is a relevant body for the purposes of the Climate Act. As a result, the obligation of the Commission is to make all decisions in a manner that is consistent with the Climate Act.

5.1.4. **Climate Action Plan, 2025**

The Climate Action Plan was first published in June 2019 by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25) is the third annual update under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. Climate Action Plan 2025 builds upon last year's Plan (2024) by refining and updating the measures and actions required to deliver the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings and it should be read in conjunction with Climate Action Plan 2024. Targets for the industrial sector include reducing embodied carbon in construction materials by at least 30% and enhancing energy efficiency to reduce fossil fuel demand by 10% by 2030.

5.1.5. **European Union Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC (WFD)**

The WFD was adopted in 2000 as a single piece of legislation covering rivers, lakes, groundwater and transitional (estuarine) and coastal waters and includes heavily modified and artificial waterbodies. The overarching aim of the WFD is to prevent further deterioration of and to protect, enhance and restore the status of all bodies of water with the aim of achieving at least 'good' ecological status by 2015 (or where certain derogations have been justified to 2021 or 2027).

5.1.6. **Quarries and Ancillary Activities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2004**

The Guidelines were issued to offer guidance to planning authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála for the quarrying industry through the Development Plan and determining planning applications for quarrying and ancillary activities and for the implementation of Section 261 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000. These guidelines note the economic importance of quarries and the demand for aggregates arising from the needs of the construction industry with particular reference to house building and infrastructure provision. It is further noted that aggregates can only be worked where they occur and that many pits and quarries tend to be located within 25km of urban areas where most construction takes place.

5.1.7. **Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry, Environmental Protection Agency, 2006**

The guidelines provide a summary of environmental management practices for quarries and ancillary facilities. Key environmental management issues have been identified and addressed. Under each of the key environmental issues, good environmental practice is summarised together with recommendations for the use of environmental management systems (EMSs), and emission limit values (ELVs), where appropriate.

5.2. **Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028**

The Mayo County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 (CDP) addresses extractive industries in the following policies and objectives;

EDP 27 - To support adequate supplies of aggregate resources to meet the future growth needs of the county and the wider region where there is a proven need for a certain mineral/aggregate and to exercise appropriate control, while addressing key environmental, traffic and social impacts.

EDP 28 - To support the development of aggregate resources (stone and sand/gravel deposits) in a manner which minimises effects on the environment and having regard to the principles of sustainability.

EDO 62 - To ensure that the development of aggregate resources (stone and sand/gravel deposits) is carried out in a manner which minimises effects on the environment, including the Natura 2000 network and its sustaining habitats (including water dependent habitats and species), amenities, infrastructure and the community,

and can demonstrate environmental enhancement through habitat management plans/ecological restoration.

EDO 63 - Have regard to the Quarry and Ancillary Activities Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities DoEHLG (April 2004) and to the Geological Survey of Ireland's Geological Heritage Guidelines for Extractive Industries, or any new or subsequent quarry guidance.

Section 10.2 of the CDP's development management volume states that the location of extractive industries is dictated by the availability of the resource and hence each application will be determined on its own merit and that all proposals must accord with Quarries and Ancillary Activities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoEHLG) 2004.

The following criteria shall be considered when determining a planning application for extractive development, including for the proposed expansion/intensification of existing operations:

- The extent of land ownership
- The nature of all deposits
- The methods of excavation and machinery
- The quantification of production in a given time
- Methods to reduce environmental impact
- The impact on the adjoining road networks
- Landscaping and screening proposals.

Section 13.8 of the CDP's development management volume sets out guidance for planning applications for extractive industries under topical headings including, extracted material, site development, working method, structures and fixed plant, process, transport, landscaping, water demand, dust, use of chemicals, vibration, aqueous discharge and rehabilitation.

5.3. Natural Heritage Designations

The nearest Natura 2000 sites are Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (c. 1.4km to the

west), Lough Mask SPA (c. 2.3 km to the northwest), and Lough Corrib SAC & SPA (c. 1.7km to the south). There are several other Natura 2000 sites within a surrounding 15km radius of the site.

5.4. **EIA Screening**

An EIAR has been submitted with the application. The proposed development relates to the deepening of an existing quarry within an application area of c.19 ha. Chapter 2 of the EIAR sets out that the deepening area of the quarry is greater than the areas specified in Class 13 (a) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. On this basis the extraction area of the quarry exceeds the area stated under Part 2 and an EIAR is required. Refer also to Section 9.1 below for further commentary.

6.0 **The Appeal**

6.1. **Grounds of Appeal**

The appeal is a third-party appeal by Sinead O'Brien against Mayo County Council's decision to grant permission. The grounds of appeal are summarised as follows;

- People are unaware of the application, which was lodged during power and communications outages, hence so few objections were made.
- The EIAR does not take account of the health and safety of surrounding households in the area, particularly in the context of fine dust exposure, radon and other harmful substances.
- In relation to dust management, reliance on rainfall is not sufficient. Reliance on measures such as tree planting to limit the spread of dust is also inadequate. The use of a wheel wash facility is a token measure.
- The wording of conditions 18 requires that '*should the need arise during the lifetime of this permission, the developer shall obtain the agreement of Mayo County Council for a revised Environmental Monitoring Plan*'. The need of environmental monitoring is required and should be implemented from the offset.

- Environmental monitoring should be carried out by an independent organisation.
- The monitoring locations should extend beyond the boundary of the quarry particularly for airborne dust and vibration levels.
- The community should have regular access to the data and environmental assessments that are carried out.
- The conclusion that the proposed development will have no impact on traffic in the village is queried. Mayo County Council are undertaking a public consultation process to develop plans for a relief road in Cong.
- The EIAR notes that there is a risk of air pollution from vehicles and from dust being spread by transport. Cong Primary School is mentioned as a receptor, however, there does not appear to be any data collection carried out at the school to study air quality or radon levels in the school currently.
- No activity should take place on a Saturday. The condition that the quarry is permitted to operate on a Saturday is unreasonable.
- The 25-year permission is contrary to Ireland's legal obligation and commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and goes against the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.

6.2. Applicant Response

The applicant's response can be summarised as follows:

- The application was lodged on 31st January 2025. Storm Eowyn occurred on the 24th January 2025. There were some local power outages, but these were for a limited duration and did not extend beyond a few weeks.
- A public notice was erected outside the quarry entrance and notice was placed in the local newspaper.
- Concerns regarding fine dust exposure, radon and health impacts on nearby households have been addressed in the Population and Human Health chapter of the submitted EIAR. Mitigation measures have been established including dust suppression techniques and regular monitoring.

- Studies have shown that radon disperses quickly in outdoor environment and outdoor concentrations are not considered to pose a significant health risk.
- The proposal does not expand the quarry footprint or increase its production capacity. The application relates solely to deepening part of the existing quarry already approved for extraction.
- Dust suppression is addressed in the Air Quality Chapter of the EIAR. The quarry employs dust control methods including use of water sprays, wheel washes and regular monitoring of dust levels at the site boundary.
- Monitoring results demonstrate dust emissions are well within acceptable limits and any potential impacts on surrounding properties are limited.
- As the proposed development involves deepening of an existing quarry void, the potential for dust dispersion beyond the site will decrease due to natural enclosure and increased shielding from the surrounding landform.
- The conditions of the Section 4 License for discharge specify continuous monitoring for key parameters including PH, temperature and turbidity.
- The quarry has a well-established monitoring programme for dust, air quality and groundwater.
- There is no increased traffic volumes associated with the application. Concerns regarding a new road are unrelated to the quarry. The new road is part of local infrastructure planning aimed at addressing general traffic concerns in Cong.
- The quarry operates between 07:00 and 18:00 Monday to Saturday. The hours for operational activity and blasting are strictly controlled and are in accordance with industry guidelines and local authority requirements.
- The applicant disagrees with the assertion that the proposed development contradicts the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. Limestone and aggregates are essential materials for building infrastructure, including roads, building, and utilities which are necessary to meet Ireland's climate and development goals. The use of recycled materials as a substitute for limestone aggregates is not currently feasible on the scale

required for national infrastructure projects as detailed in the alternatives chapter.

6.3. Planning Authority Response

None.

6.4. Observations

None.

7.0 Assessment

7.1. Having regard to the requirements of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, the assessment of the proposed development is divided into three parts to include the planning assessment (section 8) environmental impact assessment (section 9) and appropriate assessment (section 10). Invariably there is a significant overlap in the assessments, and to avoid undue repetition where issues arise, they are addressed in the environmental impact assessment (EIA) and appropriate assessment (AA) sections.

8.0 Planning Assessment

8.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including the submissions received in relation to the appeal, and inspected the site, and having regard to relevant local/regional/national policies and guidance, I consider that the main planning issues in this appeal are as follows;

- Principle of development
- Hours of Operation
- Environmental Monitoring
- Procedural Issues

8.2. Principle of Development

- 8.2.1. I note that national policy, including NPO 30 of the NPF, seeks to facilitate the development of the rural economy, including a sustainable and economically efficient extractive industry sector. The Quarries and Ancillary Activities Guidelines for Planning Authorities (April 2004) highlights the importance of quarries to the construction industry, as well as the need to work quarry aggregates where they occur and to safeguard valuable unworked deposits for future extraction. At local level, the Mayo CDP also recognises that the location of extractive industries is dictated by the availability of the resource. Policies and objectives EDP 27, EDP 28 and EDO 62 generally seek to support the development of aggregate resources in a manner that minimises effects on the environment.
- 8.2.2. The proposed development comprises the continued extraction of 19 ha of the existing permitted quarry for an operational period of 25 years. The proposed development lies within Area B and Area C of the quarry, both of which have undergone detailed assessments in previous applications (S37L, Section 34) and the associated EIARs and are subject to on-going environmental monitoring. The applicants have outlined in their documentation that the underlying bedrock, as evidenced by borehole data outlined in the EIAR (Chapters 7 & 8), supports the continued extraction of materials to depths greater than those previously permitted. Additionally, chemical composition results presented in the EIAR (Table 7-8) have indicated that the purity of the limestone increases with depth, allowing access to reserves of high-quality materials required for industrial and manufacturing applications.
- 8.2.3. Having regard to the provisions of the National Development Plan, the Quarry Guidelines 2004, the Mayo County Development Plan, the location of the proposed development at an existing quarry and the borehole evidence presented by the applicant, it is my opinion that the proposed quarry use is acceptable in principle.
- 8.2.4. I note that the appellant contends that a 25-year permission is contrary to Ireland's legal obligation and commitment to reducing out greenhouse gas emissions and goes against the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. This Act sets out the national objective of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in the period up to 2050. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) provides a roadmap for the commitments out in this Act. While CAP does not specifically set targets for the extractive industry sector, general

targets for the industrial sector include reducing embodied carbon in construction materials by at least 30% and enhancing energy efficiency to reduce fossil fuel demand by 10% by 2030. Chapter 10 of the EIAR assesses the proposed development's impact on climate. As a percentage of the industry sectors carbon emissions for 2023 the proposed development would represent a 0.055% contribution. It concludes that the proposed development will not make a significant contribution to global carbon concentrations. Section 9.12 of this report further assesses the proposed developments impact on climate. I am satisfied that the assessment in relation to climate is sufficient. While I acknowledge the concerns of the third party in relation to carbon emissions, I would again note that national and local policy outlines the importance of quarries and the demand for aggregates arising from the needs of the construction industry. On balance I consider the proposed development to be acceptable.

8.2.5. I consider that the grant of permission would also assist in realising the objectives of the NPF. The NPF has been revised and updated to take account of the changes that have occurred since it was first published in 2018. In the period between 2022 and 2040 it is expected that there will be roughly an extra one million people living in our country, with this population growth requiring new homes and new jobs. There is a projected total requirement to accommodate approximately 50,000 additional households per annum to 2040. The proposed development would provide a key construction material to aid the delivery of housing and associated services requirements.

8.2.6. Having regard to the planning policy and history outlined above, to the location of the development, and site investigations carried out, I consider that the current proposal to deepen an area of an existing quarry is consistent with local and national policy. These policies also highlight the need to ensure that the extraction of aggregate resources is carried out in a manner that minimises its impact on the environment and adjoining properties, and these matters are discussed in detail in section 9.0 of this report. Accordingly, subject to the further consideration of environmental impacts, I have no objection to the principle of the proposed development.

8.3. Hours of Operation

- 8.3.1. The third party has raised concern with the condition that allows the quarry to operate on a Saturday. It is contended that the condition is unreasonable, and no activity should take place on a Saturday.
- 8.3.2. Condition 5 of the decision to grant permission by the Planning Authority placed the following operating times on the development;
- between 0700 hours and 1800 hours, Monday to Saturday.
 - No activity outside these hours or on Sundays or Public Holidays.
- 8.3.3. The aforementioned hours of operation reflect the existing operating hours attached to the quarry in accordance with Condition 4 of Reference QD 16.QD0009 and Condition 5 of ABP Ref: ABP-308748-20. The applicant has also indicated that the site will operate within these hours in the EIAR.
- 8.3.4. I note that the Department's guidelines for quarries (2004) recommends that normal quarry operations should be confined to 0700-1800 hours Mondays to Fridays, and 0700-1400 hours on Saturdays, with no quarrying, processing or associated activities on Sundays or Bank holidays. However, the guidelines also allow for an element of flexibility based on market conditions or the nature of particular ancillary processes which require greater flexibility subject to discussion with the Planning Authority. I note the long-established nature of the quarry and consider it appropriate to maintain consistency with the already established operating hours and conditions of the extant permissions.
- 8.3.5. A detailed assessment on noise and vibration is set out in Section 9.14 of this report. I note the result of noise monitoring in the EIAR shows that noise limits have been complied with. The predicted noise impacts for the proposed development when considered cumulatively with existing operations are also predicted to be within noise limits. I also note that there is no blasting outside the hours of 10:00 to 16:00 Monday to Friday and that the frequency of the blasting operation on the entire quarry is limited to not more than four production blasts per month, (as per Condition 5 of Reference QD 16.QD0009 and Condition 6 of ABP Ref: ABP-308748-20). In this regard, I am satisfied that the operations of the site on a Saturday would not have a significant adverse impact on the residential amenity of nearby properties. In this regard, I recommend that condition 5 attached by the Planning Authority, is included in any grant of permission by the Commission.

8.4. Environmental Monitoring

- 8.4.1. The appellant has raised concerns over the attachment of Condition 18 and considers that the need for environmental monitoring is required and should be implemented from the offset. It is contended that the monitoring locations should extend beyond the boundary of the quarry particularly for airborne dust and vibration levels. The monitoring should be carried out by an independent organisation and the community should have regular access to the data and environmental assessments that are carried out.
- 8.4.2. I note that wording of condition 18 which states that *'should the need arise during the lifetime of this permission, the developer shall obtain the agreement of Mayo County Council for a revised Environmental Monitoring Plan'*. In this regard, I note that the overall quarry site has an established environmental management system in operation. Noise, dust, water and blast monitoring is carried out on a regular basis, to demonstrate that the development is not having an adverse impact on the surrounding environment. The results of monitoring are discussed in their respective sections in Section 9 below. The Planners Report on the application has noted that the Planning Authority is satisfied with the environmental management system operating within the site. In this regard, I consider that condition 18 assumes that the existing EMS will remain in operation until revised. In the interest of clarity, I recommend that should the commission be minded to grant permission, that a revised EMS is submitted to take account of the works proposed as part of this application.
- 8.4.3. I note the Quarry Guidelines (2004), state that *'the environmental monitoring can be carried out either by the developer, by agreed independent specialists, or by the planning authority at the developer's expense'*. The EIAR indicates that monitoring is carried out by external companies with appropriate experience. This approach is in accordance with national guidelines. I have no concerns with regards to the validity of the monitoring data and individual topics are considered further in section 9.0 below.
- 8.4.4. The applicant has indicated within the EIAR that the results of monitoring are available for public inspection at the office of the quarry. The EIAR is available to view online and at the offices of the Planning Authority.

8.5. Procedural Issues

8.5.1. The third party contends that the public was not made aware of the planning application. The locations of the site notices are shown on the submitted site location plan. The notices were appropriately located adjoining the site and at the entrance to the quarry. In terms of procedural matters and the nature and timing of the erection of the site notice, I note that both matters were considered acceptable by the planning authority. I note that a newspaper notice was published in The Mayo News newspaper (January 21st, 2025). Storm Eowyn occurred on the 24th January 2025 prior to the lodgement of the application on 31st January 2025. I am satisfied that this did not prevent concerned parties from making representations. I would also note that while meaningful consultation may be to the benefit of both parties there is no statutory requirement to undertake such engagement. The above assessment represents my de novo consideration of all planning issues material to the proposed development.

9.0 Environmental Impact Assessment

9.1. Statutory Provisions

Part 1 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended and section 172(1)(a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended provides that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required for the following;

- Class 19 *“Quarries and open-cast mining where the surface of the site exceeds 25 hectares.”*
- Class 22 *“Any change or extension of projects listed in this Annex where such a change or extension in itself meets the thresholds, if any set out in this Annex.”*

Class 2 of Part 2 of Schedule 5 refers to extractive industry and part (b) of that section states that the following requires an EIA; *“Extraction of stone, gravel, sand or clay, where the area of extraction would be greater than 5 hectares.”*

Class 13(a) of Part 2 requires EIA in respect of: *“Any change or extension of development already authorised, executed or in the process of being executed (not being a change or extension refer to in Part 1) which would:-*

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

The proposed development relates to the deepening of an existing quarry within an application area of c.19 ha. Chapter 2 of the EIAR sets out that the deepening area of the quarry is greater than the areas specified in Class 13 (a) of Part 2. It is stated that on this basis the extraction area of the quarry exceeds the area stated under Part 2 and an EIAR is required.

9.2. EIA Structure

This section of the report comprises the environmental impact assessment of the proposed development in accordance with Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the associated Regulations, which incorporate the European directives on environmental impact assessment (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU). Section 171 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) defines EIA as:

- a. consisting of the preparation of an EIAR by the applicant, the carrying out of consultations, the examination of the EIAR and relevant supplementary information by the Board, the reasoned conclusions of the Board and the integration of the reasoned conclusion into the decision of the Board, and
- b. includes an examination, analysis and evaluation, by the Board, that identifies, describes and assesses the likely direct and indirect significant effects of the proposed development on defined environmental parameters and the interaction of these factors, and which includes significant effects

arising from the vulnerability of the project to risks of major accidents and/or disasters.

Article 94 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 and associated Schedule 6 set out requirements on the contents of an EIAR.

This EIA section of the report is therefore divided into two sections. The first section assesses compliance with the requirements of Article 94 and Schedule 6 of the Regulations. The second section provides an examination, analysis and evaluation of the development and an assessment of the likely direct and indirect significant effects of it on the following defined environmental parameters, having regard to the EIAR and relevant supplementary information:

- population and human health,
- biodiversity, with particular attention to species and habitats protected under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive,
- land, soil, water, air and climate,
- material assets, cultural heritage and the landscape,
- the interaction between the above factors, and
- the vulnerability of the proposed development to risks of major accidents and/or disasters.

The assessment provides a reasoned conclusion and allows for integration of the reasoned conclusions into the Commission's decision, should they agree with the recommendation made.

9.3. Issues Raised in Respect of EIA

The third party raised a number of concerns regarding the EIA. These are addressed under each of the relevant chapters. Issues raised generally in respect of EIA are:

- Impact on human health as a result of fine dust and radon exposure
- Impact of dust emissions and inadequate dust management proposals
- Impact on traffic
- Location of monitoring and accessibility of monitoring data.

9.4. Compliance with the Requirements of Article 94 and Schedule 6 of the Regulations 2001

Compliance with the requirements of Article 94 and Schedule 6 of the Regulations is assessed below.

Article 94 (a) Information to be contained in an EIAR (Schedule 6, paragraph 1)
A description of the proposed development comprising information on the site, design, size and other relevant features of the proposed development (including the additional information referred to under section 94(b).
<i>A description of the proposed development is contained in Chapter 3 of the EIAR including details on the location, site, nature of the development, arrangements for access, extraction methodology and existing environmental controls. I am satisfied that the development description provided is adequate to enable a decision.</i>
A description of the likely significant effects on the environment of the proposed development (including the additional information referred to under section 94(b).
<i>An assessment of the likely significant direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the development is carried out for each of the technical chapters of the EIAR. I am satisfied that the assessment of significant effects is comprehensive and robust and enables decision making.</i>
A description of the features, if any, of the proposed development and the measures, if any, envisaged to avoid, prevent or reduce and, if possible, offset likely significant adverse effects on the environment of the development (including the additional information referred to under section 94(b).
<i>The EIAR includes designed in mitigation measures and measures to address potential adverse effects identified in technical studies. These, and arrangements for monitoring, are summarised in Section 17 of the EIAR (Mitigation and Monitoring).</i>
A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the person or persons who prepared the EIAR, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the proposed development on the environment (including the additional information referred to under section 94(b).
<i>A description of the alternatives considered is contained in Chapter 4 of the EIAR. The alternatives considered include, 'do nothing', alternative sources of limestone, alternative location, alternative layout and design. The main reasons for opting for the current proposal were based on minimising environmental effects. I am satisfied, therefore, that the applicant has studied reasonable alternatives in assessing the proposed development and has outlined the main reasons for opting for the current proposal before the Commission and in doing so the applicant has taken into account the potential impacts on the environment.</i>
Article 94(b) Additional information, relevant to the specific characteristics of the development and to the environmental features likely to be affected (Schedule 6, Paragraph 2).
A description of the baseline environment and likely evolution in the absence of the development.
<i>A description of the baseline environment is included in each technical chapter of the EIAR. I am satisfied this is sufficient to enable the assessment of likely effects and to enable decision making.</i>
A description of the forecasting methods or evidence used to identify and assess the significant effects on the environment, including details of difficulties (for example technical deficiencies or lack of knowledge) encountered compiling the required information, and the main uncertainties involved
<i>The methodology employed in carrying out the EIA, including the forecasting methods is set out, in each of the individual chapters assessing the environmental effects. The applicant has indicated in</i>

<i>the different chapters if difficulties have been encountered in compiling the information to carry out EIA.</i>
A description of the expected significant adverse effects on the environment of the proposed development deriving from its vulnerability to risks of major accidents and/or disasters which are relevant to it.
<i>The risk of accidents and unplanned events have been assessed in relevant specialist chapters of the EIA. Specific risks have been identified in relation to the vulnerability of the project to instability (following extraction of limestone), flood, and oil/fuel spills. These risks are reasonable and are assessed in my report. I consider that the applicant's approach to major accidents and disasters is adequate and allows for a full and proper assessment.</i>
Article 94 (c) A summary of the information in non-technical language.
<i>This information has been submitted as a separate standalone document. I have read this document, and I am satisfied that the document is concise and comprehensive and is written in a language that is easily understood by a lay member of the public.</i>
Article 94 (d) Sources used for the description and the assessments used in the report
<i>The sources used to inform the description, and the assessment of the potential environmental impact are set out at the end of each chapter.</i>
Article 94 (e) A list of the experts who contributed to the preparation of the report
<i>A list of the various experts who contributed to the report are set out in Table 1-2 in Chapter 1 of the EIA. The tables also set out details of the individual's expertise, qualifications which demonstrates the competence of the person in preparation of the individual chapters within the EIA. I am satisfied that the EIA has been prepared by experts with competency in the technical subject areas.</i>

Consultations

The third-party appellant considers that people are unaware of the application, hence so few objections were made.

Details of the consultations entered into by the applicant with relevant stakeholders is set out in Table 2-1 of the EIA.

The application has been submitted in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) in respect of public notices.

Submissions have been received from statutory bodies and third parties and are considered in this report, in advance of decision making.

I am satisfied, therefore, that appropriate consultations have been carried out and that third parties have had the opportunity to comment on the proposed development advance of decision making.

Compliance

Having regard to the foregoing, I am satisfied that the information contained in the EIAR, and supplementary information provided by the developer is sufficient to comply with article 94 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001.

9.5. Examination of Alternatives

Article 5 (1) (d) of the 2014 EIA Directive requires:

“(d) a description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer, which are relevant to the project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the project on the environment;”

Annex (IV) (Information for the EIAR) provides more detail on ‘reasonable alternatives’:

“2. A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example in terms of project design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for electing the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.”

The matter of alternatives is addressed in Chapter 4 of the EIAR.

The ‘Do Nothing’ Scenario

The ‘do nothing’ scenario would result in the loss of a reliable source of essential materials for local infrastructure projects. It is considered that this scenario does not align with the need for sustainable, local aggregate and lime production, and would likely create supply chain disruptions.

Alternative Sources of Limestone

Alternative sources of limestone from other quarries were considered but were ruled out due to high transportation costs and increased emissions. It is noted that the limestone reserve at the proposed deepening of the site is of higher quality and purity, which is critical for producing value-added products such as agricultural lime and calcium carbonate.

Alternative Locations

Consideration of alternative locations for quarry expansion were undertaken. Shifting operations to a new greenfield site would incur significant time and financial costs. Continuing operations at the current site, is more sustainable from an economic and environmental perspective.

Alternative Designs/Layouts

Various layouts for deepening the quarry were considered including the deepening of the southern portion of the site (pre-63 area). This option would have required the relocation of existing processing plants and infrastructure. The chosen layout which deepens Areas B and C minimises environmental impacts, maintains operational efficiency and avoid disruption to existing infrastructure.

Alternative Processes

Other extraction methods such as rock breaking were considered, but its inefficiency for large-scale operations led to its dismissal. Blasting is the preferred extraction method due to its efficiency, cost effectiveness and ability to meet production volumes.

Conclusion

The applicant contends that the alternatives assessment has determined that the proposed deepening of the existing quarry represents the most appropriate and viable option.

I consider the requirements in terms of reasonable alternatives have been satisfactorily addressed and the reasoning for the preferred option explained. It indicates how the proposed design evolved and how it was adjusted to take into consideration environmental effects. On balance, therefore, I consider that the requirements in terms of reasonable alternatives have been satisfactorily addressed and the requirements of the EIA Directive in this regard have been met.

9.6. Major Accidents and/or Disasters

Chapter 5 (Population and Human Health) of the EIAR notes that the vulnerability of the proposed development to accidents, unplanned events or natural disasters is relatively limited owing to the nature of the development works, the established

nature of the techniques, regulations and procedures to be followed, the material to be handled on site and the relatively rural location of the proposed works.

Where relevant, a number of the individual chapters also consider the topic of 'Unplanned Events' (Chapter 5, Population and Human Health; Chapter 7, Land Soils and Geology; Chapter 8, Water; and Chapter 13, Traffic). No major risks are identified. It is noted that adhering to the HSA Safe Quarry Guidelines to the Safety Health and Welfare at Work (Quarries) Regulations 2008 should limit the potential for unplanned events in the form of instability in the pit faces. Overall, I am satisfied the issue of Major Accidents or Disasters has been adequately addressed in the EIAR.

9.7. Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

This section of the report sets out an assessment of the likely environmental effects of the proposed development under the following headings, as set out Section 171A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended:

- Population and human health.
- Biodiversity, with particular attention to the species and habitats protected under the Habitats and Birds Directives (Directive 92/43/EEC and Directive 2009/147/EC respectively).
- Land, soil, water, air and climate.
- Material assets, cultural heritage and the landscape.
- The interaction between these factors.
- The vulnerability of the proposed development to risks of major accidents and/or disasters. (referred to in specific chapters and in Section 9.6 above)

In accordance with section 171A of the Act, which defines EIA, this assessment includes an examination, analysis and evaluation of the application documents, including the EIAR and submissions received and identifies, describes and assesses the likely direct and indirect significant effects (including cumulative effects) of the development on these environmental parameters and the interaction of these. Each topic section is therefore structured around the following headings:

- Issues raised in the appeal/application.
- Examination of the EIAR.

- Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and indirect effects.
- Conclusion: Direct and indirect effects.

9.8. Population and Human Health

Issues Raised

The third party contends that the EIAR does not take account of the health and safety of surrounding households, particularly in the context of fine dust exposure, radon and other harmful substances.

Examination of the EIAR

Chapter 5 addresses the impact on Population and Human Health and considers direct or indirect effects arising from the proposed development. The chapter outlines the legislative and policy context, the baseline environment, the key characteristics of the proposed development, the potential effects, methodology used and sources of information.

Other matters which would have a direct bearing on population and human health such as water, air and climate, noise, traffic and landscape are addressed under the corresponding headings below. Invariably there is overlap and I recommend that they be read in tandem.

The EIAR notes that no particular difficulties were encountered in the preparation of this chapter of the EIAR.

Baseline

Land use in the vicinity of the quarry primarily comprises agriculture interspersed with areas of woodland. The village of Cong is located c.500m to the south of the quarry site. Residences in the area comprise one-off rural houses and ribbon development along local roads. The nearest dwellings to the site are situated to the east in the townland of Drumsheel Upper and are c.100m from the site. There are approximately 51 dwellings within 500m of the site.

Population figures for the four electoral areas in the study area (5km radius of the application site) are provided. The population figures are representative of an area experiencing population increase, with an overall increase of 15.50% within the Cong ED since 2006.

There are numerous recreational and tourist attractions in the area, including the Quiet Man Museum in Cong and Ashford Castle.

The site falls within a high radon area.

Potential Effects

The EIAR identifies the potential for a range of environmental effects on Population and Human Health. Likely significant effects of the development, as identified in the EIAR, are summarised in Table 1 below. Minor effects are not identified, except where there is potential for significant impact interactions, cumulative effects or where concerns have been expressed by parties to the application.

Table 1: Summary of Potential Effects

Project Phase	Potential Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects
Do Nothing	The site would remain part of an operational quarry until the existing permission ends.
Construction	No construction phase as the site is already enabled.
Operation	Risk to human health in terms of land, soils and geology, water, air quality, noise, landscape and visual, and traffic. (Refer to respective chapters) Exposure to Radon & Silica Dust The proposed development would continue to provide employment for up to 90 people directly on-site, and a further 50 people indirectly.
Decommissioning/ Restoration	Loss of jobs within the quarry and related operations. Short term employment in relation to the restored site.
Unplanned Events	Instability following extraction of limestone Spill from traffic accidents Flooding
Cumulative	No significant cumulative effects are anticipated.

Mitigation

Mitigation measures against the potential effects from the proposed development which may impact on human health, or the local population are considered within the specific chapters for each topic which would have a bearing on population and human health (Chapter 7: Land, Soils and Geology, Chapter 8: Water, Chapter 9: Climate, Chapter 10: Air Quality, Chapter 11: Noise and Vibration, Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact, Chapter 13: Traffic). Measures proposed largely represent a continuation of the existing measures that are in place associated with existing planning consents, discharge licence and the ISO14001 environmental management system.

Additional mitigation measures in relation to Health and Safety include;

- Radon: Periodic workplace testing will be undertaken in accordance with the guideline set out the Protocol for Measurement of Radon in Homes & Workplaces, EPA, 2019.
- Silica Dust: Existing health and safety policies and procedures will continue to be reviewed and updated to ensure it is in keeping with best practice and current legislation.
- Unplanned Events: Existing emergency procedures will continue to be reviewed and updated to ensure it is in keeping with best practice and current legislation.

An Environmental Monitoring Programme (Noise, dust and water monitoring) will be carried out on a regular basis.

Residual Effects

Subject to adherence to appropriate mitigation measures and associated monitoring, the EIAR considered that any residual effects from the proposed development are not significant in terms of Population and Human Health.

Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and Indirect Effects

I have examined, analysed and evaluated Chapter 5 of the EIAR, all of the associated documentation and submissions on file in respect of health and population. I am satisfied that the applicant's understanding of the baseline environment is comprehensive and that the key impacts in respect of likely effects on health and population, as a consequence of the development have been identified.

The proposed development is not predicted to have any impact on the local land use or property values as the area has a long association with quarrying, and the quarry is well screened from the majority of residential properties in the area. Recently developed one-off housing in the vicinity is put forward as evidence that people have not been deterred from living in the area.

Key pathways for potential effects on residential amenity in this instance are air, traffic and noise & vibration. These pathways (other than traffic) are controlled by thresholds established by planning conditions and are continuously monitored at the site. The quarry has an ISO14001 certification which requires ongoing monitoring at the site to ensure that environmental emissions are strictly controlled. Noise, vibration and air emissions are assessed in the respective chapters of the EIAR. As the proposed development will not result in an increase in quarry output, there is no expected additional impact associated with traffic, except with regard to the duration of activities on the site.

Subject to compliance with mitigation and monitoring measures relating to impacts on air, noise & vibration, water, landscape and material assets, the EIAR concludes that the impact on the receiving environment will be minimised and there will be no significant residual effects on the receiving environment. These topics are assessed in further details in the sections below.

The proposed development will continue to provide employment for up to 90 people directly on-site, in addition to a further 50 people indirectly. It is noted that the number of employees will not be altered by the proposed development, however it would sustain the jobs for a longer period of time. It is also considered that the proposed development will contribute indirectly to sustaining and developing the local and regional economy through the supply of construction aggregates, concrete and other materials for the construction industry, while agricultural lime is provided for the agricultural sector.

It is not anticipated that the deepening of the quarry would have any effect on recreational or tourist resources.

The third party has raised concerns with regards to the exposure of fine dust, radon and other harmful substances on the local population. As noted in the baseline conditions, the application site falls within a High Radon Area. Statutory Instrument

No.30 (2019) requires employers located in High Radon Areas to test their premises for radon. The proposed development does not include any internal spaces and the quarry itself is an open-air site. The EIAR references studies which conclude that radon concentration in open cast mining work environments, can be considered a low risk to employees' health (Francisa et al (2023)). In terms of Silica dust, Respirable Crystalline Silica (RSC) content is low in limestone (less than 5%). Furthermore, RCS disperses rapidly, with the concentrations returning to background or near background levels quickly. As a consequence, RCS is only a risk to people working directly at the source and without proper PPE and dust management techniques.

Unplanned events have also been considered and include instability following extraction of limestone, spill from traffic accidents, and flooding. Unplanned events, such as accidents and spills, are unlikely and will be managed through appropriate safety procedures. Adherence to the HSA Safe Quarry Guidelines to the Safety Health and Welfare at Work (Quarries) Regulations 2008 should limit instability following extraction. Any significant impacts on human health beyond the site in this regard are unlikely as there is no public access to the quarry. I am satisfied that significant effects deriving from major accidents and/or disasters are not likely. Refer also to section 9.6 above in this regard.

Conclusion

Having regard to the foregoing, I am satisfied that impacts predicted to arise in relation to population and human health would be minimal and can be managed and mitigated by the measures which form part of the proposed scheme, specified mitigation measures, and through suitable conditions. I am, therefore, satisfied that the proposed development would not have any unacceptable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects in terms of population and human health.

9.9. Biodiversity

No issues have been raised by any party to the appeal/application in respect of biodiversity. I have examined Chapter 6 of the EIAR which deals with biodiversity. Further deepening of the quarry will not require removal of any additional habitat. The area lies in a karst region, but ground investigations show no major water flows

will be intersected or changed by the deeper extraction. Water is assessed further in Section 9.11 below. Having regard to the survey work carried out, the location of the site within an existing quarry, the nature of the proposed development which relates to the deepening of the existing quarry, I am satisfied that there is no potential for any significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects on biodiversity as a result of the proposed development. The restoration of the site to natural habitats is likely to have a positive and beneficial effect on wildlife. The potential for effects on European sites is examined in the AA section of this report.

9.10. Lands, Soils and Geology

Issues Raised

No issues are raised by parties to the application in respect of land and soil.

Examination of the EIAR

Chapter 7 addresses the impact on Land, Soils and Geology and considers any direct or indirect effects on these resources arising from the proposed development. The chapter outlines the legislative and policy context, the baseline environment, the key characteristics of the proposed development, the potential effects, methodology used and sources of information.

The EIAR notes that no difficulties were encountered in the preparation of this chapter of the EIAR.

The following appendices are attached to Chapter 7:

Appendix 7-1 - GSI Scoping Response

Appendix 7-2 - NRA rating criteria Tables of Appendix C of IGI (2013) Guidance

Appendix 7-3 - Colthrust (2014)

Baseline

Land use: The site is currently in use as a quarry. Land use in the vicinity of the site predominantly involves agriculture to the north and west of the site and forestry to the south. A number of one-off houses are located along the local road to the east.

Soils, Subsoils and Geological Mapping: Teagasc soil mapping indicated that the application site used to be covered in BminSW soil (shallow well drained mineral

(mainly basic). GSI mapping now indicates Bedrock at surface-Calcareous exposed bedrock (RckCa) for the site.

GSI Mapping shows contact between two limestone formations, Cong Limestone Formation and the Cong Canal Formation, immediately south of the site. The site is within the Cong Limestone Formation, which can be described as virtually impenetrable material in its un-fractured state. Unlike the Cong Canal Formation, it is not prone to karstification.

GSI mapping also shows the site as a 'Very High' potential for crushed rock aggregate.

Site Investigation: Five deep cored holes were completed at the site in 2014. Core Hole A was drilled to depth of 220m, while Cores B-E were to a depth of 65-85m. The description of the deep cored holes that were drilled in and around the application area suggests that the limestone is a solid mass of pure product with no weathered zones or water bearing routes.

Records of 22 no. investigation boreholes in the application area are presented in Table 7-6 of the EIAR. There was no evidence of conduits in the entire profile of holes drilled to a deepest elevation of c. -18m OD. Table 7-7 of the EIAR presents records of a further 21 blast-rig probe holes on the wider quarry area. No evidence of any mechanism for weakness or groundwater flow was found.

The chemical characteristics of the bedrock at the site were evaluated and reported by Dr John Colthurst in a 2014 report (Appendix 3). The analysis shows the limestone is exceptionally pure, with purity improving with depth.

Potential Effects

The EIAR identifies the potential for a range of environmental effects on Land, Soils and Geology. Likely significant effects of the development, as identified in the EIAR, are summarised in Table 2 below. Minor effects are not identified, except where there is potential for significant impact interactions, cumulative effects or where concerns have been expressed by parties to the application.

Table 2: Summary of Potential Effects

Project Phase	Potential Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects
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Do Nothing	The site would remain part of an operational quarry until the existing permission ends.
Construction	No construction phase as the site is already enabled.
Operation	Loss of Bedrock Provision of raw material for use in construction industry Instability of bedrock Contamination of bedrock from use and storage of fuel and hydrocarbons
Decommissioning/ Restoration	Landscaping, movement of soils and stockpiles necessary to facilitate site restoration.
Unplanned Events	Hydrocarbon contamination from fuel tank failure or large-scale spillage Face collapse/Rock Fall
Cumulative	No significant cumulative effects are envisaged

Mitigation

Mitigation measures are set out in Table 7-10 of the EIAR and include proper fuel storage; detailed working schemes; and comprehensive restoration plans. Planned quarry faces (ie. sloped rock surfaces) will maintain long-term stability. Engineering checks (geotechnical assessment) will be completed to keep rock faces safe. Fuel and lubricants stored in secure areas to prevent leaks into the rock. Regular checks are in place as Standard Operation Systems. The site is ISO approved, and there is continuous monitoring systems in place.

Residual Effects

Subject to adherence to appropriate mitigation measures and associated monitoring, the EIAR considered that any residual effects from the proposed development are not significant in terms of land, soils and geology, other than the inevitable loss of the mineral resource itself.

Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and Indirect Effects

I have examined, analysed and evaluated the information provided in Chapter 7 of the EIAR and all the associated documents in respect of Land, Soils and Geology. I

am satisfied that the information submitted in the EIAR adequately demonstrates an understanding of the potential impacts and provides a suitably comprehensive range of mitigation in Section 7.6 of the EIAR to reduce any potential effects within the site.

Further extraction of limestone material within the permitted quarry footprint is proposed. There are no construction impacts associated with the deepening of the quarry. The site has already been enabled with the quarry already in active use. Soils at the site have previously been removed to facilitate quarrying. The loss of bedrock is an inevitable consequence and will result in a significant and permanent impact. The primary mitigating factor is that the overall national and regional scale of this type of bedrock is large with a large area of Galway and Mayo underlain by Waulsortian Limestone. The landscaping and restoration plan following cessation of quarrying activity will go some way to mitigating this significant and permanent impact with the creation of a natural habitat area. Significant positive impacts arise in the supply of aggregates as a raw material for use in the construction industry. These impacts have occurred historically within the active quarry. I have no objection in relation to the scale of the proposed extraction, and I note that Geological Survey Ireland scoping response has raised no issues with regards to the proposed development. No interaction with the watertable has been experienced on the site nor is it anticipated. Potential contamination from fuel spills and stability issues are also considered. Adequate mitigation measures have been outlined with fuel and lubricants stored in secure areas to prevent leaks into the rock and proper engineering design and checks can help avoid slope failures.

The planning authority or the third parties have not raised concerns regarding this chapter of the EIAR. There is an established use on site for quarrying and related uses. No further land take is required as part of the proposal, and it is not proposed to remove any soils as part of this current proposal. I have had regard to the submitted restoration plan, and it is evident that the site can be restored to beneficial use (i.e. natural habitat) following the cessation of the quarrying activities.

Conclusion

I am satisfied that the impacts that are predicted to arise in relation to land, soils and geology are not significant having regard to the extensive geological resources in surrounding area. I have considered all the information on file, including submissions

received and the information contained in the EIAR, and I note that the issue was not raised by the appellant. Having regard to the above, I am satisfied that impacts predicted to arise in relation to land, soils and geology, other than the resource removal itself, would be avoided, managed, and mitigated by the measures which form part of the proposed scheme, the proposed mitigation measures, monitoring and through suitable conditions. I am, therefore, satisfied that the proposed development would not have any unacceptable direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts in terms of land, soils and geology.

9.11. **Water**

Issues Raised

No specific concerns have been raised by parties to the application regarding the impact of the development on water.

Examination of the EIAR

Chapter 8 addresses the impact on water and considers any direct or indirect effects on this resource arising from the proposed development. The chapter outlines the legislative and policy context, the baseline environment, the key characteristics of the proposed development, the potential effects, methodology used and sources of information.

The EIAR notes that no particular difficulties were encountered in the preparation of this chapter of the EIAR.

The following Appendices are attached to Chapter 8:

- Appendix 8.1 Statement of Expertise
- Appendix 8.2 Section 4 Discharge Licence W/391/05_R1 (2019)
- Appendix 8.3 Hydro-G (2019) Discharge Licence Report
- Appendix 8.4 Guidance Documents & Legislative Instruments
- Appendix 8.5 Desk Study Resources, Data & Maps
- Appendix 8.6 Scoping Responses of Relevance to Water: GSI & Uisce Eireann
- Appendix 8.7 Impact Effect Assessment Methodologies & Detail
- Appendix 8.8 Dewatering Impact Appraisal Methodology

- Appendix 8.9 OPW Hydrometric Information
- Appendix 8.10 McGraths Quarry (ESP, 2006)
- Appendix 8.11 Site Investigation Information
- Appendix 8.12 Long Term Monitoring Record

Baseline

Surface Water: The site lies within the Corrib Catchment. The site is situated between Lough Mask, to the north, and Lough Corrib, to the south. The Cong Canal runs from Lough Mask to Lough Corrib and runs close to the eastern boundary of the site.

Ground water: GSI mapping shows that the site is underlain by a regionally important Karst Conduit, which has a vulnerability classified as 'X – Rock at or near the surface'. However, as previously discussed, it has been established that the bedrock geology consists of virtually impenetrable Carboniferous Limestone. Bore holes and bedrock/aquifer information indicates that the bedrock is not karstified and that underground water flowing from north to south is most probably 30 – 40m below sea level.

Water Management System: The Water Management Infrastructure to serve the proposal is already in place at the site. Water at the site mostly comes from rainfall with some shallow groundwater flows in the rock close to the surface. Water is discharged from the floor sump and pumped to a concrete settlement system in Area A before being discharged to the Cong Canal. The site is permitted to discharge a maximum of 10,000m³/d to the Cong Canal, which is the licensed receiver of the site's discharge. The licence was granted in review in 2019 to accommodate waters arising over the entire landholding of the site and from the contributing lands.

Public Water Supply: The site is located in the catchment of Lough Corrib. Lough Corrib is the source of supply to Galway City, Tuam and much of east Galway. There is a PWS intake at Luimnagh, which is on the eastern shore of Lough Corrib in a sheltered inlet, at a distance of c.20km to the southeast of the site. There is an Uisce Eireann PWS intake at the Terryland PWS Intake in Galway city, which is c.34km south of the site.

Groundwater Supply Wells: There are no water supply wells located on the site or within 4km of the site according to GSI wells database.

Water Framework Directive: The Cong Canal flows along the eastern boundary of the site and is mapped by the EPA as Good Status (2016-2021) and 3rd Cycle Not At Risk. This water body receives the sites discharge under a Section 4 Licence (2019). Lough Corrib receives groundwater from the direction of the site and is mapped by the EPA as Good Status (2016-2021) and 3rd Cycle Not At Risk.

Flood Risk: The site and the wider area are mapped by OPW flood maps and are not located in area of pluvial or fluvial flood zones. No flood events or recurring flood incidents were identified at the site from the OPW’s Flood Hazard Mapping. The last historic flood event recorded by OPW Floodmaps for Cong was in 1990.

Existing Monitoring: Records of ongoing hydrological and hydrogeological monitoring include the following;

- 4 no. groundwater monitoring boreholes back to December 2011. Monitoring of groundwater levels and quality takes place monthly, and Annual Environmental Reports are produced.
- A continuous automated monitoring system on the discharge from the site providing daily record of flow volume, electrical conductivity, pH and turbidity back to 2012.
- Laboratory analysis of quarterly samples for the discharge, upstream and downstream on the Cong Canal relative to the licensed discharge point as monitored on a monthly basis.

Results are presented in Appendix 8.12.

Potential Effects

The EIAR identifies the potential for a range of environmental effects on Water. Likely significant effects of the development, as identified in the EIAR, are summarised in Table 3 below. Minor effects are not identified, except where there is potential for significant impact interactions, cumulative effects or where concerns have been expressed by parties to the application.

Table 3: Summary of Potential Effects

Project Phase	Potential Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects
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Do Nothing	The site would remain part of an operational quarry until the existing permission ends.
Construction	No construction phase as the site is already enabled.
Operation	Contamination of water from use of machinery and equipment – spillages during refuelling, use and storage of lubricants Mobilisation and migration of suspended solids from movement of aggregate stockpiles, cleaning of settlement ponds, wheel wash maintenance etc Potential of effects of blasting to present nitrogen residues in discharge waters, which has the potential to impact groundwater quality.
Decommissioning/ Restoration	Mobilisation and migration of suspended solids from landscaping and movement of infrastructure and overburden stockpiles necessary to facilitate restoration Positive effect from the elimination of hydrocarbon sources with the removal of semi-mobile and mobile equipment and dismantling and removal of fixed machinery Positive effect from recovery of water levels and reduction in risk of contamination from cessation of pumping and discharge.
Unplanned	Intense rainfall events, spillages, fire
Cumulative	No significant effects envisioned

Mitigation

Mitigation measures are set out in Table 8.10 of the EIAR. Measures are extensive and includes best management practices for the maintenance of machinery (such as refuelling within designated areas, storage and bunding of fuels and the provision of emergency spill kits) and the undertaking of blasting by industry specialist. Ongoing monitoring is also ongoing at the site to ensure the effectiveness of the mitigation. As per the conditions of the Section 4 Discharge licence, discharge rates are continuously recorded, as is water chemistry to confirm regulatory standards are being met.

Residual Effects

Subject to adherence to appropriate mitigation measures and associated monitoring, the EIAR considered that any residual effects from the proposed development are not significant in terms of water.

Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and Indirect Effects

I have examined, analysed and evaluated the information provided in Chapter 8 of the EIAR and all the associated documents and submissions on file in respect of Water. I am satisfied that the information submitted in the EIAR adequately demonstrates an understanding of the potential impacts and provides a suitably comprehensive range of mitigation and monitoring measures in Section 8.10 of the EIAR to reduce any potential effects within the site.

The conceptual model developed as part of the EIAR has established that almost all of the recharge to the site is rainfall driven. No conduits were identified in site investigations, and it is predicted that little groundwater will be encountered during excavation. I note that past extraction does not appear to have resulted in any breaches of the water table or pollution of groundwater. This is supported by extensive bore hole data contained in the EIAR and the dense and impermeable nature of the underlying bedrock. A dewatering impact appraisal is presented in the EIAR chapter. The quarry represents 1% of the Cong Robe groundwater body's water balance. There is no ingress of groundwater to the quarry from the Cong Canal. Therefore, there would be no requirement for dewatering or treatment of large volumes of groundwater.

The main predicted hydrogeological impact associated with the proposed development relates to the potential contamination of surface and groundwater and the subsequent risk posed to Cong Canal and Lough Corrib SAC & SPA. The activities that give rise to the potential impacts are identified in Table 8.7 of the EIAR. The EIAR considers that the predicted impacts can be resolved through a suite of proposed mitigation measures and residual impacts are predicted to be unlikely and imperceptible.

I am satisfied that satisfactory information has been submitted to demonstrate that appropriate measures are in place to collect and dispose of surface water at a quantity and quality that is in accordance with the existing Discharge Licence. The

site's monitoring data suggest compliance with the Conditions of the Licence. The water quality data submitted indicates that surrounding water course and bodies are not being adversely affected by past discharges from the quarry. The Cong Canal which receives the discharge, has retained its WFD good status since the quarry commenced its discharge. In the wider catchment, Lough Mask and Lough Corrib have also retained good status. I note a letter of Compliance from Galway County Council, dated January 2025, is presented in Appendix 8.2 along with a copy of the Discharge Licence. I have no concerns with regards to the quality of the quarry's discharge.

I am, satisfied that there will be no material change in the nature or volume of the discharge and that adequate capacity exists under the terms of the existing licence to accommodate the proposed development. This is ultimately a matter for the licencing authority (Galway County Council) and the applicant to consider. However, for the purposes of this application I am satisfied that compliance with licencing requirements will provide a satisfactory mechanism to control future discharge from the site.

Conclusion

I have considered all the information on file, including submissions received and the information contained in the EIAR, and I note that the issue was not raised by the appellant. I am satisfied that any potential impacts would be avoided, managed and mitigated by the measures which form part of the proposed development, the proposed mitigation measures, monitoring and through suitable conditions. I am therefore satisfied that the proposed development would not have any unacceptable direct, indirect or cumulative effects in terms of water.

9.12. Climate

Issues Raised

The third party has queried the proposed development with respect to the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 and the nature of the proposed development in terms of supporting a decrease in Ireland's total emissions. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 is listed in

Section 5 above. There is an overlap with the planning assessment (Section 8) and this Section of the report, and I recommend that they be read in tandem.

Examination of the EIAR

Chapter 9 addresses the impact on climate and considers any direct or indirect effects on these resources arising from the proposed development. The chapter outlines the legislative and policy context, the baseline environment, the key characteristics of the proposed development, the potential effects, methodology used and sources of information.

Section 9.32 of the EIAR notes that there are no industry-specific tools developed to assess the impacts of climate change within the extraction sector in Ireland.

However, the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) published a document in 2020 called Environmental Impact Assessment Guide to: Climate Change Resilience & Adaptation. The climate change risk assessment outlined by IEMA in Appendix 1 of their report is used to assess how the proposed development is vulnerable to climate change.

The following appendices are attached to Chapter 10:

Appendix 9.A – Climate Change Risk Assessment Methodology

Appendix 9.B – Carbon Footprint Assessment Report

Appendix 9.C – Relevant Guidance

Baseline

The baseline climate is a temperate maritime climate characterised by mild temperatures and high levels of precipitation. The Claremorris weather station is located approx. 26.8km northeast of the application site and is considered representative of conditions experienced at the application site. Meteorological data from Claremorris weather station shows a mean daily precipitation of between 3.0mm and 4.44mm, mean daily minimum temperature of between 5.34 and 6.99°C, and mean daily maximum temperature between 12.89 to 14.32°C, for the period 2013-2023.

Potential Effects

The EIAR identifies the potential for a range of environmental effects on Climate. Likely significant effects of the development, as identified in the EIAR, are summarised in Table 4 below. Minor effects are not identified, except where there is potential for significant impact interactions, cumulative effects or where concerns have been expressed by parties to the application.

Table 4: Summary of Potential Effects

Project Phase	Potential Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects
Do Nothing	Any reduction in in greenhouse gas emissions are likely to be outweighed by increased emissions relating to customers having to source limestone from further afield.
Construction	No construction phase as the site is already enabled.
Operation	Annual energy use from plant machinery Carbon emissions from excavating aggregate Carbon emissions from processing aggregate Transport emissions from moving aggregate off-site
Decommissioning/ Restoration	No direct carbon impact
Cumulative	No significant effects envisioned.

Mitigation

Mitigation measure to increase the resilience of the proposed development to climate change and increase weather events are set out in Table 9.6 of the EIAR and include the existing water management system and ongoing compliance with all relevant safety codes, standards and directives. Table 9.7 outlines mitigation measures in relation to carbon emissions and includes servicing of plant and vehicles to ensure they run as efficiently as possible and adherence to good practice such as switching off plant and vehicles when not in use. Continued monitoring will include fuel usage checks and periodic carbon footprint reviews.

Residual Effects

Subject to adherence to appropriate mitigation measures and associated monitoring, the EIAR considered that any residual effects from the proposed development are not significant in terms of climate.

Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and Indirect Effects

I have examined, analysed and evaluated Chapter 9 of the EIAR and all of the associated documentation, and submissions on file in respect of Climate. I am satisfied that the information submitted in the EIAR adequately demonstrates an understanding of the potential risks, impacts and provides a suitably comprehensive range of mitigation and monitoring measures to reduce any potential impacts on climate.

The greenhouse gas assessment undertaken has quantified the total emissions associated with the operational phase of the proposed development. I also note that the assessment considers all transport emissions associated with the operation of the proposed development. The total emission in tonnes of CO₂e have been presented as a percentage of Ireland's annual greenhouse gas emissions in 2023. It represents 0.0064% contribution. As a percentage of the industry sectors carbon emissions for 2023 the proposed development would represent a 0.055% contribution.

I am satisfied that the assessment undertaken is robust. It is acknowledged that there are potentially indirect effects of the proposed development in relation to climate from downstream emissions from the use of concrete, aggregates and lime and secondary economic activities. However, this is difficult to track given that the variety of uses for the material once it leaves the site. I agree with the conclusions of the EIAR that the carbon footprint assessment shows that the proposed development will not make a significant contribution to global carbon concentrations. Further commentary in relation to the principle of development and climate is set out in Section 8.2 above.

Mitigation measures proposed are designed to increase the resilience of the proposed development to climate change and extreme weather events. I am satisfied that the project design and mitigation proposed is adequate and addresses the impact of climate change on the proposed development, and I agree with the

conclusions of the EIAR that the impact of weather events on the proposed development will not be significant.

Conclusion

I have considered all of the written submissions, and any specific points made in relation to climate as well as the submitted application documentation. I am satisfied that any potential impacts would be avoided, managed and mitigated by the measures which form part of the proposed development, the proposed mitigation measures and through suitable conditions. I am therefore satisfied that the proposed development would not have any unacceptable direct, indirect or cumulative effects in terms of climate.

9.13. Air Quality

Issues Raised

The third party has raised concerns in relation to dust emissions from the proposed development and the adequacy of the mitigation measures and monitoring in relation to same. Monitoring locations should extend beyond the boundary of the quarry. It is noted that Cong Primary School is mentioned as a receptor, however no data collection was carried out at the school.

Examination of the EIAR

Chapter 10 addresses the impact on Air Quality and considers any direct or indirect effects arising from the proposed development. The chapter outlines the legislative and policy context, the baseline environment, the key characteristics of the proposed development, the potential effects, methodology used and sources of information.

The EIAR does not indicate if any particular difficulties were encountered in the preparation of this chapter of the EIAR.

The following Appendix is attached to Chapter 10:

- Appendix 10-A Methodology

Baseline

The proposed development is located in Air Quality Zone D-Rural Ireland. Claremorris monitoring station is also within Air Quality Zone D. Air Quality levels

(PM10 levels – particles less than 10 micrometres in diameter) for Claremorris monitoring station are set out in Table 10.7 of the EIAR.

Research findings from the institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) Guidance on the Assessment of Mineral Dust Impacts for Planning (2016) indicate that deposited dust typically does not disperse beyond 400m. There are approximately 18 residences within a 400m radius of the application site. The nearest receptor is located c. 121m from the proposed development application boundary to the northeast of the site (refer to Fig 10.3).

The quarry operates under the guidance of an Environmental Management Scheme (EMS) for the purpose of environmental management and control at the existing quarry. Dust monitoring using the Bergerhoff method has been undertaken over a number of years as part of the monitoring scheme under the current planning and the most recent version of the EMS.

Dust deposition monitoring is undertaken at 6 boundary locations of the quarry site. Monitoring results for 2023 and 2024 are shown in Table 10.8 of the EIAR. The results presented indicate that dust deposition rates were typically below the recommended Bergerhoff limit value of 350 mg/m²/day averaged over 30 days.

Potential Effects

The EIAR identifies the potential for a range of environmental effects on Air Quality. Likely significant effects of the development, as identified in the EIAR, are summarised in Table 5 below. Minor effects are not identified, except where there is potential for significant impact interactions, cumulative effects or where concerns have been expressed by parties to the application.

Table 5: Summary of Potential Effects

Project Phase	Potential Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects
Do Nothing	The existing quarry operations are to be maintained at existing levels. From an air quality perspective, no change in air quality is expected.
Construction	No construction phase as the site is already enabled.
Operation	Dust emissions from the following activities;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - blasting and extraction - Material Handling - Stockpiling - Haulage - Crushing and Screening <p>Emissions from Heavy Duty Vehicle Traffic (off-site)</p>
Decommissioning/ Restoration	Dust emissions from soil movement and heavy plant operations.
Unplanned Events	Not examined for this factor in the EIAR.
Cumulative	<p>No significant effects envisioned.</p> <p>Activities from the main quarry are considered including; processing activities, manufacturing and transport of material.</p> <p>There are two other small-scale quarries (c.1.5ha) located c.0.9km to the east and 1.9km to the northeast. Due to the low level of extraction, significant in-combination impacts associated with these developments are unlikely.</p>

Mitigation

Existing mitigation measures are noted including existing screening berms, hedgerows and trees and the topography of the land. Site-Specific Mitigation measures are set out in table 10-10 of the EIAR and they include minimising drop heights when handling materials, avoid working in adverse/windy conditions, minimising on-site haul distances, restricting speeds, using tarpaulin covered loads, use of water to dampen surfaces during dry weather, and the use of a road sweeper and wheel wash. Dust deposition monitoring will continue.

Residual Effects

Subject to adherence to appropriate mitigation measures and associated monitoring, the EIAR considered that any residual effects from the proposed development are not significant in terms of air quality.

Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and Indirect Effects

I have examined, analysed and evaluated Chapter 10 of the EIAR and all of the associated documentation and submissions on file in respect of air quality. I am satisfied that the information submitted in the EIAR adequately demonstrates an understanding of the potential risks, impacts and provides a suitably comprehensive range of mitigation and monitoring measures to reduce any potential impacts on air quality.

As outlined in the Baseline section Above, I note that the results of ongoing dust monitoring at the site that indicate that dust deposition rates were typically below the relevant limit value of 350 mg/m²/day averaged over 30 days.

Dust deposition from quarrying activities and emissions from plant and machinery are identified as being the main potential impacts on air quality. I note that the proposed development will not result in an increase in the extraction/ production rate at the site. Dust emissions from blasting and drilling are generally very low and localised, and the residual effect is not considered significant post mitigation. The inherent deepening of the quarry will also provide mitigation with a degree of natural shielding against the dispersion of dust emissions. The extraction, loading and transportation of material may also generate dust but, subject to the implementation of mitigation measures, the impacts are not considered significant. Exhaust emissions resulting from plant and vehicles operating directly at the application area or indirectly by transporting material from the application area to the main quarry have the potential to contribute to local pollution levels, however no significant changes to traffic movements, road alignment or speed are proposed, and this represents no change to the current situation.

All 18 residential residences within 400m of the site have been considered as receptors. Receptors to the east of the proposed development have been grouped (Group 1-3). Receptor 4 is an individual receptor to the southwest of the site. The risk of impact from dust emissions associated with the proposed development (without any mitigation measures in place) varies from slight adverse effect at group one and two and negligible effect at group three and receptor four. With the range of mitigation measures to be implemented and design measures to be incorporated into the working scheme, it is considered that the risk of dust impact at receptors from the proposed development reduces further.

In terms of cumulative impacts, the EIAR acknowledges that processing, manufacturing and transportation impacts also occur in the main quarry area. Processing activities will continue to take place in a relatively sheltered area of the main quarry, which is 375m from the nearest residence. There have been no significant impacts in the past and this is predicted to continue. The manufacturing of quarry-related materials is unlikely to lead to significant emissions as all materials are stored in bins, and the asphalt plant operates in accordance with an air emission license granted by Mayo County Council. The two other quarries within 2km of the site are unlikely to result in significant cumulative effects due to their limited scale.

The third-party queries why no monitoring data has been collected at Cong National School. As outlined in the baseline section, the Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) Guidance on the Assessment of Mineral Dust Impacts for Planning (2016) notes that research findings indicate that deposited dust typically does not disperse beyond 400m. I note that Cong National Catholic School is located c. 900m to the southeast of the site. Having regard to such separation, I do not consider that there will be any impact on the school.

The third party has also raised the issue of accessibility to monitoring data. I note that Section 10.122 states that the results of the dust monitoring are available for public inspection at the office of the quarry and can be submitted to Mayo County Council on request.

Having regard to the information submitted, I am satisfied that the potential for effects on surrounding residential properties from dust generated during the operational phase will not be significant and that suitable mitigation and monitoring arrangements will apply.

Conclusion

I have considered all of the written submissions and any specific points made in relation to air quality as well as the submitted application documentation. I am satisfied that any potential impacts would be avoided, managed and mitigated by the measures which form part of the design of the proposed development, the proposed mitigation measures, monitoring and through suitable conditions. I am therefore satisfied that the proposed development would not have any unacceptable direct, indirect or cumulative effects in terms of air quality.

9.14. Noise and Vibration

Issues Raised

The third party considers that monitoring locations should extend beyond the boundary of the quarry for vibration levels.

Examination of the EIAR

Chapter 11 addresses the impacts of Noise and Vibration and considers any direct or indirect effects arising from the proposed development. The chapter outlines the legislative and policy context, the baseline environment, the key characteristics of the proposed development, the potential effects, methodology used and sources of information.

The EIAR notes that no difficulties were encountered in the preparation of this chapter of the EIAR.

The following Appendices are attached to Chapter 11:

Appendix 1 – Calculations for trucking

Appendix 2 - Locations where historical vibration measurement were carried out

Appendix 3 – Noise Monitoring Report (September 2024 and January 2025)

Baseline

The existing quarry operated under planning conditions attached to Ref No. QD16QD0009 and ABP308748-20 which establishes noise limits of 55dBA for daytime (0700 to 1800 hours) and 45dBA at any other time. Planning conditions have also set vibration level limits from blasting ('peak particle velocity' limits of 12 to 8 mm per second and 'air over pressure' 125 dB (linear) maximum peak). Blasting is also limited to no more than 4 production blasts per month.

Existing sources of activity on the site are divided into six zones; Zone 1 - Blocking Plan, Zone 2 - Asphalt Plant, Zone 3 - Drying Shed, Zone 4 - Processing Plant, Zone 5 - Lime Plant and Zone 6 - the Quarry Face.

Noise monitoring is carried out during the year at a number of locations inside the site perimeter at locations closer to quarrying activity than to receptors. The noise monitoring locations (locations N1, N2 and N3) are considered representative of the

nearest noise sensitive locations. The noise monitoring reports (Appendix 3 of this chapter), provides results from noise monitoring at the site from September 2024 and January 2025. Noise levels have been shown to be less than the daytime limit of 55dBA at locations N1-N3.

Blast vibration monitoring is carried out for each blast. There have been a number of blasts carried out in the excavation area during the past 3 years. The maximum blast vibrations levels from 2021 to 2024 are provided and compliance with the vibration limits are demonstrated.

Potential Effects

The EIAR identifies the potential for a range of environmental effects from Noise and Vibration. Likely significant effects of the development, as identified in the EIAR, are summarised in Table 6 below. Minor effects are not identified, except where there is potential for significant impact interactions, cumulative effects or where concerns have been expressed by parties to the application.

Table 6: Summary of Potential Effects

Project Phase	Potential Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects
Do Nothing	The quarry would continue to operate until planning permission has expired and the life of the quarry would be reduced significantly.
Construction	No construction phase as the site is already enabled.
Operation	<p><u>Noise</u></p> <p>Quarry Extraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tracked drill rig for the drilling blast holes - Hitachi-850 Excavator - Hitachi 455 excavator rock breaking - Cat 775E Dump Truck - Dump truck on haulage <p>Existing Operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zone 1 – Blocking Plant - Zone 2 – Asphalt Plant

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zone 3 – Drying Shed - Zone 4 – Processing Plant - Zone 5 – Lime Plant <p><u>Vibration</u></p> <p>Effects from Blasting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Vibration - Air Blast (Air-Overpressure) Noise - Flyrock
Decommissioning/ Restoration	Decommissioning will be carried out during the working life of the quarry when equipment otherwise used for production will be utilised to carry out decommissioning in phases. No significant effects envisioned.
Unplanned Events	Not examined for this factor in the EIAR.
Cumulative	The cumulative effects of the proposed development and all existing operations within the quarry site are considered. The EIAR did not identify any notable applications, plans or projects that require cumulative consideration. The two other quarries located in the vicinity of the site (one located approximately 0.9km to east and another located 1.9km to the northeast) have not specifically been considered in this chapter. However given the separation distance and the limited scale of their operations, it is unlikely that these developments would result in any significant in-combination impacts. No significant effects envisioned.

Mitigation

Ameliorative Measures already in place for noise are set out on the Section following Section 11.35 of the EIAR. Measures that are already in place to minimise the generation and migration of noise include keeping main sources of noise below ground or within enclosed areas, using berms around the development area and the maintenance and management of operational plant to minimise noise. Mitigation measures for vibration are set out Section 11.54 of the EIAR and include planning

and monitoring blasts and employing methods such as proper stemming to reduce flyrock.

Residual Effects

Subject to adherence to appropriate mitigation measures and associated monitoring, the EIAR considered that any residual effects from the proposed development are not significant in terms of noise and vibration.

Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and Indirect Effects

I have examined, analysed and evaluated Chapter 11 of the EIAR and all of the associated documentation and submissions on file in respect of noise. I am satisfied that the information submitted in the EIAR adequately demonstrates an understanding of the potential risks, impacts and provides a suitably comprehensive range of mitigation and monitoring measures to reduce any potential impacts on surrounding sensitive noise receptors.

The noise monitoring results for the existing quarry operation have been reviewed with reference to the limits set out in the existing conditions of permission (i.e. 55 dBA for daytime and 45 dBA for other times). Monitoring results from September 2024 and January 2025 show that these noise limits have been complied with.

Day to day activities associated with blasting, extraction and transporting material in the application area have the potential to contribute to noise levels. These activities will be undertaken during the opening hours of the quarry and, therefore, the daytime limit of 55dB(A) is applied in the EIAR. The EIAR sets out predicted maximum noise levels from quarry extraction (Zone 6), based on all plant working together which in practice is unlikely to occur. The predicted noise levels are within the noise limits at all identified noise sensitive locations. The predicted noise impacts for existing operations within Zones 1 to 5 are also considered, with the cumulative noise levels (Zones 1-6) also predicted to be within noise limits for each of the noise sensitive locations.

The vibration limits set out in the previously attached conditions relate to 'peak particle velocity' (limits of 12 to 8 mm per second) and 'air over pressure' (125 dB (linear) maximum peak). Ground vibration monitoring is carried out for every blast at the subject quarry to ensure blast vibrations limits are being complied with.

Monitoring results from the Maximum Blast Vibrations for the years 2021-2024 show that 'peak particle velocity' results are generally well below the specified limits and that the 'air over pressure' limit has not been exceeded. I note existing conditions also limit blasting to no more than 4 times per month.

The third party has raised concerns about the monitoring locations within the quarry boundary. It is considered that when compliance is met at the nearest noise receptors within the site boundary, then it will be met at distance further away as noise levels decreases with distance from a source.

I consider that the monitoring results submitted demonstrate satisfactorily that, noise and vibration emissions associated with the existing quarry are consistently below the established limit values. The predicted noise impacts, both alone and cumulatively, have been adequately assessed and are predicted to be controlled within the established limits which are considered to remain appropriate. Blast vibration is predicted to remain at appropriate levels based on ongoing monitoring and existing blasting methods.

Conclusion

Having regard to the foregoing, I am satisfied that impacts predicted to arise in relation to noise and vibration would be minimal and can be managed and mitigated by the measures which form part of the proposed scheme, proposed mitigation measures, monitoring and through suitable conditions. I am, therefore, satisfied that the proposed development would not have any unacceptable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects in terms of noise and vibration.

9.15. Visual and Landscape

No issues have been raised by any party to the appeal/application in respect of Visual or Landscape Impacts. I have examined Chapter 12 of the EIAR which deals with Visual and Landscape Impacts. Having regard to submitted viewpoints, the location of the site within an existing quarry, the nature of the proposed development which relates to the deepening of the existing quarry and its restoration after use, and best practice mitigation measures, which include retaining the existing screening berms and enhancing vegetation along the perimeter of the site, I am satisfied that

there is no potential for any significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects on Visual/Landscape as a result of the proposed development.

9.16. Traffic

Issues Raised

The third party has queried the conclusion that the proposed development will have no impact on traffic in the village of Cong. It is also noted that Mayo County Council have published a public consultation process to develop plans for a relief road in Cong.

Examination of the EIAR

Chapter 13 addresses the impact on Traffic and Transport and considers any direct or indirect effects on this resource arising from the proposed development. The chapter outlines the legislative and policy context, the baseline environment, the key characteristics of the proposed development, the potential effects, methodology used and sources of information.

In terms of difficulties that were encountered in the preparation of this chapter of the EIAR, it is stated that the date of decommissioning the quarry was not known. It is envisaged that the extraction will continue at the quarry beyond the date of the final assessment year of 2050 under a new or subsequent application. The TII Project Appraisal Guidelines for National Roads Unit 5.3 - Travel Demand Projections does not project this far into the future. For this reason, the assessment of decommissioning has been compared to the Operational Phase throughout this chapter.

There are no appendices attached to Chapter 13, however a standalone Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) has been submitted.

Baseline

The site lies on the north side of the R345 Regional Road, within County Mayo. The quarry is accessed via a T-junction on the R345, between Cong and Clonbur, within County Galway. The speed limit along this section of the R345 is 80km/h.

The quarry is currently operational and utilises haul routes on the regional and national road network;

- To the west, the R345 links to the National Secondary Road N59 via Regional Roads (R300 and R336)
- To the east, the R345 links to the National Secondary Road N84 and National Road network via Regional Roads (R345 and R334)

A Junction Turning Count (JTC) survey was undertaken at the site access in May 2024. The result of the survey indicated that the peak traffic levels through the junction occur between 08:45-9:45 and 16:30-17:30. The existing traffic volumes during peak hours and during a 12-hour period are set out in Table 13-5. The junction operates within capacity.

Potential Effects

The EIAR identifies the potential for a range of environmental effects from traffic. Likely significant effects of the development, as identified in the EIAR, are summarised in Table 7 below. Minor effects are not identified, except where there is potential for significant impact interactions, cumulative effects or where concerns have been expressed by parties to the application.

Table 7: Summary of Potential Effects

Project Phase	Potential Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects
Do Nothing	The existing quarry operations would be maintained at existing levels until the existing permission ends.
Construction	There are no constructions works associated with this application as the site is already enabled.
Operation	The proposed project generated traffic is based on the existing traffic in operation as obtained for the traffic survey. Operational phase is based on; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cars for staff numbers at the existing quarry - Light vehicles for staff and material collection - Operational Heavy Vehicles (HV) No increase in traffic is proposed.
Decommissioning/ Restoration	Traffic will be less than the operational phase and for a shorter duration.

Unplanned Events	Incidents along haul routes, site access and within the quarry.
Cumulative	The baseline traffic counts capture the existing traffic levels. Any increase in traffic over the period considered will be accounted for in the baseflow central growth factors. The EIAR did not identify any notable applications, plans or projects that require cumulative consideration. No significant effects envisioned.

Mitigation

Mitigation measures are provided in Section 13.6 of the EIAR. Operational mitigation measures include sufficient car parking on-site, traffic-related layout design, signage, load covers and the existing wheel wash. Decommissioning measures also include sufficient car parking and sourcing materials and plants to reduce impact on the road network and environment.

Residual Effects

Subject to adherence to appropriate mitigation measures, the EIAR considered that any residual effects from the normal operational phases and decommissioning phase of the proposed development are not significant in terms of traffic.

Analysis, Evaluation and Assessment: Direct and Indirect Effects

I have examined, analysed and evaluated the information provided in Chapter 13 and all the associated documents and submissions on file in respect of Traffic and Transportation. I am satisfied that the information submitted in the EIAR adequately demonstrates an understanding of the potential impacts that the proposed development could have on the surrounding area in terms of traffic.

The traffic count at the site entrance has determined the current operational traffic of the site to comprise 66 car arrivals with 84 departures, 20 light vehicle arrivals with 22 departures, and 65 heavy vehicle arrivals with 62 departures. The Junction 10 PICADY assessment of the existing site entrance is provided in Table 13-7 of the EIAR. The analysis demonstrated that the access junction will operate within capacity, with a max RFC (Ratio of Flow to Capacity) Value of 0.11 (i.e. with development) encountered at the junction well below the maximum desired RFC of 0.85. No increase in traffic has been proposed as part of the proposed development.

Therefore, the two scenarios analysed (i.e. as existing, and with the proposed development) present the same results. The analysis indicates that there will be no queues and minimal delays. I note traffic distribution details are provided in the standalone Traffic and Transport Assessment with 83% of traffic travelling in the direction of Cong village upon leaving the site. It has also been assumed that the existing distribution of traffic generated by the quarry through the existing access will remain the same in future years. I am satisfied that the impacts that are predicted to arise in relation to traffic are acceptable having regard to existing traffic counts and distribution.

Unplanned events have been considered, and it is noted that in the event of an accident, emergency services protocols would be followed, and diversion routes would be set up.

The EIAR identifies existing and proposed mitigation measures including parking provision, traffic-related layout design and signage, etc., and concludes that the proposed development will have an imperceptible effect on the existing access and the wider road network. I consider that the application clearly outlines the existing traffic conditions at the site and reasonably predicts that the impact of the proposed development and wider traffic growth will not result in a cumulative adverse impact on traffic.

I note that Transport Infrastructure Ireland have confirmed that they have no comments to make regarding the proposed development. I note the third party's comments in relation to the Cong Relief Road. I note from the Mayo County Council website that the Council are currently at 'Phase 2 – Options Selection' in the Cong Relief Road. I note Mayo County Council had no observations in this regard. There is no demonstrated requirement for such relief road to facilitate this development.

Conclusion

I have considered all of the written submissions, and any specific points made in relation to traffic as well as the submitted application documentation. Having regard to the available capacity of the site access and road network, I am satisfied that the potential for effects on traffic during the operational and decommissioning phases can be avoided, managed and mitigated by measures that form part of the proposed scheme and proposed mitigation. I am therefore satisfied that the proposed

development would not have any unacceptable direct, indirect or cumulative effects in terms of traffic.

9.17. Heritage

No issues have been raised by any party to the appeal/application in respect of Heritage. I have examined Chapter 14 of the EIAR which deals with Archaeology and Cultural Heritage. Having regard to the studies, survey work and excavations carried out, with no evidence of cultural heritage, monuments or buildings of heritage interest within the application area or vicinity, I am satisfied that there is no potential for any significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects on heritage as a result of the proposed development.

9.18. Material Assets

No issues have been raised by any party to the appeal/application in respect of material assets. I have examined Chapter 15 of the EIAR which deals with this topic. Having regard to the location of the site in rural environment, the absence of built services that will be impacted on by the proposed development, and standard arrangements for the management of waste, I am satisfied that there is no potential for any significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects on material assets as a result of the proposed development.

9.19. Interactions and combined effects

Chapter 16 of the EIAR addresses interaction of impacts with a matrix provided in Table 16-1. I would agree that the most notable interactions pertain to population and human health with other interactions between air, noise, landscape and traffic.

I have considered the interrelationships between factors and whether these might, as a whole, affect the environment, even though the effects may be acceptable when considered on an individual basis. In my assessment of each environmental topic, I have considered the likelihood of significant effects arising as a consequence of interrelationship between factors. Most interactions, e.g. the impact of noise and air quality on the population and human health, are addressed under individual topic headings. Given the significance and probability of the effects which are predicted to

occur and having regard to the nature of the proposed development, mitigation measures, or as a consequence of proposed conditions, I do not foresee any likelihood of any of these interrelationships giving rise to significant effects on the environment.

I have considered the interrelationships between factors and whether these might as a whole affect the environment, even though the effects may be acceptable on an individual basis. In conclusion, having considered the mitigation measures in place, I am satisfied that no residual risk of significant negative interaction between any of the disciplines was identified and no further mitigation measures are required.

9.20. Cumulative Impacts

Given the scale and nature of nearby residential and rural development there is no potential for these minor developments to create in-combination impacts with the proposed development. The cumulative assessment has had regard to the existing quarry operations and the existing manufacturing operations on site. There are two other quarries located in the vicinity of the site with one located approximately 0.9km to east and another located 1.9km to the northeast. Both quarries are in the region of 1.5 hectares in area and are subject to rock extraction and processing on a small-scale basis. Given the limited scale of their operations, it is unlikely that these developments would result in any significant in-combination impacts with the proposed quarry deepening. No other planning applications have been submitted to Mayo County Council in the passing of time since the submission of the application that warrant noting. The proposed development has been considered cumulatively with other plans and projects in the preceding sections of this report. The proposed development will not result in any significant residual effects and will not contribute to any cumulative effect when considered in combination with other plans and projects.

9.21. Reasoned Conclusions on the Significant Effects

Having regard to the examination of environmental information contained above, and in particular to the EIAR and supplementary information provided by the developer, and the submission from the planning authority, prescribed bodies, appellants, and observers in the course of the application, it is considered that the main significant

direct and indirect effects of the proposed development on the environment with the implementation of the proposed mitigation measures are as follows;

- **Population and Human Health:** The potential for significant effects on human health from noise and vibration, air quality (dust) during the operational phases can be avoided, managed and mitigated by measures that form part of the proposed scheme, by the mitigation measures proposed, and the conditions set out below as well as compliance with other regulatory obligations. The quarry will continue to provide local employment with neutral direct impacts for population arising.
- **Lands, Soils and Geology:** Site investigations indicate that the bedrock is solid and virtually impermeable, with no evidence of subterranean karst features or water bearing conduits. Given the nature of the proposed development, significant impacts will arise in terms of the loss of bedrock due to the proposed continuation of extraction activity. The site will be returned to a natural habitat upon the cessation of quarrying activities. Significant positive impacts arise through the supply of aggregates for the construction industry. Adequate mitigation measures have been outlined to prevent fuel/contaminant leaks into the rock and to prevent slope failures.
- **Water:** Negative effects on surface water and ground water as a result of contamination from quarrying activities, blasting and machinery use can be adequately mitigated by measures outlined in the application. The site will operate under a Section 4 Discharge License and discharges to the Cong Canal which is recorded as 'good status' and 'not at risk'. The proposed development will not impede the ability of surface waters to achieve good or high status with regards to the Water Framework Directive.
- **Air and Climate:** Dust deposition and emissions from plant and machinery are identified as being the main potential impacts on air quality and climate. The potential impacts of dust would be mitigated by measures, to achieve adherence to the appropriate emission limit value, the existing topography and screening berms and the use of a wheel wash. The effect of the proposed development on global carbon concentrations will be insignificant. It is

concluded there is no potential for significant adverse environmental effects on air and climate.

I am therefore satisfied that the proposed development would not have any unacceptable direct or indirect effects on the environment.

10.0 AA Screening

Refer to Appendix 2 of this report for Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination. In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the information considered in this AA screening, I conclude that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to give rise to significant effects on the Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (Site Code: 001774); Lough Corrib SAC (Site Code: 000297); Lough Corrib SPA (Site Code: 004042); Lough Mask SPA (Site Code: 004062); Ballymaglancy Cave Cong SAC (Site Code: 000474); or any European Site, in view of the conservation objectives of these sites and is therefore excluded from further consideration. Appropriate Assessment is not required.

This determination is based on:

- The nature of the works within an existing quarry and separation from relevant European Sites.
- Scientific information provided in the Screening Report
- The absence of ex-situ impacts on wintering birds

Possible impacts identified would not be significant in terms of site-specific conservation objectives for the Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC, Lough Corrib SAC, Lough Corrib SPA, Lough Mask SPA or Ballymaglancy Cave Cong SAC and would not undermine the maintenance of favorable conservation condition or delay or undermine the achievement of restoring favorable conservation status for those qualifying interest features of unfavorable conservation status.

No mitigation measures aimed at avoiding or reducing impacts on European sites were required to be considered in reaching this conclusion.

11.0 Recommendation

I recommend that planning permission should be granted, subject to conditions.

A summary of my consideration of the planning authority's environmental conditions is included in Appendix 3.

12.0 Reasons and Considerations

12.1.1. In coming to its decision, the Commission had regard to;

- (a) The nature, scale and extent of the proposed development
- (b) The pattern of development in the area
- (c) The national, regional and local policy provisions for the proposed development including;
 - National Planning Framework First Revision 2025
 - National Development Plan Review 2025
 - Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021
 - Climate Action Plan, 2025
 - European Union Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC (WFD)
 - Quarries and Ancillary Activities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2004
 - Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry, Environmental Protection Agency, 2006
 - Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028
- (d) The documentation and drawings submitted within the application, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and Appropriate Assessment Screening Report.
- (e) The submissions on file, including those from prescribed bodies, the local authority and third parties.
- (f) The report of the inspector.

Environmental Impact Assessment

The Commission completed an environmental impact assessment of the proposed development taking account of;

- i. the nature, scale and extent of the proposed development,
- ii. the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and associated documentation submitted in support of the application,
- iii. the submissions made in the course of the application; and
- iv. the inspector's report.

The Commission considered that the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, supported by the documentation submitted by the applicant, adequately considers alternatives to the proposed development and identifies and describes adequately the direct, indirect, secondary and cumulative effects of the proposed development on the environment.

The Commission agreed with the examination, set out in the inspector's report, of the information contained in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and associated documentation submitted by the applicant and submissions made in the course of the application.

The Commission considered, and agreed with the inspector's reasoned conclusions, that the main significant direct and indirect effects of the proposed development on the environment are as follows:

- **Population and Human Health:** The potential for significant effects on human health from noise and vibration, air quality (dust) during the operational phases can be avoided, managed and mitigated by measures that form part of the proposed scheme, by the mitigation measures proposed, and the conditions set out below as well as compliance with other regulatory obligations. The quarry will continue to provide local employment with neutral direct impacts for population arising.
- **Lands, Soils and Geology:** Site investigations indicate that the bedrock is solid and virtually impermeable, with no evidence of subterranean karst features or water bearing conduits. Given the nature of the proposed development, significant impacts will arise in terms of the loss of bedrock due to the proposed continuation of extraction activity. The site will be returned to

a natural habitat upon the cessation of quarrying activities. Significant positive impacts arise through the supply of aggregates for the construction industry. Adequate mitigation measures have been outlined to prevent fuel/contaminant leaks into the rock and to prevent slope failures.

- **Water:** Negative effects on surface water and ground water as a result of contamination from quarrying activities, blasting and machinery use can be adequately mitigated by measures outlined in the application. The site will operate under a Section 4 Discharge License and discharges to the Cong Canal which is recorded as 'good status' and 'not at risk'. The proposed development will not impede the ability of surface waters to achieve good or high status with regards to the Water Framework Directive.
- **Air and Climate:** Dust deposition and emissions from plant and machinery are identified as being the main potential impacts on air quality and climate. The potential impacts of dust would be mitigated by measures, to achieve adherence to the appropriate emission limit value, the existing topography and screening berms and the use of a wheel wash. The effect of the proposed development on global carbon concentrations will be insignificant. It is concluded there is no potential for significant adverse environmental effects on air and climate.

Appropriate Assessment Stage 1

In completing the screening for Appropriate Assessment, the Commission accepted and adopted the screening assessment and conclusions reached in the inspector's report. This assessment identified the relevant European Sites that could potentially be affected by the proposed development and evaluated the potential for likely significant effects, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on these sites, in view of the sites' conservation objectives. The Commission is satisfied that the proposed development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, would not be likely to have a significant effect on any European Site, in view of the sites' conservation objectives.

Proper Planning and Sustainable Development

Having regard to the nature, scale and extent of the proposed development which comprises the proposed continued extraction within an existing quarry site, it is

considered that subject to compliance with the conditions set out below the proposed development, would not have an unacceptable impact on water quality, traffic, visual amenity or residential amenity and would constitute an acceptable form of development in this location. It is considered that the proposed development would accord with national, regional and local planning policy 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.

Climate and Low Carbon Development Act and Climate Action Plan

The Commission performed its functions in relation to the making of its decision, in a manner consistent with Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Act 2015, as amended by Section 17 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, (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).

13.0 Conditions

1. The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application on the 31st January 2025, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. This grant of permission shall be for a period of 25 years from the date of this order. Restoration shall be completed within a further two years, unless a permission for further quarrying has been received prior to the expiry of this permission.

Reason: Having regard to the scale of the quarry and its environmentally

sensitive location, it is considered reasonable to require the acceptability of continued quarrying to be reconsidered at this time having regard to the circumstances then pertaining.

3. The mitigation measures contained in the submitted Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), shall be implemented.

Reason: To protect the environment.

4. This grant of permission authorises extraction within the application area to a maximum depth of -12 metre Ordnance Datum. The developer shall comply with the following:

- a) Prior to commencement of development, a benchmark shall be established on site as a reference point from which all levels shall be taken. Details of the location and construction of the benchmark shall be agreed in writing with the planning authority.

- b) A topographical survey shall be submitted to the planning authority on an annual basis, beginning before the commencement of works on site.

Reason: In the interest of clarity and to allow for the appropriate monitoring of activity.

5. The quarry, and all activities occurring therein, shall operate only between 0700 hours to 1800 hours, Mondays to Saturdays inclusive. No activity shall take place outside these hours or on Sundays or public holidays. Where market conditions or the nature of particular ancillary processes require greater flexibility of working hours, these times may be adjusted following the written agreement of the planning authority.

Reason: To protect the residential amenities of property in the vicinity.

6. The frequency of the blasting operation on the entire quarry shall be limited to not more than four production blasts per month. Blasting shall take place between 1000 hours and 1600 hours from Monday to Friday only. Monitoring of the noise and vibration arising from the blasting shall be carried out at the developer's expense by an independent contractor to be agreed in writing with the planning authority. All monitoring records shall be made publicly available. A protocol for alerting neighbouring residents of each blast shall be agreed in

writing with the Planning Authority.

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

7. (a) Vibration levels from blasting operations shall not exceed a peak particle velocity of 12 millimetres per second when measured at any three mutually orthogonal directions. The peak particle velocity relates to low frequency vibration of less than 40 hertz where blasting occurs no more than once in seven continuous days. Where blasting operations are more frequent, the peak particle velocity limit is reduced to 8 millimetres per second. The air overpressure from any blast shall not exceed a value of 125 dB (Lin) maximum peak with a 95% confidence limit. No individual air overpressure value shall exceed the limit value by more than 5 dB (Lin).

(b) A monitoring programme, which shall include reviews to be undertaken at annual intervals, shall be developed to assess the impact of quarry blasts. Details of this programme shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of any quarrying works on the site. This programme shall be undertaken by a suitably qualified person acceptable to the planning authority. The results of the reviews shall be submitted to the planning authority within two weeks of completion. The developer shall carry out any amendments to the programme required by the planning authority following this annual review.

Reason: In the interest of public safety and to protect residential amenity.

8. During the operational phase of the proposed development, the noise level from within the boundaries of the site measured at noise sensitive locations in the vicinity, shall not exceed- (a) An LArT value of 55 dB(A) during 0700 to 1800 hours. The T value shall be one hour. (b) An LAeqT value of 45 dB(A) at any other time. The T value shall be 15 minutes.

Reason: To protect the residential amenities of property in the vicinity.

9. (a) The total dust emissions arising from on-site operations shall not exceed 350 milligrams per square metre per day averaged over a continuous period of 30 days (Bergerhoff Gauge) when measured as deposition of insoluble and insoluble particulate matter at any position on the boundary of the quarry.

(b) A monthly survey and monitoring programme of dust and particulate emissions shall be undertaken to provide for compliance with these limits. Details of this programme, including the location of dust monitoring stations, and details of dust suppression measures to be carried out within the entire quarry complex, shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of any quarrying works on the site. This programme shall include an annual review of all dust monitoring data, to be undertaken by a suitably qualified person acceptable to the planning authority. The results of the reviews shall be submitted to the planning authority within two weeks of completion. The developer shall carry out any amendments to the programme required by the planning authority following this annual review.

Reason: To control dust emissions arising from the development and in the interest of the amenity of the area

10. The disposal of surface water shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works and services.

Reason: in the interest of sustainable drainage.

11. The development shall be operated and managed in accordance with a revised Environmental Management System (EMS), updated to take account of works proposed as part of this application, which shall be submitted by the developer to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of development. This shall include the following:

(a) Proposals for the suppression of on-site noise.

(b) Proposals for the on-going monitoring of sound emissions at noise sensitive locations in the vicinity.

(c) Proposals for the suppression and monitoring of dust at prior agreed locations, on site and on the access road.

(d) All fuels and lubrication shall be stored in fully bunded storage areas and proposals to deal with accidental spillage shall be submitted to the Planning Authority.

- (e) Details of safety measures for the land above the quarry, to include warning signs and stock proof fencing.
- (f) Management of all landscaping with particular reference to enhancing the ecological value of the woodland/grassland on the bunds and buffer areas.
- (g) Specification of limits in relation to the following parameters or as deemed relevant: Dust, Noise, Groundwaters, Surface waters.
- (h) Monitoring of ground and surface water quality, levels and discharges.
- (i) Details of site manager, contact numbers (including out of hours) and public information signs at the entrance to the facility.
- (j) Monitoring of Noise levels at identified noise sensitive locations

Reason: In order to safeguard local amenities

12. A comprehensive plan for the restoration of the entire quarry following the cessation of quarrying works shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority within six months from the date of this order. This plan shall include proposals for re-use of the quarry and measures to ensure public safety therein. The developer shall commence implementation of the agreed site restoration plan within the area of the site within one month of cessation of extraction in this area and shall have completed this part of the plan within 2 years of commencement.

Reason: In the interest of public amenity and public safety.

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

An Coimisiún Pleanála to determine the proper application of the terms of the Scheme.

Reason: It is a requirement of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, that a condition requiring a contribution in accordance with the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Act be applied to the permission.

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.

Ciara McGuinness
Planning Inspector

26th September 2025

Appendix 1 – WFD IMPACT ASSESSMENT STAGE 1: SCREENING

WFD IMPACT ASSESSMENT STAGE 1: SCREENING			
Step 1: Nature of the Project, the Site and Locality			
An Coimisiún Pleanála ref. no.	322336-25	Townland, address	Cregaree, Cong, Co. Mayo.
Description of project		The development will consist of the deepening of 19 ha. of the existing permitted quarry extraction area (Plan File Ref. No. 20/77: ABP-308748-20 & Plan File Ref. No. PL16.SU0132: QD16.QD0009). The applicant is seeking a 25-year permission. This planning application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report.	
Brief site description, relevant to WFD Screening,		The site is an existing quarry. Site investigations indicate that the bedrock is solid and virtually impermeable, with no evidence of subterranean karst features or water bearing conduits. The Cong Canal flows along the eastern boundary of the quarry landholding. The Cong Canal is the hydrological connector between Lough Mask and Lough Corrib.	
Proposed surface water details		The following existing water management proposals are in place; Water is discharged from the floor sump and pumped to a concrete settlement system before being discharged to the Cong Canal. The site is permitted to discharge a maximum of 10,000m ³ /d to the Cong Canal, which is the licensed receiver of the site's discharge. The Cong Canal flows along the eastern boundary of the site. The Cong Canal is the hydrological connector between	

	Lough Mask and Lough Corrib. The licence was granted, in review, in 2019 to accommodate waters arising over the entire landholding of the site and from the contributing lands.
Proposed water supply source & available capacity	Not applicable
Proposed wastewater treatment system & available capacity, other issues	Existing wastewater management systems in place (on-site WWTP and discharge area)
Others?	Not applicable

Step 2: Identification of relevant water bodies and Step 3: S-P-R connection

Identified water body	Distance to (m)	Water body name(s) (code)	WFD Status	Risk of not achieving WFD Objective e.g.at risk, review, not at risk	Identified pressures on that water body	Pathway linkage to water feature (e.g. surface run-off, drainage, groundwater)
River Waterbody	c.100m	Cong Canal_010	Good	Not at risk	No pressures	Section 4 License to discharge treated

							water to the Cong Canal
Groundwater waterbody	Underlying site	Cong-Robe IE_WE_G_0019	Good	At risk	Unknown, Ag		Bedrock is solid and virtually impermeable. No evidence of subterranean karst features or water bearing conduits.
Step 4: Detailed description of any component of the development or activity that may cause a risk of not achieving the WFD Objectives having regard to the S-P-R linkage.							
CONSTRUCTION PHASE							
No.	Component	Water body receptor (EPA Code)	Pathway (existing and new)	Potential for impact/ what is the possible impact	Screening Stage Mitigation Measure*	Residual Risk (yes/no) Detail	Determination** to proceed to Stage 2. Is there a risk to the water environment? (if 'screened' in or 'uncertain' proceed to Stage 2.
1.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
OPERATIONAL PHASE							

2.	Surface	Cong Canal_010	Existing discharge	Siltation, hydrocarbon spillages, Nitrogen residues	Standard construction practices, Existing surface water management systems and adherence to S.4 license	No	Screened out
3.	Ground	Cong-Robe IE_WE_G_0019	None	Spillages, nitrogen residue. (No potential for dewatering impacts)	Standard construction practices, pollution controls, fuel storage etc.	No	Screened out
DECOMMISSIONING PHASE							
4.	Surface	Cong Canal_010	None	None	None	No	Screened out
5.	Ground	Cong-Robe IE_WE_G_0019	None	None	None	No	Screened out

Appendix 2 - AA Screening Determination

Screening for Appropriate Assessment Test for likely significant effects	
Step 1: Description of the project and local site characteristics	
Brief description of project	The development will consist of the deepening of 19 ha. of the existing permitted quarry extraction area (Plan File Ref. No. 20/77: ABP-308748-20 & Plan File Ref. No. PL16.SU0132: QD16.QD0009).
Brief description of development site characteristics and potential impact mechanisms	<p>A detailed description of the proposed development is provided in Section 2 of this report, and detailed specifications of the proposed development area are provided in the AA Screening Report and other planning documents provided by the applicant.</p> <p>The existing operational limestone quarry covers an area of approximately 62.45 hectares (ha). The application site for the proposed deepening of the existing quarry covers approximately 19ha in the northern section of the overall existing and consented operational quarry.</p> <p>Lough Mask which is located to the north of the site and Lough Corrib which is located to the south of the site form the dominant landscape features in the area with the quarry lying between these two large waterbodies. The quarry is located adjacent a section of the Cong Canal that connects these two lakes.</p> <p>Existing surface water management systems will be used to serve the proposed development. Incidental rainfall and groundwater seepages entering the proposed quarry are directed to a sump in the floor of the existing quarry. Water is then pumped to an existing concrete settlement lagoon, to allow the settlement of suspended solids. Treated effluent is discharged from the settlement lagoon to the Cong Canal under discharge licence W391/05 R1 issued by Galway County Council in 2019.</p>
Screening report	Yes (prepared by Green and Blue Ecology)
Natura Impact Statement	No
Relevant submissions	N/A

The existing quarrying operations incorporating the project site are permitted development authorised by way of a substitute consent application (Reference PL 16.SU0132) and a 37L application (Reference QD 16.QD0009) granted by An Coimisiún Pleanála (Area B) and under a Section 34 Application (Plan Ref. File No. 20/77/ ABP Ref: ABP-308748-20) (Area C) granted for the extraction of material to 5mOD.

I note that an NIS was submitted with all of the above applications. In the most recent decision (ABP-308748-20), the Commission completed an appropriate assessment of the impacts of the development on nearby Natura 2000 sites, specifically the Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (Site Code: 001774); Lough Corrib SAC (Site Code: 000297); Lough Corrib SPA (Site Code: 004042); Ballymaglancy Cave Cong SAC (Site Code: 000474); Kildun Souterrain SAC (Site Code: 002320). They were satisfied that subject to the implementation of the identified mitigation measures and on the basis of the information available, the development, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, would not have adversely affected and is not adversely affecting the integrity of any Natura site, having regard to the conservation objectives of those sites.

This AA Screening document examines the current proposal, namely the deepening of part of the existing quarry from 5m OD to -12m OD within the existing permitted quarry footprint.

Step 2. Identification of relevant European sites using the Source-pathway-receptor model

Five European sites were identified as being located within a potential zone of influence of the proposed development as detailed in Table 1 below. I note that the applicant included a greater number of European sites in their initial screening consideration, with sites within 15km of the development site considered.

The following sites have been excluded given separation distances, the intervening lands and the lack of impact pathways;

- Kildun Souterrain SAC
- Clyard Kettle-Holes SAC
- Mocarha Lough SAC
- Cloughmoyne SAC
- Shrute Turlough SAC
- Lough Carra SPA
- Skealaghan Turlough SAC
- Ardkill Turlough SAC
- Kilglass/Cahevavoostia Turlough Complex SAC
- Connemara Bog Complex SAC

I have only included those sites with any possible ecological connection or pathway in this screening determination.

European Site (code)	Qualifying interests ¹ Link to conservation objectives (NPWS, date)	Distance from proposed development (km)	Ecological connections ²	Consider further in screening ³ Y/N
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Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (001774)	CO001774.pdf	1.1km	Potential pathway	Y
Lough Corrib SAC (000297)	ConservationObjectives.rdl	1.7km	Potential pathway	Y
Lough Corrib SPA (004042)	CO004042.pdf	1.7km	Potential pathway	Y
Lough Mask SPA (004062)	CO004062.pdf	2.2km	Potential pathway	Y
Ballymaglancy Cave, Cong SAC (000474)	ConservationObjectives.rdl	2.5km	Potential pathway	Y

Step 3. Describe the likely effects of the project (if any, alone or in combination) on European Sites

AA Screening matrix

Site name Qualifying interests	Possibility of significant effects (alone) in view of the conservation objectives of the site*	
	Impacts	Effects
<p>Site 1: Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (001774)</p> <p>Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) [3110]</p> <p>Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or Isoeto-Nanojuncetea [3130]</p> <p>Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. [3140]</p> <p>European dry heaths [4030]</p> <p>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]</p>	<p>Direct: No Direct impacts and risk of habitat loss fragmentation or any other direct impact.</p> <p>Indirect: Disturbance (ie. Noise, vibration and visual disturbance) Lighting Dust deposition Alteration to the hydrological and hydrogeological regimes Changes in ground and surface water quality</p>	<p>There are no known lesser horseshoe bat roost sites within the potential zone of influence of disturbance from the proposed project. There are no changes to current operation hours, no expansion of footprint or loss of foraging habitat. Quarrying operations are not predicted to generate noise and vibration during periods when bats are foraging and commuting and therefore there is no likely significant effect on lesser horseshoe bat. Based on the predicted noise levels (below 55dB) and the large berm running along the eastern boundary of the quarry site (separating the site from the Cong Canal) no likely significant effects are predicted on otters from disturbance generated by the deepening of the quarry.</p> <p>The deepening of the quarry will not result in any significant increase in light levels. No effects are predicted on the ability of lesser horseshoe bat to forage and commute within the area</p>

<p>Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [7210]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]</p> <p><i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p> <p><i>Hamatocaulis vernicosus</i> (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]</p>		<p>immediately surrounding the quarry site.</p> <p>The deepening of the quarry is not predicted to result in any increase in dust deposition. Dust deposition is not predicted to be at levels where any potential foraging habitat or its associated invertebrate assemblage, with the potential to provide prey for lesser horseshoe bat, will be adversely affected. Therefore, the deposition of dust is not predicted to have any likely significant effects on lesser horseshoe bat.</p> <p>The quarrying operations at the existing quarry have not resulted in any groundwater strikes and none are anticipated to be encountered by the deepening of the quarry to -12mOD. The deepening of the existing quarry will have no effects on the hydrology of Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC.</p>
	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No	
	If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No	
	Impacts	Effects
<p>Site 2: Lough Corrib SAC (000297)</p> <p>Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (<i>Littorelletalia uniflorae</i>) [3110]</p> <p>Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the <i>Littorelletea uniflorae</i> and/or <i>Isoeto-Nanojuncetea</i> [3130]</p> <p>Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. [3140]</p> <p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the</p>	<p>Direct: No Direct impacts and risk of habitat loss fragmentation or any other direct impact.</p> <p>Indirect: Disturbance (ie. Noise, vibration and visual disturbance) Lighting Dust deposition Alteration to the hydrological and hydrogeological regimes Changes in ground and surface water quality</p>	<p>Quarrying operations are not predicted to generate noise and vibration during periods when bats are foraging and commuting and therefore there is no likely significant effect on lesser horseshoe bat. Based on noise levels from the deepening of the quarry predicted to be below 55dB and that the Cong Canal is screened from the quarry by an existing large berm running along the eastern boundary of the quarry site no likely significant effects are predicted on otters from disturbance generated by the deepening of the quarry.</p> <p>The deepening of the quarry will not result in any significant increase in light levels. There will be no overspill</p>

<p>Ranunculon fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260]</p> <p>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]</p> <p>Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) [6410]</p> <p>Active raised bogs [7110]</p> <p>Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]</p> <p>Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]</p> <p>Calcareous fens with Cladium mariscus and species of the Caricion davallianae [7210]</p> <p>Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p>Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0]</p> <p>Bog woodland [91D0]</p> <p>Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</p> <p>Austropotamobius pallipes (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]</p> <p>Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</p> <p>Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</p> <p>Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106]</p>		<p>of light to adjacent foraging/commuting habitats. No effect predicted on the ability of lesser horseshoe bat to forage and commute within the area immediately surrounding the quarry site.</p> <p>The deepening of the quarry is not predicted to result in any increase in dust deposition from the quarrying operations. No effects are predicted on the structure and plant communities within the zone of influence. Dust deposition levels are not predicted to be at levels where any potential foraging habitat or its associated invertebrate assemblage, with the potential to provide prey for lesser horseshoe bat, will be adversely affected. Therefore, the deposition of dust is not predicted to have any likely significant effects on lesser horseshoe bats.</p> <p>The quarry has not encountered any groundwater strikes and none are anticipated through the deepening of the quarry. The deepening of the quarry will not require any changes to the Discharge Licence for the volume of water consented for discharged to the Cong Canal. The deepening of the existing quarry will have no effects on the hydrology of Lough Corrib SAC.</p> <p>Based on current baseline environmental conditions of the surface waters of the Cong Canal and Lough Corrib the existing quarry operations have not resulted in any significant deterioration in water quality or in the WFD status of these waterbodies or in groundwater body status and the interaction between ground and surface waters in Lough Corrib. The proposed deepening of the existing quarry is not predicted to cause a deterioration in groundwater or surface water quality. The</p>
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<p>Rhinolophus hipposideros (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p> <p>Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]</p> <p>Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]</p> <p>Hamatocaulis vernicosus (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]</p>		<p>restoration of the site to natural habitats is not predicted to result in any negative effects on groundwater quality or have a detrimental effect on the status of any surface waterbody.</p>
	<p>Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No</p>	
	<p>If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No</p>	
	<p>Impacts</p>	<p>Effects</p>
<p>Site 3: Lough Corrib SPA (004042)</p> <p>Pochard (Aythya ferina) [A059]</p> <p>Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula) [A061]</p> <p>Common Scoter (Melanitta nigra) [A065]</p> <p>Hen Harrier (Circus cyaneus) [A082]</p> <p>Coot (Fulica atra) [A125]</p> <p>Golden Plover (Pluvialis apricaria) [A140]</p> <p>Black-headed Gull (Chroicocephalus ridibundus) [A179]</p> <p>Common Gull (Larus canus) [A182]</p> <p>Common Tern (Sterna hirundo) [A193]</p> <p>Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea) [A194]</p> <p>Greenland White-fronted Goose (Anser albifrons flavirostris) [A395]</p> <p>Shoveler (Spatula clypeata) [A857]</p> <p>Gadwall (Mareca strepera) [A889]</p>	<p>Direct: No Direct impacts and risk of habitat loss fragmentation or any other direct impact.</p> <p>Indirect: Disturbance (ie. Noise, vibration and visual disturbance) Dust deposition Alteration to the hydrological and hydrogeological regimes Changes in ground and surface water quality</p>	<p>Qualifying birds which use adjacent lands or have flight paths over the site are likely to be habituated to disturbance generated by quarrying activities. No significant effects are predicted by the proposed deepening of the quarry.</p> <p>The levels of potential dust deposition on grassland habitats within the wider surrounding areas of the quarry site will not be at levels where grasses will be impacted. No likely significant effects predicted on any of the qualifying bird species.</p> <p>As described above for Lough Corrib, the deepening of the existing quarry will not affect the hydrology of Lough Corrib and therefore will have no effects the Lough Corrib SPA wetland habitats and any of its qualifying birds species.</p> <p>Based on current baseline environmental conditions of the surface waters of the Cong Canal and Lough Corrib the existing quarry operations have not resulted in any significant deterioration in water quality or in the WFD status of these waterbodies or in groundwater body status and the interaction between ground and surface waters in Lough Corrib. The proposed deepening of</p>

Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]		the existing is not predicted to cause a deterioration in groundwater or surface water quality. The restoration of the site to natural habitats is not predicted to result in any negative effects on groundwater quality or would have a detrimental effect on the status of any surface waterbody.
	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No	
	If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No	
	Impacts	Effects
Site 4: Lough Mask SPA (004062) Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) [A061] Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179] Common Gull (<i>Larus canus</i>) [A182] Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>) [A183] Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193] Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) [A395] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	Direct: No Direct impacts and risk of habitat loss fragmentation or any other direct impact. Indirect: Disturbance (ie. Noise, vibration and visual disturbance) Dust deposition Alteration to the hydrological and hydrogeological regimes	Qualifying birds which use adjacent lands or have flight paths over the site are likely to be habituated to disturbance generated by quarrying activities. No significant effects are predicted by the proposed deepening of the quarry. The levels of potential dust deposition on grassland habitats within the wider surrounding areas of the quarry site will not be at levels where grasses will be impacted. No likely significant ex-situ effects predicted on any of the qualifying bird species. As described above for Carra/Mask Complex SAC, the deepening of the existing quarry will not affect the hydrology of Lough Corrib and therefore will have no effects the Lough Corrib SPA wetland habitats and any of its qualifying birds species.
	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No	
	If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No	
	Impacts	Effects
Site 5: Ballymaglancy Cave, Cong SAC (000474) Caves not open to the public [8310]	Direct: No Direct impacts and risk of habitat loss fragmentation or any other direct impact. Indirect:	At a distance of 2.49km the Ballymaglancy Cave, Cong SAC is considered to be a sufficient distance from the proposed project that there will be no changes in baseline disturbance levels as a result of the proposed development. No likely

<p>Rhinolophus hipposideros (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p>	<p>Disturbance (ie. vibration and disturbance) Noise, visual Lighting Dust deposition</p>	<p>significant effects on lesser horseshoe bat with potential functional linkages to areas of land adjacent the quarry site are predicted.</p> <p>The deepening of the quarry will not result in any significant increase in light levels. There will be no overspill of light to adjacent foraging/commuting habitats. No effect predicted on the ability of lesser horseshoe bat to forage and commute within the area immediately surrounding the quarry site.</p> <p>Dust deposition levels from the deepening of the existing quarry is not predicted to be at levels where any potential foraging habitat or its associated invertebrate assemblage, with the potential to provide prey for lesser horseshoe bat, will be adversely affected. Therefore, the deposition of dust is not predicted to have any likely significant effects on lesser horseshoe bat.</p>
	<p>Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No</p>	
	<p>If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No</p>	
<p>Further Commentary / discussion (only where necessary)</p> <p>Mitigation measures are already in place in relation to the wider quarry operations and have been shown to be effective. As outlined above the proposed development, when considered on its own will have no likely significant effects. No mitigation measures aimed at avoiding or reducing impacts on European Sites were considered in reaching this conclusion. I have also considered the proposed development in combination with the existing activities on the site, and I note that the proposed development will not result in an increase in the extraction/production rate at the site and activity at the site will not increase above existing levels. No other projects or plans which have the potential for any in-combination effects with the proposed deepening of the existing quarry have been identified. I note that there are two other quarries located in the vicinity of the site with one located approximately 0.9km to east and another located 1.9km to the northeast. Given the limited scale of their operations, it is unlikely that these developments would result in any significant in-combination impacts with the proposed quarry deepening. Overall, I conclude that the proposed development would have no likely significant effect in combination with other plans and projects on the qualifying features of any European sites.</p>		

Step 4 Conclude if the proposed development could result in likely significant effects on a European site

I conclude that the proposed development (alone) would not result in likely significant effects on Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (Site Code: 001774); Lough Corrib SAC (Site Code: 000297); Lough Corrib SPA (Site Code: 004042); Lough Mask SPA (Site Code: 004062); or Ballymaglancy Cave Cong SAC (Site Code: 000474). The proposed development would have no likely significant effect in combination with other plans and projects on any European sites. No further assessment is required for the project.

No mitigation measures are required to come to these conclusions.

Screening Determination

Finding of no likely significant effects

In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the information considered in this AA screening, I conclude that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to give rise to significant effects on the Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (Site Code: 001774); Lough Corrib SAC (Site Code: 000297); Lough Corrib SPA (Site Code: 004042); Lough Mask SPA (Site Code: 004062); Ballymaglancy Cave Cong SAC (Site Code: 000474); or any European Site, in view of the conservation objectives of these sites and is therefore excluded from further consideration. Appropriate Assessment is not required.

This determination is based on:

- The nature of the works within an existing quarry and separation from relevant European Sites.
- Scientific information provided in the Screening Report
- The absence of ex-situ impacts on wintering birds
- Possible impacts identified would not be significant in terms of site-specific conservation objectives for the Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC, Lough Corrib SAC, Lough Corrib SPA, Lough Mask SPA or Ballymaglancy Cave Cong SAC and would not undermine the maintenance of favorable conservation condition or delay or undermine the achievement of restoring favorable conservation status for those qualifying interest features of unfavorable conservation status.

No mitigation measures aimed at avoiding or reducing impacts on European Sites were required to be considered in reaching this conclusion.

Appendix 3 - Consideration of Local Authority Conditions

Planning Authority		Included/ excluded in Schedule of Conditions
Mayo County Council		
Condition 7	Blasting (minimise nitrate/ammonia residues)	Excluded. Provided for in EIAR.
Condition 8	Blasting (restrictions on frequency/occurrence)	Included. Standard Condition.
Condition 9	Blasting (velocity limits)	Included. Standard Condition.
Condition 10	Blasting (warning signals)	Included. Standard Condition.
Condition 11	Noise levels	Included. Standard Condition.
Condition 12	Dust emissions	Included. Standard Condition.
Condition 13	Bunding	Excluded. Provided for in EIAR.
Condition 14	Emergency Response Plan in the event of a spill or other pollution incident	Excluded. Provided for in EIAR.
Condition 15	Surface Water (use of oil petrol interceptors)	Excluded. Provided for in EIAR.
Condition 16	Design of oil interceptor	Excluded. Not a planning condition.
Condition 17	No Surface water to be discharged onto public road	Standard condition in relation to surface water included.
Condition 18	Environmental Monitoring Plan	Standard condition included in relation to Environmental Management System.