



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ACP-323019-25

Development	Retain as-constructed agricultural entrance and all ancillary site development works
Location	Crannagh Beg, Drum, Athlone, Co. Roscommon
Planning Authority	Roscommon County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	25/60197
Applicant	Adrian Watson
Type of Application	Retention permission
Planning Authority Decision	To grant permission with conditions
Type of Appeal	Third Party
Appellant	Padraig Walshe
Observers	None
Date of Site Inspection	18 th September 2025
Inspector	Trevor Rue

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1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The application site is located about 4 kilometres to the south west of Athlone. With a stated area of 0.106 hectares, it comprises a field on the northern side of a local road, which is part of a larger holding. The field is set back from the road by a partially grassed verge. There is a wall 1 metre in height at the front of the field. A steel gate, 4.3 metres wide and 1.2 metres high, is in place at the western end of the frontage.
- 1.2. The site is one of several breaks within a group of roadside dwellings and farm buildings. There are dwellings on the eastern and western site boundaries. There is an open field on the opposite, southern side of the road, which is less built up.
- 1.3. The local road which adjoins the site is undulating and contains several bends. The horizontal curvature of the road is convex in relation to the field gate access, which is in a hollow with higher ground on either side.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. It is proposed retain the existing agricultural entrance.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

- 3.1.1. On 24th June 2025, Roscommon County Council decided to grant retention permission, subject to four conditions. Condition 1 required adherence to submitted plans. Condition 2 required sight lines to be maintained. Conditions 3 and 4 were to do with drainage.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

Planning Report

- 3.2.1. A planning officer's report dated 18th June 2025 provided the reasoning for the authority's decision. The main points were as follows:
 - Having regard to the agricultural nature of the proposal, the development is acceptable in principle at this location.

- 90-metre sight lines have been indicated in each direction. The access/egress is acceptable at this location and compliant with the standards set out in the Development Plan.

Other Technical Reports

3.2.2. An Assistant Engineer to Athlone Municipal District Office reported that the site is accessed off the local primary road L-2027-0 where a speed limit of 60 kilometres per hour applies. The site layout map clearly indicated the 2.4-metre by 90-metre sight lines required in each direction in accordance with the Development Plan, which concurred with what she noted during her site inspection conducted on Friday 6th June. No additional works were required to the roadside boundary. Athlone Municipal District Office had no objection to the development, subject to conditions.

3.3. Third Party Submissions

3.3.1. The Council received a submission from the present appellant, the substance of which was repeated in his grounds of appeal.

4.0 Planning History

4.1. **06/382:** On 19th February 2007, permission was granted for housing development comprising 14 detached houses accessed via the present application site.

4.2. **UDR 2879:** On 1st May 2024, a warning letter was issued concerning alleged unauthorised development consisting of the creation of an access/entrance on to the public road.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Development Plan

5.1.1. Map 2.1 of the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028 indicates that the application site is in an Area under Urban Influence. It is explained in Chapter 2 of the Plan that such areas lie within the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment and that local authorities are required to develop a tailored policy approach to ensure that development in such areas is facilitated based on

sustainable principles and a core consideration of demonstrable social or economic need to live in such rural areas. Policy CS 2.18 is to ensure that the countryside continues to play its role as a place to live, work and visit, and that appropriate development is facilitated having careful regard to the carrying capacity and environmental sensitivity of the rural area.

- 5.1.2. It is stated in Section 5.4 of the Development Plan that the Council seeks to ensure the continuity of agriculture for reasons which are not solely economic. This sector has important cultural significance, is the predominant land use in the county and has essentially shaped its landscape and settlement pattern. For these reasons and for the economic benefits for the county, the Council's rural development strategy is centred on facilitating the continuity of agriculture as well as supporting agriculture by maintaining the integrity of viable farming areas. Objective RD 5.4 of the Plan is to support the agricultural sector and the development of agriculture to facilitate the development of sustainable agricultural activities.
- 5.1.3. It is stated in Section 12.20 of the Plan that agricultural structures should be sited as unobtrusively as possible. Finishes and colours used should blend the development into its surroundings.
- 5.1.4. It is stated in Section 12.24 of the Plan that safe unobstructed sight distances should be provided and maintained thereafter from vehicular entrances on to the road network. Figure 12.4 specifies that from a point 2.4 metres back from a local road, sight lines of 90 metres in both directions shall be provided.

5.2. Natural Heritage Designations

- 5.2.1. The application site is not in any Natura 2000 site of European nature conservation importance. The nearest Natura 2000 sites are:
- Middle Shannon Callows Special Protection Area, about 2.5 kilometres to the east, designated for various bird species; and
 - River Shannon Callows Special Area of Conservation, about 2.5 kilometres to the south east, designated for molinia and lowland hay meadows, alkaline fens, limestone pavements, alluvial forests and otter.
- 5.2.2. Carrigynaghtan Bog Natural Heritage Area (NHA), about 4 kilometres to the south east of the site is designated for peatlands. Section 10.5 of the Development Plan states

that there are also many proposed NHAs in Co. Roscommon which will be designated on a phased basis.

6.0 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening

- 6.1. The proposed development is not a class for the purposes of EIA as per the classes of development set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (or Part V of the 1994 Roads Regulations). No mandatory requirement for EIA therefore arises and there is also no requirement for a screening determination. Refer to Form 1 in Appendix 1 of report.

7.0 The Appeal

7.1. Grounds of Appeal

- 7.1.1. The grounds of appeal may be summarised as follows:

- The land already benefits from two existing entrances – one on the L2027 (a photograph was attached to the appeal statement) and the other on the road known locally as Rockfield Road (at 53.412140° north, -7.999781° west). These entrances provide adequate access for agricultural purposes. The County Development Plan emphasises sustainable land use and the minimisation of unnecessary development. A third entrance lacks justification, rendering the proposed retention contrary to prudent planning principles.
- The proposed entrance is located on a busy road with significant traffic. The Roscommon County Road Safety Plan 2024-2030 aims to achieve a 50% reduction in road fatalities and serious injuries, prioritising the minimisation of traffic hazards. An additional entrance increases the risk of accidents. The creation of new entrances on busy roads is discouraged under local planning guidelines unless necessary.
- The proposed entrance is situated close to a hill on the L2027, where visibility is limited for traffic approaching over the hill. The County Development Plan 2014-2020 stated that visibility splays for local roads must be assessed on a site-specific basis and this was carried forward in principle to the 2022-2028

Plan. Slow-moving agricultural equipment entering or exiting at this location would pose a significant hazard due to restricted sightlines, increasing the risk of collisions. An Bord Pleanála has previously refused permission for developments where proposed access arrangements endangered public safety, setting a precedent that supports this objection.

- The application fails to provide compelling evidence for the operational or agricultural necessity of a third entrance. The Development Plan requires a clear functional need to be demonstrated for new or retained entrances and compliance with road safety standards. Without such justification, retention of this entrance undermines the Council's commitment to safe and sustainable development.

7.2. Applicant's Response

7.2.1. None

7.3. Planning Authority Response

7.3.1. None

8.0 Assessment

8.1. Issues

8.1.1. Having inspected the site and considered in detail the documentation on file for this Third Party appeal, it seems to me that the main planning issues are:

- whether the development is acceptable in principle;
- whether the access is safe; and
- the availability of alternative accesses to the land.

8.2. Acceptability in Principle

8.2.1. The appellant's case appears to be based on the assumption that a functional need must be demonstrated to justify the creation or retention of an access to agricultural land. I find no such requirement in the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028. The application site is in an Area under Urban Influence, where a core

consideration is demonstrable social or economic need to live in such rural areas. That need test applies to applications for new dwellings but not to agriculturally related development. Objective RD 5.4 of the Plan is to support the agricultural sector and the development of agriculture to facilitate the development of sustainable agricultural activities. Agricultural accesses are consistent with that objective and are therefore acceptable in principle in this rural area.

8.2. Road Safety

- 8.2.1. Figure 12.2 of the Development Plan requires sightlines of 2.4 by 90 metres to be provided at this location. As I observed at the site, the road geometry is such that there is reasonable visibility in both directions. The local authority Roads Engineer has confirmed that the sight-distance requirements are met. I conclude that the access is safe.

8.3. Alternative Accesses

- 8.3.1. As I have found the development to be acceptable in principle and the access to be safe, it is strictly speaking superfluous to consider alternative accesses. However, I do so for the sake of completeness. The field gate access on the L2027 to the south east of the site is overgrown and appears to be disused. Its re-use would be dangerous as there is virtually no visibility in either direction.
- 8.3.2. Rockfield Road runs northwards and north westwards from the L2027 for a distance of about 400 metres until it passes under a railway line. Immediately to the south of the railway bridge, there is a field gate access to the applicant's lands. For much of its length, this part of Rockfield Road is wide enough to accommodate only one vehicle. There are few passing places, yet several dwellings rely on it for access. The access to which this application relates is more conducive to efficient farming than the alternative access to the north and I see no good reason why it should not be retained.

9.0 Appropriate Assessment Screening

- 9.1. Having considered the nature, location and small scale of the proposed development, the absence of emissions therefrom, the distance from the nearest European site and the absence of a pathway between the application site and any European site, I am content on the basis of objective information that the development is not likely to have

a significant effect on any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. I therefore conclude that the carrying out of an appropriate assessment under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 is not required.

10.0 Water Framework Directive

- 10.1. The application site is located about 650 metres to the south of Cross River and about 3.7 kilometres to the west of the River Shannon. The proposed development comprises the retention of an existing agricultural entrance. No water deterioration concerns were raised in the planning appeal.
- 10.2. I have assessed the development and have considered the objectives set out in Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive which seek to protect and, where necessary, restore surface and groundwater water bodies in order to reach good status (meaning both good chemical and good ecological status), and to prevent deterioration. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any surface and/or groundwater water bodies either qualitatively or quantitatively.
- 10.3. The reasons for this conclusion are the nature and small scale of the proposed works, the distance of the application site from the nearest water bodies and the lack of hydrological connections.
- 10.4. I conclude, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development will not result in a risk of deterioration on any water body (rivers, lakes, groundwaters, transitional and coastal) either qualitatively or quantitatively or on a temporary or permanent basis or otherwise jeopardise any water body in reaching its Water Framework Directive objectives and consequently can be excluded from further assessment.

11.0 Recommendation

- 11.1. I recommend to the Commission that planning permission be granted, subject to the conditions set out below.

12.0 Reasons and Considerations

12.1. It is considered that the development is consistent with Objective RD 5.4 of the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028 to support the development of agriculture and facilitate the development of sustainable agricultural activities; that it meets the requirements of Section 12.24 of the Plan in regard to safe unobstructed sight distances; and that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, it would not cause danger to road users or injury to amenity. It is concluded, therefore, that the development is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

13.0 Conditions

1.	The development shall be retained in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application. Sight lines of 2.4 metres by 90 metres shall be permanently maintained and kept free from vegetation and other obstructions to visibility. Reason: In the interests of clarity and road safety.
2.	Surface water drainage arrangements shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such services and works. No water runoff from the development shall be allowed to flow on to the adjacent road or adjoining properties. Existing road drainage shall not be impaired and the site owner shall be responsible for the cost of any damage to the road arising from the development. Reason: In the interest of sustainable drainage and to prevent flooding and damage to the public road.

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.



TREVOR A RUE

Planning Inspector

29th September 2025

Appendix 1 – Form 1 EIA Pre-Screening

Case Reference	ACP-323019-25
Proposed Development Summary	Retention of agricultural entrance
Development Address	Crannagh Beg, Drum, Athlone, Co. Roscommon
	In all cases check box /or leave blank
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (For the purposes of the Directive, "Project" means: - The execution of construction works or of other installations or schemes, - Other interventions in the natural surroundings and landscape including those involving the extraction of mineral resources)	☒ Yes, it is a 'Project'. Proceed to Q2.
2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in <u>Part 1</u>, Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?	
☒ No, it is not a Class specified in Part 1. Proceed to Q3	
3. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) OR a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of Roads Regulations 1994, AND does it meet/exceed the thresholds?	
☒ No, the development is not of a Class Specified in Part 2, Schedule 5 or a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of the Roads Regulations, 1994. No Screening required.	
4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted AND is the development a Class of Development for the purposes of the EIA Directive (as identified in Q3)?	
No ☒	Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q3)

Inspector: Trevor A Rue

Date: 29th September 2025

TREVOR A RUE