



**Development**

Gort Town Centre Public Realm  
Enhancement Project.

**Location**

Gort, County Galway.

**Local Authority**

Galway County Council.

**Type of Application**

Application for approval made under  
Section 177(AE) of the Planning and  
Development Act, 2000

**Prescribed Bodies**

Department of Housing, Local  
Government and Heritage

The Arts Council

Inland Fisheries Ireland

Uisce Eireann

Waterways Ireland

The Heritage Council

Fáilte Ireland

An Taisce

National Transport Authority

**Observers** Charles Foley  
Darren Woods  
James Ricks  
JM Print and Sign  
John Sullivan (Sullivans Royal Hotel)  
Karen Harte  
Marjanovic Limited  
National Transport Authority  
Richard Coen  
Shane Foran.

**Date of Site Inspection** 4/5<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

**Inspector** Philip Davis.

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Proposed Development .....	4
3. Site and Location .....	6
4. Planning History.....	7
5. Legislative and Policy Context.....	7
6. Consultations.....	18
8. EIA Screening.....	23
9. Assessment .....	24
10. Recommendation.....	62
APPENDIX – EIAR AND WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE FORMS.....	69
Screening Determination.....	74

## 1. Introduction

Galway County Council is seeking approval from An Coimisiún Pleanála to undertake public realm improvements in the town of Gort, within 2 km of the Coole-Garryland Complex SAC site code 000252 which is a designated European site. There are several other designated European sites in proximity to the proposed works (see further analysis below). A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) and application under Section 177AE was lodged by the Local Authority on the basis of the proposed development's likely significant effect on a European site.

Section 177AE of the Planning and Development act 2000 (as amended) requires that where an appropriate assessment is required in respect of development by a local authority, the authority shall prepare an NIS, and the development shall not be carried out unless the Commission has approved the development with or without modifications. Furthermore, Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that the appropriate assessment shall include a determination by the Commission as to whether or not the proposed development would adversely affect the integrity of a European site and the appropriate assessment shall be carried out by the Commission before consent is given for the proposed development.

## 2. Proposed Development

The proposed development involves public realm improvements on a number of streets and public areas within the historic core of the town of Gort. Key elements include:

- Redesigned paved areas along Market Square, Bridge Street, George Street, Crowe Street, Barrack Street, Queen Street and Church Street, involving new surface materials, a new lighting scheme, street furniture and hard and soft landscaping. These works are within an Architectural Conservation Area and in the vicinity of a number of Protected Structures.
- Provision of an upgraded and expanded pedestrianised civic/public space in the Market Square
- Provision of a number of new pedestrian crossings.

- Installation of new road alignments including a reduction in carriageway width and traffic calming measures.
- New street furniture and cycle parking.
- Rationalised on-street carparking through the town including the provision of new disabled and age friendly parking provision.
- The provision of 2 no. new public off-street parking facilities at Crowe Street and Barrack Street.
- Upgraded works to Canon Quinn Park including the installation of play equipment, seating, lighting and ancillary infrastructure.
- Installation of a new signage and way-finding scheme.
- Undergrounding of overhead cables and the removal of redundant overhead cabling.
- Installation of upgraded surface water drainage infrastructure including SuDs solutions.
- The relocation of the existing public bus stops to Bridge Street/George Street and the provision of 1 no. new coach drop off area on Market Square.

### **Accompanying documents**

In addition to detailed plans and specifications, this application for approval is accompanied by the following documents:

- **Natura Impact Statement**
- **Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report.**
- **Design and Planning Statement**
- **Archaeological Assessment**
- **Inventory of Built Heritage & Impact Assessment**
- **Bat Survey Report**
- **Construction and Environmental Management Plan**

- **Outdoor Lighting Report**
- **Stage 1 Road Safety Audit**
- **Stage 2 Flood Risk Assessment**
- **SuDS Assessment**
- **Wayfinding Strategy**
- **Mobility Management Plan**

### **3. Site and Location**

The town of Gort (population, just under 3,000) is in south Galway close to its south-west border with County Clare. It is within a low-lying valley between the exposed limestone uplands of the Burren to the west and the Slieve Aughty hills to the east. The town is located on what would have been a strategic crossing of the Gort River (also indicated on maps as the Cannahowna River) and the natural north to south alignment of the valley. The town appears to have its origin around a fort on an island in the river (Gort Island) and later developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century around a formally laid out market square. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a flour mill was developed on the river and further food related businesses, including abattoirs, developed in and around the town. The town is also associated with the historic Coole House and Park and Thoor Ballylee, some 2km to the north.

The town is at the intersection of a number of regional roads, including the R380, R458 and R460. The M18 motorway runs just to the west of the town, and the Ennis to Athenry railway stops at Gort Station, on the eastern side of the town centre. The town centre is mostly aligned along the R380 (George Street/Bridge Street/Crowe Street) and Church Street, which meet at the Market Square. The town centre is characterised by typical 2-3 storey buildings dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. There is a scattering of shops and other commercial uses on these roads and on minor streets running off the Market Square. Residential expansions to the town have mostly been to the west and north. The town has a small park, Canon Quinn Park, just south of Market Square and there is an attractive walk along the Gort River extending north from the town. There are three small supermarkets serving the town – each at one of the three main roads entering Market Square - as well as a number

of specialist shops, cafes, and other retail and commercial services within the traditional core.

## 4. Planning History

There are a number of live permissions for developments within the town, but I do not consider that most are of significance for the current application. Galway County Council recently granted permission (Planning Reference **24/60115**) permission for over 230 housing units east of the railway station – in addition, two other housing developments have commenced development in this area.

On the 6th November 2025, the Commission approved with conditions a similar public realm scheme for the town of Clifden, County Galway – **ABP-321144-24**.

## 5. Legislative and Policy Context

### 5.1 Relevant legislative provisions

**The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC):** This Directive deals with the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora throughout the European Union. Article 6(3) and 6(4) require an appropriate assessment of the likely significant effects of a proposed development on its own and in combination with other plans and projects which may have an effect on a European Site (SAC or SPA).

**European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011:** These Regulations consolidate the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 to 2005 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Control of Recreational Activities) Regulations 2010, as well as addressing transposition failures identified in CJEU judgements. The Regulations require in Reg 42(21) that where an appropriate assessment has already been carried out by a 'first' public authority for the same project (under a separate code of legislation) then a 'second' public authority considering that project for appropriate assessment under its own code of legislation is required to take account of the appropriate assessment of the first authority.

**National nature conservation designations:** The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the National Parks and Wildlife Service are responsible for the

designation of conservation sites throughout the country. The three main types of designation are Natural Heritage Areas (NHA), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and the latter two form part of the European Natura 2000 Network.

European sites located in proximity to the subject site include:

- Coole-Garryland Complex SAC, site code 000252
- Coole-Garryland SPA site code 004107.
- Termon Lough SAC site code 001321.
- East Burren Complex SAC, site code 001926.
- Ballinduff Turlough SAC site code 002295.
- Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs 002293.
- Lough Cutra SAC site code 000299.
- Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA site code 004168.
- Moyree River System SAC site code 000057.
- Dromore Woods and Loughs SAC site code 000032.

### **Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended)**

Part XAB sets out the requirements for the appropriate assessment of developments which could have an effect on a European site or its conservation objectives.

- 177(AE) sets out the requirements for the appropriate assessment of developments carried out by or on behalf of local authorities.
- Section 177(AE) (1) requires a local authority to prepare, or cause to be prepared, a Natura impact statement in respect of the proposed development.
- Section 177(AE) (2) states that a proposed development in respect of which an appropriate assessment is required shall not be carried out unless the Commission has approved it with or without modifications.
- Section 177(AE) (3) states that where a Natura impact assessment has been prepared pursuant to subsection (1), the local authority shall apply to the Commission for approval, and the provisions of Part XAB shall apply to the carrying out of the appropriate assessment.

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

## 5.2 Policy and Guidelines of Relevance

The following policy and guidelines are relevant to the proposed development:

### National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040 is a high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of Ireland to 2040. Key objectives of the Framework are to ensure the promotion of compact urban development, sustainable mobility and transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. Embedded in these objectives is the promotion of recreational infrastructure, and the promotion of more sustainable modes of transport, including walking and cycling. In relation to community, **NPO 12** seeks to ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being. In relation to rural towns, **NPO 26** seeks to continue to support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services. **NPO 34** seeks to facilitate tourism development and **NPO 37** as it relates to Healthy Communities, seeks to ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both

existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages. **NPO 22** outlines for urban areas planning and related standards, including in particular building height and car parking will be based on performance criteria that seek to achieve well-designed high quality outcomes in order to achieve targeted growth.

### **Climate Action Plan 2025**

The Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP 24) follows the commitment in the Climate Act 2015, as amended, and sets out the range of emissions reductions required for each sector to achieve the committed to targets. The document sets out Irelands plan to achieve a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 2021-2030 and being carbon neutral by 2050. Section 15 of the Plan deals with transport and table 15.5 sets out the key actions to deliver abatement in transport for the period 2024-2025. Under the Active Travel Infrastructure Programme for the cited 2 years, the advanced roll-out of walking/cycling infrastructure are included for each year.

### **National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030**

The NBAP includes five strategic objectives aimed at addressing existing challenges and new and emerging issues associated with biodiversity loss. Section 59B(1) of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 (as amended) requires the Board, as a public body, to have regard to the objectives and targets of the NBAP in the performance of its functions, to the extent that they may affect or relate to the functions of the Board. The impact of development on biodiversity, including species and habitats, can be assessed at a European, National and Local level having regard to the Habitats and Birds Directives, Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and other relevant legislation, strategy and policy where applicable.

### **Regional Planning Guidelines**

The RSES for the Northern and Western region (2020-2032) provides a long-term, strategic development framework for the future physical, economic and social

development of the region. **RPO 3.4** seeks to support the regeneration and renewal of small towns and villages in rural areas. **RPO 3.13** seeks to support the role of smaller and medium sized towns, which demonstrate an important role in terms of service provision and employment for their catchments within the economic function of the county. Such settlements will be identified through the Development Plan process as part of the Settlement Hierarchy and the Core Strategy.

### **County Development Plan/LAP – Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028**

Gort is identified in the GCDP as a level 4 ‘Self-sustaining town’, which is defined as a town with a high level of population growth and a limited employment base which is reliant on other areas for employment and/or services, and which require targeted ‘catch-up investment to become more sustaining. Policy Objective SS4 states that it is an objective to:

*Support the development of Gort and Loughrea as Self-Sustaining Towns as outlined in the Core Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy in order to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options in order to become more self-sustaining settlements.*

In terms of the retail hierarchy, Gort (section 5.9.1) is indicated as a level 3 district/sub county town (under Galway City in the hierarchy, along with Ballinasloe, Tuam, Athenry and Loughrea).

In Section 6.5.3.2 on Road provisions (and DM Standard 27), Gort carpark is indicated for extensions and improvements and the Gort to Loughrea road (R380) is one indicated as of importance for protection from new accesses.

The Gort Water Supply Scheme (WwTP) upgrade is indicated as a priority project (7.5.1), with works to provide additional storage underway.

The Galway County Transport and Planning Study 2022-2028 (Appendix 3 of the GCDP) mostly focuses on transport links connecting Gort with other centres, highlighting a number of roads and junctions outside the town that requires improvements. Table 13 identifies a need to encourage a modal shift in transport in Gort and notes the low usage of Gort Railway Station. Improvements to bus stops in the centre of Gort in conjunction with the NTA is noted as a key measure (Table 19),

in addition to improved connectivity for cyclists. Gort Carpark is identified for improvements (Table 24). Table 32 outlines specific proposed physical improvement measures listing three categories – the Gort Multi-modal hub, the Galway to Athlone Cycleway and the Galway to Loughrea Cycleway.

The appendix to the GCDP also lists the Gort ACA (this covers most of the town centre, including nearly all the area subject to the Public Realm study). It states:

*Architectural Heritage:*

*Gort is a historic town with a rich architectural heritage and a number of key features, including ecclesiastical, monastic and religious buildings and structures, a historic core, street pattern, plot arrangement and historic streetscapes, mainly within the town centre. A unified cornice at eaves line indicates the controlling interest of a landlord in the development of the town. The retention of the character of the historic core is recognised as being a major attraction. Gort contains a significant number of buildings of national or regional significance for a town of its size. The river and its banks, surviving military buildings, traditional shopfronts and narrow lanes entered through carriage arches are distinctive and important features. The majority of buildings span the late 18th to late 19th centuries and share many characteristics. A large proportion of buildings are in a classical vernacular style, ranged along two wide intersecting roads which focus on Market Square. Stone walls are another significant feature of the area, particularly those around Slipper and Barrack Streets.*

*Statement of Significance*

*Gort's principal significance lies in the arrangement of its street pattern, plot sizes, architectural coherence, distinctive landmark buildings or groups and countryside setting. The combination of architecturally coherent buildings, narrow lanes with overhead carriage arches, extant military structures and traditional shop fronts mark Gort's unique significance. For its size, Gort contains a generous number of buildings of national or regional significance. The town as a whole is potentially very attractive.*

Additional relevant provisions of the CDP are set out below:

Section 3.2 of the CDP outlines the strategic aims for Placemaking, Regeneration and Urban Living include the following:

- To promote town and village centre living in a high-quality environment with good connectivity and access to local services;
- To facilitate town and village centre public realm improvement works, regeneration and infrastructure upgrades as deemed appropriate;
- To ensure the delivery of good quality public open space of varying scales for use by inhabitants and visitors;

Relevant Policy objectives include:

**PM 1:** Placemaking which seeks to '*promote and facilitate the sustainable development of a high-quality built environment where there is a distinctive sense of place in attractive streets, spaces, and neighbourhoods that are accessible and safe places for all members of the community to meet and socialise*'.

**PM 2:** Regeneration aims '*to prioritise projects and proposals which will result in both social and economic rejuvenation and regeneration within towns and villages*'.

**PM 4:** Sustainable Movement within Towns outlines '*it is a policy objective of the Planning Authority to encourage modal shift in our towns to more sustainable transport alternatives through mixed use development that enables local living and working which is well connected to sustainable transport infrastructure such as walking, cycling, public bus and rail transport*'.

**PM 13:** Public Realm Opportunities seeks to promote enhanced and increased public realm opportunities including the shared use of spaces, for outdoor experiences, with a priority on pedestrian uses.

**ARC 4:** Protection of Archaeological Sites seeks to '*Protect archaeological sites and monuments their settings and visual amenity and archaeological objects*'.

**AH 1** Architectural Heritage): seeks to '*Ensure the protection of the architectural heritage of County Galway which is a unique and special resource, having regard to*

*the policy guidance contained in the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2011 (and any updated/superseding document)'.*

**NHB 3:** Protection of European Sites - *No plans, programmes, or projects. giving rise to significant cumulative, direct, indirect or secondary impacts on European sites arising from their size or scale, land take, proximity, resource requirements, emissions (disposal to land, water or air), transportation requirements, duration of construction, operation, decommissioning or from any other effects shall be permitted on the basis of this Plan.*

## **Gort Local Area Plan 2025-2031**

This LAP was adopted after the submission of this application – on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2025, coming into effect on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2025. The LAP references the Gort Inse Guaire Town Centre First Plan 2023, which identifies key proposal for the town centre, which includes (Theme 04: Connectivity), proposals to improve sustainable transport connectivity (walking, cycling and public transport) and a Wayfinding and signage strategy.

Section 2.8 of the LAP sets out the Local Transport Plan (LTP), deriving from the Galway County Transport Planning Study 2022. Figure 5 indicates the emerging preferred LTP strategy for Gort.

The Barracks Site, one of the locations for proposed parking within the Public Realm Scheme, is zoned Town Centre (Opportunity site 2).

**Policy GSST 11** states:

*Galway County Council shall support the implementation of the Gort Inse Guaire Town Centre First Plan, subject to meeting all other relevant planning policy requirements.*

**GSST 33** Public Spaces and Streets states that it is policy to:

*Promote the development of high-quality public spaces consisting of streets, squares, parks and amenities connected by a network of pedestrian and cycling routes. Public spaces should have a high standard of design and*

*street furniture that will create a coherent character for the area. This would include appropriately designed and located park benches, bus shelters, bicycle storage facilities, refuse bins, signage, street sculpture, etc. but should avoid the over-proliferation of different elements and/or cluttering of public spaces.*

#### **GSST 34 Spatial Definition and Animation**

*Ensure that new developments are designed to provide spatial definition and animation to public spaces and streets through the use of appropriate building lines and built forms, responsive building frontages and passive surveillance and high-quality streetscapes and/or landscaping edges to enclose and address public spaces. Perimeter block typologies provide a useful approach in generating good spatial definition, adequate enclosure and a high-quality public realm and the creation of focal points, such as landmark buildings and gateways, also help to improve spatial definition and legibility and will be encouraged in appropriate locations*

#### **GSST 37: Views and Prospects**

*Preserve the protected views and scenic routes as detailed in Maps 8.3 and 8.4 in the GCDP 2022-2028 from development that in the view of the Planning Authority would negatively impact on said protected views and scenic routes. This shall be balanced against the need to develop key infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan.*

#### **GSST 40: Architectural Conservation Areas**

*Protect, conserve and enhance the essential character of the Gort Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) through the appropriate management and control of the design, location and layout of new development, respecting surviving historic plots and street patterns, alterations or extensions to existing structures, and/or modifications to the character or setting of the Architectural Conservation Areas. The identification of areas of special interest within the plan boundary may be considered during the lifetime of the plan*

#### **GSST 43: Archaeology and Infrastructure Schemes**

*It is a policy objective of the planning authority to have regard to archaeological heritage when considering proposed service schemes (including electricity, sewerage, telecommunications, and water supply) and proposed roadwork (both realignments and new roads) located in close proximity to Recorded Monuments and Places and their known archaeological monuments.*

#### **GSST 44 Local Transport Plan**

*Support the implementation of the Local Transport Plan as set out in the accompanying LTP document accordance with proper planning and sustainable development.*

#### **GSST 45: Transportation Infrastructure**

*Facilitate the provision and maintenance of essential transportation infrastructure. This shall include the reservation of lands to facilitate public roads, footpaths, cycle ways, bus stops and landscaping together with any necessary associated works, as appropriate.*

#### **GSST 46: Sustainable Transportation**

*Facilitate any Smarter Travel initiatives that will improve sustainable transportation within the plan area and facilitate sustainable transportation options including public transportation, rail freight, electric vehicles rentals, car clubs, public bike schemes, cycle parking as appropriate.*

#### **GSST 47: Pedestrian and Cycle Network**

*Facilitate the improvement of the pedestrian and cycling environment and network so that it is safe and accessible to all, through the provision of the necessary Infrastructure. New development shall promote and prioritise walking and cycling, shall be permeable, adequately linked and connected to neighbouring areas, the town centre, recreational, educational, residential and employment destinations and shall adhere to the principles contained within the national policy document Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future 2009 – 2020, the Design Manual for Urban*

*Roads and Streets(DMURS) and NTA document Permeability: Best Practice Guide.*

**GSST 48:** Pedestrian Crossings

*Facilitate the provision of pedestrian crossings adjacent to schools and at other appropriate locations within the plan area.*

**GSST 49:** Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) and Road Safety Audits (RSA)

*Require all significant development proposals to be accompanied by a Road Safety Audit and Traffic & Transport Assessment carried out by suitably competent consultants, which are assessed in association with their cumulative impact with neighbouring developments on the road network, in accordance with the requirements contained within the TII's Traffic & Transport Assessment Guidelines (PE-PDV-02045) 2014 (including any updated/superseding document) and 'Road Safety Audit' (GE-STY-01024) December 2017*

Map 1A: Land Use Zoning indicates that most of the area affected by this proposed scheme is zoned Town Centre – including the two proposed new carparks. Most of the area is within the Architectural Conservation Area and part is within the Archaeological Zone of Notification. There are multiple protected structures along the main roads.

Map 3: indicates Indicative Flood Zone A potentially impacting the low lying area north-west of Market Square, and around the River Gort.

### **Other Guidelines**

**Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines.** Provides an overview and guidelines for the protection of both protected structures and Architectural Conservation Areas.

**Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets:** Provides detailed guidance on the design of urban streets and through-roads.

**Cycle Design Manual** August-September 2023 (NTA): Provides detailed recommendations on the provision of cycling infrastructure.

Other relevant Policy Guidance (depending on the type of development e.g. River Basin Management Plan, Water Catchment Unit Plan, Transport Strategy etc). I will address these as relevant in the appraisal section below.

## **6. Consultations**

### **6.1 Consultees Circulated**

The application was circulated to the following bodies:

- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- The Arts Council
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Uisce Eireann
- Waterways Ireland
- Waterways Ireland
- The Heritage Council
- Fáilte Ireland
- An Taisce
- National Transport Authority

## 6.2 Responses Received from Consultees

Responses were received from the NTA only:

### National Transport Authority:

- Notes the key elements of the proposed development – specifically that there is a net loss of 78 no. on street spaces, with 100.no new spaces in the two proposed new off-street carparks.
- Notes the proposal (3.1.9 of the Mobility Management Plan), that the location of the us stops is to be moved away from Market Square to closer to the train station.
- With regard to the latter, it is stated that in its submission to Galway CC with regard to the draft Gort LAP, the NTA stated its opposition to moving the bus stops away from such a prominent and convenient location. It is their view that the current bus stops are well located, in a high profile central location to facilitate high demand trips to and from the town centre. It is the view of the NTA that moving these would disincentivise bus usage by increasing walking distance from residential areas and the town centre.
- It is argued that the impact of the relocation of the public transport stops has not been adequately addressed in the proposal. It is also argued that the new location for the stops may be less useable for less able-bodied users.
- Finally, it is recommended that the proposed Part 10 scheme is not approved in its current form whereby the bus stops are removed from the core town centre location, a key destination, which may have the effect of reducing the convenience and attractiveness of public transport usage in the town.

## 6.3 Public Submissions

Nine submissions from local residents and businesses have been received (listed in the title page to this report). All have raised objections to some or all aspects of the proposals. I will note the key points raised and the response by the planning authority in Section 6.4 below.

In summary, the main concerns raised come under the following general issues:

- Concerns at the specific location of trees and hard landscaping/street furniture (overshading, obstructions on the pavement, etc).
- Requests for additional art and public features in specific places, such as in front of the Tal Vez coffee shop.
- Objection to the removal of on-street parking and its implications for businesses within the town.
- Objection to the provision of cycling lanes and parking at the expense of on-street parking close to shops/houses.
- Objections to lowering the plinth of the Christ the King Statue on Market Square.
- Objections to the location of pedestrian crossings and the potential interactions with existing goods deliveries.
- Objections to the provision of street furniture and bicycle parking as there is no evidence of any demand for this.
- Concerns outlined over the loss of business during construction.
- Damage to electrics from tree planting.
- Cumulative impact with claims of general poor cleaning and maintenance by the County Council.
- Lack of proper cycling provision, with the removal of some road space from bicycle users (i.e. lowering of road widths) – argued that this is contrary to national Climate Action Plans.
- Lack of compliance with the National Cycle Policy Framework – specifically with a lack of connectivity to obvious cycling destinations, such as schools or HSE facilities. Peak hour flows (refers to 2023 Cycle Design Manual) indicates that at the predicted levels and speeds cyclists and motor vehicles should not be mixed.
- Argued that narrowing the roads without the provision of cycle paths or alternatives is contrary to national policy, Climate Action Plan and existing road design guidance (DMURS).

- One observer (O'Sullivan's Hotel) submitted an independent traffic review questioning elements of the submission and the Road Safety Audit.
- One Observer set out detailed arguments that specific elements are not in accord with the National Cycle Policy Framework and other Guidance.

#### 6.4 Response of Applicant to Submissions

I have set out below a summary of the response by the applicant to the 10 no. submissions, including the submission by the NTA. In its preamble, the County Council outlines the details what it states was a comprehensive community consultation process.

Issue raised	By	Galway CC Response
Relocation of bus stops	NTA	<p>It is submitted that the current bus stop's location (at the junction of R458 and R460, top end of Gort Market Square) causes significant traffic management and pedestrian safety issues (photos attached as illustration). Specifically, parked buses obscure visibility for traffic exiting the R458, and additionally a pedestrian problem with passengers attempting to cross over to the Market Square.</p> <p>Also, the topography at south bound bus stop ensures steps are required to provide bus access – it is not considered possible to address this. It is noted that the design team worked with Bus Eireann in identifying the new site for the stops.</p> <p>Bus Eireann supports the relocation to closer to the railway station to facilitate inter modal transport. It is argued that the proposed relocation is also closer to the main expansion area of the town (including 230 dwellings recently permitted – 24/60115).</p>
Inappropriate location for trees	James Ricks	<p>It is noted that the tree is north of the observer's property so there should be no direct loss of light.</p>

Additional street furniture.	James Ricks	The location and distribution of public seating has been considered with regard to the provision of rest stops for the mobility impaired.
Need for additional bicycle parking	James Ricks and others	The Council is open to the provision for additional cycle stands where demand is demonstrated.
Crossing point at R460 and R458 Junction issues (outside Sullivans Hotel, on the junction corner – elimination of parking at this point and a proposed pedestrian crossing point.	Sullivans Hotel	Notes the absence of a safe pedestrian crossing due to the public parking arrangement crossing the desire line (photos attached indicating current safety issues). The proposals align with an existing desire line and are intended to improve safety.
Reduction in parking provision.	Various	There are 252 on-street parking spaces, with the proposal to reduce this to 165 spaces. The two new proposed off-street parking areas will accommodate 100 new spaces, resulting in a net gain of 13 spaces (5% increase).
Traffic Modelling Data queried	Sullivans Hotel and others	Notes that the modelling period was extend for a warm and cool down period to test the junction design. Pedestrian flow is from a survey carried out on 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2023 (Friday). It is acknowledged that the geometry of the proposed mini-roundabout indicates some discrepancies – crossing measurements have been verified and do not impact on the capacity.  It is stated that all information on demand flows and movements has been checked and are considered correct. The modelling was re-run to check on updated data – the operation is considered acceptable and consistent with the application.  It is noted that the proposed changes are not anticipated to change overall traffic demand, and as such forecasting for 10-15 years is not considered necessary.

		It is stated that there is no evidence that the traffic will detour onto regional roads in any meaningful volume.
The works would reduce economic activity and impact upon the Friday market.	Karen Harte & others	It is submitted that the proposals are in line with Galway CDP policy to enhance the attractiveness and vibrancy for businesses, and the provisions of the Town Centre First Plan. It is stated that there are concerns about pedestrian safety during the market and the proposed works will allow improvements for the market.
The reduction on parking will detract from business.	Marjanovic Ltd	It is submitted that the net increase in parking and the environmental improvements will enhance the economic rejuvenation of the town.
Interference with the statue of Christ the King on Market Square.	Richard Coen and others	It is confirmed that there are no proposed that will impact on the Christ the King Monument.
Overall design is not appropriate or safe for cyclists.	Shane Foran	It was determined that most streets within Gort are not wide enough to provide for separate cycling facilities. It is argued that the proposal facilitates cycling by way of providing additional cycle stands, a narrower carriageway with traffic calming, dedicated cycle approach ramps to the proposed roundabout and additional crossing points to overall reduce traffic speeds.

## 8. EIA Screening

The proposed development has been subject to preliminary examination for environmental impact assessment (refer to Form 1 and Form 2 in Appendices of this report). Having regard to the characteristics and location of the proposed development and the types and characteristics of potential impacts, I conclude that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment. The proposed development, therefore, does not trigger a requirement for environmental impact assessment screening and an EIAR is not required.

## **9. Assessment**

The assessment will be undertaken in three parts as per the requirements of Section 177AE as follows:

- The likely effects on the environment.
- The likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- The likely significant effects on a European site.

### **9.1 The likely effects on the environment**

In considering the likely effects on the environment, I will assess the proposed public realm works under the following general headings.

- Material Assets
- Population and human health
- Cultural heritage
- Biodiversity
- Land, soil, water, air and climate

#### **Material Assets**

The proposed public realm works involves upgraded carriageway and footpaths on the two key roads intersecting the town of Gort. One is along the R458, which connects Junction16 on the M18 with Ennis to the south (i.e. the original main road bypassed by the motorway). This road is called Georges Street as it crosses the Gort River to the south-east, Bridge Street in the town centre and Crowe Street as it runs downhill away from Market Square to the north-west towards the junction.

The R460 (Gort to Corofin Road) is called Church Street as it enters the town from the south-west, then forms the triangular Market Square which is the centrepiece of the town. Queen Street is a right angled street south of Market Square leading to a former church (now Gort Public Library) and connecting to Bridge Street. Barrack

Street is a cul-de-sac running west from Bridge Street, terminating at a small industrial area next to the Gort River, with a vacant area of land between this industrial area and the Garda Station which now occupies part of the former Barracks. Additionally, there is a strip of land north-west of Market Square which is connected via a narrow lane, Lowery's Lane – the latter two vacant areas of land are identified as future carparks as part of the proposed scheme.

The town centre is formally laid out on a slightly elevated ridge following the alignment of a shallow valley linking Ennis with Galway to the north. The town has two core areas – the traditional town centre along with a suburban area on the west side of the bridge, concentrated between Gort River and the M18, with a smaller extension running south of the river and railway line extending along the main road network. The latter area is mostly a relatively modern suburban extension. The historic core of the town is primarily on the west side. The town itself is a planned estate town, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, although most town centre buildings are 19<sup>th</sup> Century in origin. Buildings are generally 2-4 storey in height with the great majority of structures in the centre being three storeys, with typical narrow frontages. Market Square is on a somewhat higher level than most of the surrounding areas, with a distinct fall in level along Crowe Street running north.

Market Square is the traditional commercial heart of the town, with a hotel, several pubs and cafes, and an eclectic mix of small shops and other businesses. An Aldi is located just south-west of the Bridge on Georges Street (close to the recently re-opened Gort Railway Station). There is a Lidl marking the entry to the town on Crowe Street, with a Supervalu at Church Street at the western end of the town centre. The suburban extension of the town is around 500 metres from Market Square to the west and north, with the southern sprawl of the town running around a kilometre south of the bridge over the Gort River. The latter extent includes residential areas, a hotel (the Lady Gregory), and a number of commercial units. There is a substantial area of land east of the railway station which has recently been granted permission by the planning authority for around 230 dwellings, with further small estates permitted in this general area. Total population of Gort is just under 3000, a population level that has been steady for some time. The town has some relatively small industrial employers – it primarily functions as a local market

town, but with the opening of the railway station appears to be developing as a residential satellite town for Ennis, Athenry and Galway City.

The key elements of the proposed works involve the following major elements:

The shutting off of the northern branch of the main road on the north side of Market Square, with all traffic to be funnelled via a small roundabout at the southern side of the junction. The area created is to be landscaped, with some parking spaces left, with an expanded area for pedestrian circulation and the longstanding Friday Market.

The bus stops (for Bus Eireann routes connecting local towns) on either side of Bridge Street (at the prominent former Court House) are to be removed.

Two new carparks are to be created – one at a derelict area of land at the end of Barrack Street, and another on an elongated area of land accessed via Lowery's Lane to the north of Market Square – this land is levelled and flattened, but appears to be currently unused.

The carriageway from the railway bridge crossing George Street is to be altered, with the widening of the footpath, removal of some on-street parking and additional planting with trees and the addition of seating and other street furniture. This will extend along to Crowe Street, ending at a new crossing point just before the Lidl. Similar work extends south-west of Market Street, and along Queen Street, including improvements to Cannon Quinn Park at Queen Street, opposite the library (a former Church). The bus stops at Market Square are to be removed and relocated at George Street, close to the Aldi and Gort railway station on the opposite side of the Gort River.

The stated aim of the proposed works is to slow down traffic through the town, create additional net parking while reducing on-street parking, widen footpaths, and provide overall visual improvements, along with rationalising traffic as it moves through the town. I note with regard to the latter issue, while the M18 motorway was intended to draw traffic away from Gort, it may also have had the effect of funneling some additional east west traffic through the town to access the nearby junction. It also seems to have led to potential increases in population as it has brought the town within the commuter zone of Galway City – and as the major permitted residential areas are east of the town, additional traffic will almost inevitably be drawn through the town centre.

The existing town centre serves both the immediate population, the majority of whom are well within 1 km of Market Square, and car borne shoppers. All public parking is on the street – the three small supermarkets have their own parking – there is additional parking associated with a number of private or semi-public uses (such as the schools and medical centre). The parking survey carried out as part of the LAP notes (section 2.3.4) that the weekday occupancy of the 119 parking spaces did not exceed 77%, while Saturday afternoon was busiest with 91% occupancy. Peak occupancy was between 1200 and 1600 hours. Occupancy on adjoining streets averaged 55%. This survey noted that while there appears to be no significant shortage of on-street parking, the town is deficient in safe pedestrian and cycle space, particularly during the Friday Market on Market Square.

The physical impact on the town will be to increase overall parking provision (which doesn't seem particularly necessary based on available figures) by developing two small carparks, both of which are within 200 metres of Market Square, narrowing the main through-roads, rationalising the junction of the two regional roads to create more public space, while providing additional trees, landscaping, and pedestrian space. There are no proposed significant alterations or removal of existing fabric. I note the concerns expressed in two observations about the Christ the Redeemer statue, but I am satisfied from the response of the applicant and the plans and particulars submitted that there will be no material impact on this statue – if anything, the proposed alteration will make it more visible and prominent by removing some visible obstructions in the area.

While much of the impact is subjective, I consider it reasonable to conclude that the overall impact on the material assets of the town will be positive.

## **Population and human health**

Although they are not specifically intended for improvements to public health and safety, in their submission the Council notes that there are existing hazards along the road – in particular at the junction of the two regional roads – and the design is intended to facilitate greater pedestrian and cycle use and to provide aids in the form of seats and wider pavements for the mobility impaired. One observer raised

concerns about older shoppers being unable to park close to the pharmacy and other outlets in the town with the removal of some parking.

The Road Safety Audit submitted with the response to Observers comments notes a number of potential safety concerns with the proposed design, along with recommended alterations. These included a number of problematic crossings and potential issues with disabled parking bays. Existing problem areas were also noted and highlighted, including heavy vehicular use of the Gort Medical Centre carpark. The recommended alterations are generally minor in nature and can be addressed within the context of the overall scheme.

One observer objected to the conception of reducing highway width due to the potential impact on cyclists. I will address this issue in the relevant section further below, but in this context, I do not consider that there would be a likely measurable increase in hazard.

As the overall development is intended to rationalise and slow down traffic, and provide more space and amenities to pedestrians, notwithstanding potential individual issues with part of the design I conclude that the overall design will significantly improve the amenities of the town and have a net positive impact on human health and safety.

## **Cultural heritage**

The application was accompanied by an Archaeological Assessment and an Inventory of Heritage and Impact Assessment (IHIA).

The town of Gort has its origins in the later medieval period, seemingly from a castle established on an island in the Gort River. It later developed as an estate town associated with the estate of Lord Gort (with its famous demesne at Coole, 2-km northwest of the town, now State owned and used as a recreational area) and functioned from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards as a local market town, based around the planned Market Square. This is the core of the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). Most existing fabric dates from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The town's principal significance lies in its street pattern, architectural coherence and the significant number of buildings of national or regional significance. The submitted IHIA has a comprehensive photographic survey of the streetscape features of

importance and all the protected structures (36 in total have been identified as being potentially impacted by works). I would note that in addition to the most prominent street features, there are also very interesting and intact older commercial stone structures along the backlands, some accessible via the narrow lanes (such as Lowery's Lane) that extend from Market Square.

The Impact Assessment element of the IHIA (at the end of the report) outlines anticipated possible impacts with recommendations to address them. It notes that for the most part none of the proposed works directly impacts upon any of the many protected structures, but there is some possibility of indirect impacts on historic fabric from adjoining pavement works. It is also noted that tree planting may interfere with the overall architectural composition of the formal street layout. I note that a small number of observers have requested that specific trees be removed – I will address this point in the section on recommended conditions below.

The Archaeology Assessment notes that there are two recorded sites within the footprint of the proposed scheme, comprising the Town of Gort (GA122-093) and the stie of a castle (GA122-097). There are a number of other recorded sites within the wider study area. It is noted that all the area subject to development associated with the project has been disturbed at some time, but there is still the possibility of some subsurface archaeological remains being intact and exposed during the works. In mitigation, it is recommended that any excavations associated with the works beneath c.0.4 metres depth be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist under licence.

Neither document addresses the overall design context of the proposals, except to note that the tree planting may obscure rather than enhance the planned streetscape and that possibly lower-level planting would be more appropriate in some areas.

The submission documents do not provide a schedule of chosen tree species (indicative species are listed) – I would concur that excessively large and unstructured trees would not be appropriate for such a formal streetscape, but smaller, more symmetrical species would enhance the overall balance.

In conclusion, I consider that subject to conditions to ensure the works do not impact directly on the fabric of the protected structures, and that suitable monitoring is in place in the unlikely event of their being intact sub-surface archaeological features

exposed, the proposed development will enhance, not detract, from the overall cultural heritage of the town.

## **Biodiversity**

The applicants submitted a bat study in addition to an AA Screening. The works do not involve any direct interference with 'natural' habitats – the small park is highly cultivated, the two proposed carparks are on made ground, and the remainder of the works take place on existing streets. No existing trees are to be removed although there may be some works to existing trees (I note some vegetation on the northernmost of the proposed carparks was removed at the time of my site visit).

The bat survey identified 2 trees that were assessed to have bat roosting potential for singular bats, although street lighting would preclude their likely use. A number of stone walls and walls covered with creepers were assessed as having low probability of bat potential. The works are close to a number of derelict properties with some low potential for bat habitat.

The survey included night time and static bat surveys. These detected Soprano and Common Pipistrelle in the vicinity of the larger of the two proposed carparks, Leisler's bat, Common, Soprano, Pipistrelle and Daubentons bat around the bridge over the Gort River at Bridge Street. Activity was considered very high, especially on the river, although lighting there precludes parts of the river from use by bats. The river is considered to be an important ecological corridor providing a commuting route between the Coole-Garryland Complex SAC and the Lough Cutra SAC, both of which have Lesser Horseshoe bats listed in their QI's.

The report concluded that seven of the nine resident Irish bat species were found within the area, but no roosts were found. The report recommends mitigation measures, mostly relating to construction works, in order to prevent any interference with bats and to improve the Gort River as a commuting link for bats.

In other respects, and notwithstanding the analysis and conclusions of the AA screening, I am satisfied that the proposed development does not significantly interfere with any habitats or individual species of importance.

## **Land, soil, water, air and climate**

The works that are proposed only interface with existing public highway/open space and brownfield within the core area of the town. All areas to be physically disturbed are existing paving or brownfield sites (i.e. the two carparks). There will be some alterations to surface drainage – a SuDs approach is proposed, but these are generally minor in nature.

The town overlies karstic limestone extending from the Burren east to the Aughthy Mountains. The Gort River (sometimes known also as the Cannahowna River) arises and disappears into the vast local cave network (sometimes termed a Losing Stream or a Lost River), and there are numerous turloughs and other karstic feature in the wider area. None of the observations submitted relate directly to geology or water/climate issues (I will address the implications for Climate Act in the relevant section below).

According to available information, the flood mapping for Gort is currently under review. The lower parts of the town centre, at the northern end, are within both the 1% and 0.1% AEP fluvial flooding area (Flood Zones A and B) – this includes the area for the proposed carpark to the north. There is also an area potentially vulnerable to flooding at the south end of Georges Street, on the opposite side of the Gort River. The works are classified as ‘water compatible’, and as such is considered appropriate in any flood zone. As such, no Justification Test, as set out in the 2009 Flooding Guidelines is required. There are now freeboard requirements for such developments, so no minimum levels differences are needed.

The applicants submitted a SuDS assessment which includes proposals for the works – these include the use of permeable pavements, rain gardens and SuDs tree pits. Figure 3.2 of the SuDs report outlines the sub-catchments for drainage in the study area. The study concludes that the proposed SuDS components will provide significant quantity and qualitative benefits compared to the existing pre-development scenario.

The submission includes a CEMP which outlines standard methodologies for controlling run-off during construction works.

The application documents do not include a WFD assessment, but I am satisfied from the information provided that the proposed works will result in a quantitively and

qualitatively higher quality of run-off from the urban area to both ground and surface water. The site overlies the Caherglassaun Turlough groundwater body – the Cannahowna\_010 River provides surface drainage for the town and surrounding area (this river discharges directly to the underlying karst network). A full Water Framework Assessment is set out in the appendix to this report below.

With regards climate change – the proposed works are intended to calm traffic within the town, but it is not anticipated that there would be a substantial change over the longer term in overall traffic levels, so I would consider the impacts to be broadly neutral.

## **9.2 The likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area**

In addressing the likely consequences for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, I will address the proposed development under the following heading and sub-headings.

- Principle of development (National, Regional, Local Policy)
- Design considerations
  - o Overall design and conception
  - o Public bus stop
  - o Parking
  - o Mobility issues
  - o Crossing points
  - o Street furniture and trees
  - o Construction and implementation

### **Principle of development (National, Regional, Local Policy)**

The proposed upgrade works is consistent with national and regional policies as outlined in Section 5.2 of this report above and is among the works set out in the LAP, which was adopted shortly after the submission of this request for approval.

Gort is identified as a level 4 ‘self-sustaining town’ in the GCDP, a status it shares with Loughrey. The objective of this status is to support its development as a local employment centre and a self-sustaining settlement. Infrastructural upgrades to facilitate this objective are set out, including upgrades to the local road network and carparks within the town. General County level policy favours strengthening infrastructural links through road upgrades. The proposals generally respect or enhance the qualities outlined in the ACA designation and do not significantly interfere with any protected structures or other designations set out in the GCDP. I am satisfied that the proposed development is fully in accordance with all relevant policy objectives (these are summarised in Section 5.2 above) in the GCDP in addition to the Town Centre zoning.

The Gort Local Area Plan 2025 along with the Galway County Transport and Planning Study includes a Local Transport Plan and additionally refers to a Transport Planning Study from 2022. A number of specific policies are relevant (particularly GSST 47, quoted in Section 5.2 above). None are specific to the Public Realm works, but the public consultation for the Public Realm works was carried out more or less in parallel with the LAP process and it is clear that the designers of the scheme were fully cognizant of the overlap. The principles of the proposals (I will address the specific details further below) are clearly fully compatible with the overall zoning objectives and policy objectives set out in the LAP.

One observer (Shane Foran) highlighted what he considers to be a breach of the Climate Action Plan 2025 (following the 2015 Climate Act and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act of 2021) and related cycling and traffic design guidance and technical guidance, including the 2023 Cycle Design Manual, the 2009 National Cycle Policy Framework and DMURs. The basis for this is his argument that the overall design has not fully addressed requirements set out the Act and Action Plan to reduce emissions and to facilitate cycle friendly design. He notes that the Climate Action Plan refers to the importance of facilitating cycling and implementing relevant national guidance. Mr Foran specifically argues that the proposed narrowing of traffic lanes increases the potential hazard for cyclists and will discourage use. I note that other observers have actively argued against the provision of cycling infrastructure, arguing that there is no demand within Gort

The proposed works do not seek to actively reduce traffic use, and the facilitation of cycling comes primarily from providing bike stands. The local authority argues that the effect of providing controlled crossings at the key entrances to the Town Centre, along with narrowing lanes, will make speeds lower and thus safer for cyclists, although it is acknowledged there is no significant provision of segregated lanes, as recommended in a number of circumstances in existing guidance. I note that it is not anticipated that the works would significantly reduce traffic rates coming through the town.

Other observers have claimed that there is no bike usage in the town, but during my site visit local cyclists were using the main roads. The town itself is compact and the clear majority of residents who live within the town are within 1km – perhaps 12-15 minutes at most – walk from the town centre and key nodes including Gort National School (around 300 metres south of the Market Square), *Gaelscoil na PhFili* and the Gort Community School, the latter two of which are east of Bridge Street, and around 1.5km on average from the residential areas to the north-west. The railway station is around 800 metres from the Community School and 600 metres from the Market Square. As such, it is reasonable to think that there is some limited scope for facilitating local cyclists, in particular school children and providing 'last mile' transportation to and from the railway station. The presence of the M18 and heavy traffic around that junction makes the road system on this side potentially unpleasant for cyclists wishing to visit the most prominent outdoor amenity nearby, Coole Demesne.

I further note that the general area between Slieve Aughty and the Burren would be popular with touring and recreational cyclists, although there are no specific proposals for Greenways or other links in the area, and the majority would be using the minor roads around the Burren National Park or the Wild Atlantic Way (Eurovelo Route 1) along the coast. There are no Eurovelo routes or national Greenways proposed for the immediate area of Gort.

The town, with the usual country town mix of haphazard parking and heavy thru traffic, is less than ideal for cyclists, particularly children, but I accept the argument of the local authority that there is insufficient width to provide for parking and dedicated cycling routes. While there is certainly an argument based on the traffic surveys carried out that a much more radical reduction of on-street parking could have been

implemented as part of the proposal without impacting on businesses, the proposals do appear to be a reasonable compromise between all the competing needs for public space. It is somewhat disappointing that the proposal did not address in more detail the recommendations in the Guidelines and Manuals referred to above to seek to identify and eliminate hazards for cyclists, in particular the narrow and steep link between Market Square and Crowe Street, possibly by developing Bolands Lane and Queen Street as a safe protected bypass (Queen Street is one-way – there is provision in the Cycle Design Manual for providing contra-flows in such circumstances). In reality, local cyclists will likely organically find the safer routes even if not specifically designated as such.

I also note that there has been no significant attempt to make the proposed roundabout at the main junction in Market Square more cycle friendly, in line with the proposals in section 4 of the Cycle Design Manual. In this regard, I note that the provisions for crossing points next to the roundabout and overall traffic calming should ensure traffic speeds are very slow at this point, so even though such roundabouts are not comfortable for inexperienced cyclists, I do not consider that it constitutes a hazard.

While I accept Mr. Forans argument that narrowing road lanes can create a perception of hazard (and frequently an actual hazard), especially for children cycling within the town, I consider that the overall design will significantly reduce speeds and rationalise traffic movements, resulting in no net increase in hazard, but a likely marginal improvement in the overall level of amenity and safety for cyclists in the town, including for the inexperienced and for children going to school or other amenities, such as the town library on Queen Street.

In this regard, while I would conclude that the overall design could have been more radical in reducing on-street parking and providing for more space for cyclists, and in particular identifying potential hazards and solutions at the proposed roundabout, I do not consider that the proposals actively make things worse for cycling, and for the most part will provide modest net improvements. As such, I do not consider that it is contrary to the statutory requirements set out in the Climate Action Plan or in related guidance or statute.

## Design considerations

### Overall design and conception

As I have noted above, the overall design is in line with the provisions of national, regional and local policy and the recently adopted LAP. The overall conception is for quite a light touch approach to the towns streetscape, with a much needed rationalisation of traffic flows in Market Square, and for the much needed provision of off-street parking for shoppers and other users of the commercial premises in the town. While inevitably some businesses are less than happy at the loss of parking directly adjoining their premises, this copious supply of parking has undoubtedly led to both visual chaos, a reduction in amenity for pedestrians and others, and created numerous points of potential hazard due to restricted pedestrian space and poor-quality crossing points. As the town increases in size due to newly permitted residential developments on the eastern side, it can be anticipated that traffic could get worse, in particular during peak commuting hours.

The applicant has submitted a Design and Planning Statement provided by BDP consultants, which includes detailed drawings and visualizations, including further details on the choice of materials and landscaping. Section 2.8 of that document indicates the choice of tree species for the main roads, although I note that these are generally indicative. While active intervention into the streetscape is relatively modest in scope and scale – as noted above I consider that a much more radical approach to creating more pedestrian and cycling space could have been justified - I would consider the overall design conception and execution to be of a high standard and will provide very significant overall benefits to the town.

A number of observers, in particular Sullivans Hotel - located on the corner of Market Square, has objected to the changes at this corner. While the hotel and the adjoining businesses have clearly benefited over the years from very convenient street parking and general access, I concur with the local authority that the situation at this point is entirely unsatisfactory from a safety and amenity perspective. The mix of parking and the left turn into Crowe Street has created an unsafe and unpleasant situation for pedestrians and the proposal to seal off this 'branch' from left turning traffic will provide very significant safety and amenity benefits and will significantly benefit the regular Friday Market. I accept the submission by the

Council that its submitted traffic report and data are accurate in the context of the proposed changes to the town's road layout.

I note the comment in the cultural heritage appraisal that the use of street trees may not be appropriate for such a formally laid out street and could potentially detract from the visual appreciation of its well preserved proportions and potentially screen some of the more attractive buildings. I note that the proposed trees are generally modestly proportioned and have an emphasis on colour (i.e. species such as Gleditsia, Magnolia and ornamental Hawthorne). I would be concerned that there is a certain randomness to the choice of trees on Bridge Street - the Commission may wish to alter this by condition.

Notwithstanding the more detailed issues I will address below, I consider the overall design and conception of the public realm scheme to be of a satisfactory quality.

#### *Public bus stop*

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) objects to the proposed removal of the existing main bus stop at Market Square directly outside the former Courthouse, and their replacement with a bus/coach stopping area to the south-east of Market Square on George Street, close to the Aldi and next to the Railway Bridge over the road. This is approximately 350 metres away from Market Square and around 4-5 minutes' walk. TII argues that it is inconsistent with national planning policy with regard to public transport to move the bus stop from such a central and visible location in the heart of the town to a more distant peripheral location. The local authority state that Bus Eireann and other operators agree with the proposal. In support of moving the bus stop, they note the following:

- The current bus location interferes directly with traffic at the junction between the two regional roads creating congestion and potential hazard
- The levels change at this point (the east side of Market Square, next to the old Courthouse, is significantly higher than the rest of the Square) has resulted in a hazard for users accessing the northbound bus at this point.

- It is argued that the proposed new stops allows for a safer, better loading and manoeuvring environment, and is much closer to the railway station, allowing for more integrated public transport use.

The town is served by a number of bus routes (in addition to the relatively recently reopened railway station). Route 51 connects Gort to Galway and Limerick/Cork, Route 350 connects to Galway and Ennis, in addition to some villages in north Clare. Route 434 provides a once-a-day direct route link to Galway. There are also some local TFI links, including route 349. At the time of my site visit, in mid-week and mid-afternoon, there was a significant number of people waiting at both bus stops.

The location of the bus stops right in the town centre, and probably the most visible single location, is clearly advantageous for the town as a whole. I would concur as a general principle with the TII submission that such a location should be chosen and protected wherever possible. Notwithstanding this, it does seem very clear that the levels change between the highway and the footpath at this point and the location so close to a junction (and the proposed roundabout), is highly problematic in safety and accessibility terms. Due to the historic fabric on the pavement on the east side of the Square next to the Courthouse, there seems little potential for re-engineering the levels to facilitate fully safe and wheelchair friendly access.

On balance, I therefore concur with the decision of the planning authority to move the location closer to the Railway Station, although this will undoubtedly be less convenient for at least some residents of the town. Neither option is ideal, but on balance I consider that safety considerations points to the proposed change of location represents the best overall balance of safety, accessibility and amenity. I therefore do not recommend that this element be deleted or altered.

### Parking

The town centre currently has 252 on-street public parking spaces (not including spaces associated with the three supermarkets) – it is proposed to reduce this to 165 spaces. The two new proposed off-street parking areas will accommodate 100 new spaces, resulting in a net gain of 13 spaces (5% increase). There will be a significant re-orientation of parking, with right angled spaces replaced by parallel

parking spaces. Additionally, much existing parking land is reallocated to landscaping and tree planting, pavement extensions and some bike parking stands. The proposed off-street parking is on a vacant site between Lowery's Lane and Bolands Court at the north of the centre, next to the Fire Station (this site appears to have been recently cleared of vegetation and hardened with a rough stone surface). The second one is to the east on Barrack Street (the site of a former cavalry barracks possibly associated with the original Gort Castle – now a small commercial area). It is fenced and seems to have been occupied by a dwelling, now cleared. Both are within less than 150 metres walk of Market Square.

A number of observers raised concerns about the loss of parking within the town and the convenience of the existing system for existing customers. The surveys carried out by the local authority indicate that there is no evidence of a shortfall in parking in the town at present – even at the peak time of Saturday there were still available spaces. The proposal is to ensure the proposed reduced number of spaces are used generally for short term parking only to encourage turn-over for business and discourage long term parkers from blocking parking spaces.

On the available evidence, it is clear that there is no overall shortage of parking within the town, and while having multiple spaces in front of the shops may appear convenient, there is no evidence that this helps business – in reality, the narrow pavements are much less attractive and safe than they should be for such a small town. The delineation of a reasonable number of parking spaces for the registered disabled will address the specific issues of mobility restricted shoppers, so long as those spaces are respected/enforced. Given the very close proximity of the two proposed parking spaces to the range of shops and commercial operations within the town centre, it seems highly unlikely that anybody will be disadvantaged or incentivised to drive to another town. In other respects, the rationalisation of the parking will provide a more attractive and safer environment for pedestrians, in particular during market days.

I therefore conclude that there is no basis for refusing permission or significantly altering the proposed parking provision by way of condition for the reason of inadequate parking provision or layout.

### *Mobility issues*

The overall design, among other objectives, is intended to improve mobility around the town by way of widening footpaths creating safer crossings, providing age friendly and disabled parking bays mostly within Market Square), appropriately graded crossings, and an improved bus stop area (the existing bus stop on the eastern side of market Square has poor bus access due to the elevated pavement at this point).

The overall design achieves this to a reasonable degree (I note in this regard the submissions arguing that some elements of the Road Safety Audit could be improved), although there may be some scope for some improvements – the plans submitted are detailed, but the Commission may wish to condition it such that minor alterations can be made at final contract stage to address any issues that arise. I conclude that the overall design significantly improves mobility for all elements of society and is in line with all national and regional guidance in this regard.

### *Crossing points*

The proposed public realm works includes for improved additional crossing points on the town centre streets, with one at each of the tree main entries to the town, three further on Bridge Street and close to where the main roads meet Market Square, and a pair at the proposed new roundabout. The local authority state that there are a number of points where crossing is considered hazardous, in particular on the east side of Market Square next to Crowe Street, and from my observations during my site visit I can concur that there were visible problems for pedestrians at this point due to irregular traffic movements at the junction. The proposed crossings are in line with current design guidance, and I would consider are sufficient in number and at appropriate locations.

### *Street furniture and trees*

The submitted documentation gives an overview of paving types, landscaping and street furniture, in addition to a wayfaring strategy (focusing on signage for pedestrians). Landscaping details are provided, but there is some flexibility within

the plans provided as to planting and related details, which I would consider to be reasonable.

A number of submissions have been made about specific aspects of the street furniture design and layout. With regards to the Christ the Redeemer statue in Market Square, the local authority has confirmed that there are no proposals to alter the statue or the plinth in any way – the submitted plans confirm this. If anything, the proposals will enhance its immediate context, in particular the removal (if granted) of the bus shelter.

The owner/operator of the Tal Vez Coffee shop on Bridge Street (near the centre of the main terrace on the east side) has requested the deletion/relocation of the proposed street tree at this point and its replacement with ground level and the proposed benches, and asked for an increase in the paved area (to allow for more café seating) and more bike/art space. At present, this premises is fronted by street parking and a single parking meter (on plan no. 3160-BDP-00-XX-DR-L-0106 it is labelled by its older name of M.Barry Flour Meal and Provision Store). The tree is to be located close to the boundary between this premises and Pat Smyths to the north. I concur with the response of the applicant that the proposed tree will not shade the premises. The planning authority has stated that the benches proposed are to facilitate the less able bodied in the community – while this is obviously a key benefit of the proposal, I would consider that there are sufficient benches along this street and removing the one in front of the café premises would be reasonable, especially as this is a particularly attractive shop front and it would be better if it was not blocked in any way. As to increasing the pavement at this point – the Council note that the overall width of the pedestrian way is to be increased, but there is a limit to this with regard to the stated need for carriageway width and parking. While it would certainly be very worthwhile to have more pavement at this point, in order not to interfere with the overall balance of the proposal I do not consider that it would be appropriate as it would fundamentally alter the overall plan.

Charles Foley, the owner of a solicitors office on the western end of Market Square (indicated in plan 3106-BDP-00-XX-DR-L-0103) also requested a tree deleted at this point. This is to be placed in an area of expanded public space on either side of a laneway going north. This is a crucial viewpoint for people entering the heart of the town, and I consider the landscaping proposals here to be an important element of

the overall design – I therefore do not recommend any significant alteration by condition.

A number of other submissions have objected to the nature of the proposed development, including what is claimed to be excessive numbers of bike parking areas, trees, etc. It is not always clear from the submissions as to whether they relate to specific items of furniture, or the proposals in general. I would conclude that the overall design, layout and choice of street furniture reasonably address the competing needs and balance of allocating public space in a historic town, so I do not recommend further significant changes by condition of the Commission is minded to grant approval.

#### *Construction and implementation (including maintenance)*

The proposed works have been accompanied by a Construction and Management Plan, which I consider to be reasonable and in line with best practice for such works. I note additional measures set out in the Appropriate Assessment. I note the concerns outlined in the Cultural Heritage submission about potential impacts of the works on protected structures – while I would consider this to be unlikely, and for the most part the protected structures are not within the Council ownership, so it is outside the scope of this application, I would consider it reasonable to address such potential impacts by condition.

I would note the concerns expressed in a number of observations about litter, maintenance, and the potential for trees to impact on public services. The proposed ground level landscaping would certainly require additional maintenance, as such planting can, if inappropriately managed, attract vermin and catch litter. In general, hard landscaping in public areas is more robust and less likely to result in unintended nuisance issues. However, I consider that the designs have been carefully chosen, and I trust the Council has sufficient experience in these matters not to choose specific plants or planting layouts which generate problems. Issues with the growth of trees interfering with overhead services and the long-term management of the town centre in general is outside the scope of this application.

## **Suggested conditions**

If the Commission is minded to grant approval, I consider that no significant alterations are required by conditions. I would recommend some minor alterations, specifically the removal of a bench in front of one unit, and conditions to ensure no direct impacts on adjoining protected structures. Otherwise, standard conditions relating to appropriate assessment, best practice construction management, archaeological monitoring are required.

## **9.3 The likely significant effects on a European site**

The areas addressed in this section are as follows:

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

### **9.3.1 Compliance with Articles 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive**

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

### **9.3.2 The Natura Impact Statement**

The application was accompanied by an NIS which described the proposed development, the project site and the surrounding area. The NIS contained a Stage 1 Screening Assessment which concluded that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was required. The NIS outlined the methodology used for assessing potential impacts on the habitats and species within several European Sites that have the

potential to be affected by the proposed development. It predicted the potential impacts for these sites and their conservation objectives, it suggested mitigation measures, assessed in-combination effects with other plans and projects and it identified any residual effects on the European sites and their conservation objectives.

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

- A desk top study.
- An examination of aerial photography and maps.
- A bat survey of the proposal site and surroundings including along the Gort River
- Consultations with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The report concluded that, subject to the implementation of best practice and the recommended mitigation measures, the proposed development would not result in adverse effects on any European site.

Having reviewed the NIS and the supporting documentation, I am satisfied that it provides adequate information in respect of the baseline conditions, does clearly identify the potential impacts, and does use best scientific information and knowledge. Details of mitigation measures are provided, and they are summarised in the NIS. I am satisfied that the information is sufficient to allow for appropriate assessment of the proposed development (see further analysis below).

### **9.3.3            Appropriate Assessment**

I consider that the proposed development of the Gort Town Urban Realm improvement is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site.

Having regard to the information and submissions available, nature, size and location of the proposed development and its likely direct, indirect and cumulative effects, the source pathway receptor principle and sensitivities of the ecological receptors the following European Sites are considered relevant to include for the

purposes of initial screening for the requirement for Stage 2 appropriate assessment on the basis of likely significant effects

European sites considered for Stage 1 screening:

European site (SAC/SPA)	Qualifying Interests	Distance
Coole-Garryland Complex SAC, site code 000252	Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150] Turloughs [3180] Rivers with muddy banks with Chenopodion rubri p.p. and Bidention p.p. vegetation [3270] Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130] Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210] Limestone pavements [8240] Taxus baccata woods of the British Isles [91J0] Rhinolophus hipposideros (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]	1km
Coole-Garryland SPA site code 004107	Whooper Swan ( <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> ) [A038]	1km
Termon Lough SAC site code 001321.	Turloughs [3180]	5km
Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA site code 004168.	Hen Harrier ( <i>Circus cyaneus</i> ) [A082] Merlin ( <i>Falco columbarius</i> ) [A098]	7km
Ballinduff Turlough SAC site code 002295.	Turloughs [3180]	5km
Caherglassaun Turlough SAC	Turloughs [3180]	5km

European site (SAC/SPA)	Qualifying Interests	Distance
	<p>with muddy banks with <i>Chenopodium rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidention p.p.</i> vegetation [3270]</p> <p><i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p>	
Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs 002293.	Turloughs [3180]	4km
Lough Coy SAC, site code 002117	Turloughs	6km
Dromore Woods and Loughs SAC site code 000032.	<p>Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i> - type vegetation [3150]</p> <p>Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p><i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p>	10km
East Burren Complex SAC, site code 001926.	<p>Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. [3140]</p> <p>Turloughs [3180]</p> <p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</p> <p>Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]</p> <p><i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]</p> <p>Calaminarian grasslands of the <i>Violetalia calaminariae</i> [6130]</p> <p>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (* important orchid sites) [6210]</p> <p>Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) [6510]</p>	3km

European site (SAC/SPA)	Qualifying Interests	Distance
	<p>Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [7210]</p> <p>Petrifying springs with tufa formation (<i>Cratoneurion</i>) [7220]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p>Caves not open to the public [8310]</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>Euphydryas aurinia</i> (Marsh Fritillary) [1065]</p> <p><i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p>	
Moyree River System SAC site code 000057.	<p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p>Caves not open to the public [8310]</p> <p><i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p>	10km
Lough Cutra SAC site code 000299.	<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 <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</p>	4km

European site (SAC/SPA)	Qualifying Interests	Distance
	<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 <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [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 <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles [91A0]</p> <p>Bog woodland [91D0]</p> <p><i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</p> <p><i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]</p> <p><i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</p> <p><i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</p> <p><i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106]</p> <p><i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p> <p><i>Najas flexilis</i> (Slender Naiad) [1833]</p> <p><i>Hamatocaulis vernicosus</i> (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]</p>	
<b>Lough Cutra SPA site code 004056.</b>	Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> ) [A017]	4km

Based on my examination of the NIS report and supporting information, the NPWS website, aerial and satellite imagery, the scale of the proposed development and likely effects, separation distance and functional relationship between the proposed works and the European sites, their conservation objectives and taken in conjunction with my assessment of the subject site and the surrounding area, I would conclude that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required for 6.no of the European sites referred to above, i.e. the Coole Garryland Complex SAC, Lough Cutra SAC, Caherglassaun Turlough SAC, Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC, Lough Coy SAC and the East Burren Complex SAC.

The remaining sites can be screened out from further assessment because of the nature and scale the scale of the proposed works, the nature of the Conservation Objectives, Qualifying and Special Conservation Interests, the separation distances and the lack of a substantive linkage between the proposed works and the European sites. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that on the basis of the information on the file, which I consider adequate in order to issue a screening determination, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to have a significant effect on these European sites in view of the sites conservation objectives and a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not therefore required for these sites.

### **Relevant European sites**

The Conservation Objectives and Qualifying Interests, including any relevant attributes and targets for these sites, are set out below.

Site Name	Qualifying Interests	Distance
1. Coole Garryland Complex SAC	Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150] Turloughs [3180] Rivers with muddy banks with Chenopodion rubri p.p. and Bidention p.p. vegetation [3270]	2km

Site Name	Qualifying Interests	Distance
	<p>Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]</p> <p>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p>Taxus baccata woods of the British Isles [91J0]</p> <p>Rhinolophus hipposideros (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p>	
<b>2. Lough Cutra SAC</b>	Rhinolophus hipposideros (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]	5km
<b>3. Caherglassaun Turlough SAC</b>	<p>Turloughs [3180]</p> <p>Rivers with muddy banks with <i>Chenopodium rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidention</i> p.p. vegetation [3270]</p> <p>Rhinolophus hipposideros (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303]</p>	6km
<b>4. Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC</b>	Turloughs [3180]	5km
<b>5. Lough Coy SAC</b>	Turloughs [3180]	6 km
<b>6. East Burren Complex SAC</b>	<p>Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. [3140]</p> <p>Turloughs [3180]</p> <p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitrichio-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260]</p> <p>Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]</p> <p>Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]</p> <p>Calaminarian grasslands of the <i>Violetalia calaminariae</i> [6130]</p> <p>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]</p> <p>Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) [6510]</p> <p>Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [7210]</p>	2 km

Site Name	Qualifying Interests	Distance
	Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220] Alkaline fens [7230] Limestone pavements [8240] Caves not open to the public [8310] Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i> (Marsh Fritillary) [1065] <i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> (Lesser Horseshoe Bat) [1303] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	

## 1. Coole Garryland SAC site code 000252

The Coole-Garryland Complex is situated in a low-lying karstic limestone area west of Gort, in Co. Galway within and around the Coole Park Estate. It contains a series of seasonal lakes (turloughs), which are fed by springs and a partly submerged river, surrounded by woodland, pasture and limestone heath. The more well-known turloughs present in the site include Lydakan, Crannagh North, Raheen, Crannagh South, Coole, Garryland, Newtown and Hawkhill.

### Conservation Objectives

- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition* - type vegetation.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Turloughs.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Rivers with muddy banks with *Chenopodion rubri p.p.* and *Bidention p.p.* vegetation.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands.

- To restore the favourable conservation condition of semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland species on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*).
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Limestone pavements.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles.
- To maintain the Favourable conservation condition of the Lesser Horseshoe Bat.

**Potential direct effects:**

Potential impact on populations of this bat foraging and commuting along the Gort River if increased lighting results in strengthening the barrier effect. This could affect satellite roosts associated with the SAC.

**Potential indirect effects:**

Potential impact on water quality and lake substratum quality and PH balance.

**Potential in-combination effects:**

None identified.

**Mitigation measures:**

Bat protection measures set out in 5.1.7 of the NIS – controls on tree works, disturbance, and the implementation of a lighting plan (as submitted).

**Residual effects/Further analysis:**

None identified.

**NIS Omissions**

None noted.

### **Suggested related conditions**

Standard condition relating to water pollution control in construction methodology.

Conclusion: I am satisfied that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of this European site in light of its conservation objectives (subject to the implementation of mitigation measures outlined above).

## **2. Lough Cutra SAC site code 000299**

Lough Cutra is a large oligo/mesotrophic freshwater lake in south Galway lying on limestone, but with much sediment washed down from the sandstone hills of Slieve Aughy. This lake is situated about 4 km south-east of Gort. A series of connected woodlands on the western side of the lake has been included as foraging habitat for the Lesser Horseshoe Bats which roost at the site.

### **Conservation Objectives:**

To restore the favourable conservation condition of the Lesser Horseshoe bat.

### **Potential direct effects:**

Potential impact on populations of this bat foraging and commuting along the Gort River if increased lighting results in strengthening the barrier effect. This could affect satellite roosts associated with the SAC.

### **Potential indirect effects:**

None identified

### **Potential in-combination effects:**

None identified.

**Mitigation measures:**

Bat protection measures set out in 5.1.7 of the NIS – controls on tree works, disturbance, and the implementation of a lighting plan (as submitted).

**Residual effects/Further analysis:**

None identified

**NIS Omissions:**

None noted.

**Suggested related conditions**

Implementation of lighting plan as submitted.

**Conclusion:** I am satisfied that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of this European site in light of its conservation objectives, subject to the implementation of mitigation measures outlined above.

### 3. Caherglassaun Turlough SAC site code 000238

Caherglassaun is a large lake located 6 km north-west of Gort in the low-lying farmland of east Co. Galway. Situated in a natural depression just to the north-west of Coole Nature Reserve, this site comprises a permanent lake at its core, while the rest of the basin functions as a turlough. At times of high water, the site can flood to a depth of 10-15 m. A series of collapse features act as swallow-holes.

**Conservation Objectives**

- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Turloughs.

- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Rivers with muddy banks with *Chenopodium rubri* p.p. and *Bidention p.p.* vegetation.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Lesser Horseshoe Bat

#### **Potential direct effects:**

Potential impact on populations of this bat foraging and commuting along the Gort River if increased lighting results in strengthening the barrier effect. This could affect satellite roosts associated with the SAC.

#### **Potential indirect effects:**

Potential indirect effects on water quality from construction run-off.

#### **Potential in-combination effects:**

None identified

#### **Mitigation measures:**

Bat protection measures set out in 5.1.7 of the NIS – controls on tree works, disturbance, and the implementation of a lighting plan (as submitted).

Construction water run off standard controls.

#### **Residual effects/Further analysis:**

None identified

#### **NIS Omissions**

None noted.

#### **Suggested related conditions**

Implementation of lighting plan as submitted.

**Conclusion:** I am satisfied that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of

this European site in light of its conservation objectives (subject to the implementation of mitigation measures outlined above).

#### **4. Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC, site code 002293**

The Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC complex is a group of three turloughs which are hydrologically linked in times of high flood. It is situated in the vicinity of the Thoor Ballylee Interpretive Centre, 3 km west of Peterswell and 6 km north-east of Gort, in the limestone lowlands of south Co. Galway. The site is at the southern end of a larger complex of turloughs which includes the SACs Lough Coy (002117) and Peterswell (000318). It is usually the last of these to flood.

#### **Conservation Objectives**

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs.

#### **Potential direct effects:**

None identified

#### **Potential indirect effects:**

Potential impact on water quality by way of run-off.

#### **Potential in-combination effects:**

None identified

#### **Mitigation measures:**

Standard water control measures in construction management.

#### **Residual effects/Further analysis:**

None identified.

## **NIS Omissions**

None noted.

## **Suggested related conditions**

Standard water pollution control measures – CEMP.

### **Conclusion:**

I am satisfied that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of this European site in light of its conservation objectives (subject to the implementation of mitigation measures outlined above).

## **5. Lough Coy SAC, site code 002117**

Lough Coy is situated approximately 6.5 km north-east of Gort in Co. Galway and lies close to the Slieve Aughty hills. The site consists of a small permanent lake in the middle of an almost circular turlough basin. There are drift deposits, as well as outcropping rocks and boulders on the relatively steep side walls, and small areas of scrub towards the top of the basin. Areas of improved grassland above the normal flood line are included in the site for hydrological reasons. The underlying soils consist of alluvial gleys and a gleyed, rendzina-like soil.

### **Conservation Objectives**

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of turloughs

### **Potential direct effects:**

None identified.

### **Potential indirect effects:**

Water quality impacts through construction.

**Potential in-combination effects:**

None identified.

**Mitigation measures:**

Standard construction site water quality controls.

**Residual effects/Further analysis:**

None identified

**NIS Omissions**

None noted.

**Suggested related conditions**

Standard water control measures during construction.

**Conclusion:**

I am satisfied that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of this European site in light of its conservation objectives subject to the implementation of mitigation measures outlined above.

**6: East Burren Complex SAC site code 001926.**

This extensive and complex habitat incorporates all of the high ground in the east Burren in Counties Clare and Galway and extends south-eastwards to include a complex of calcareous wetlands. The area encompasses a range of limestone habitats that include limestone pavement and associated calcareous grasslands and heath, scrub and woodland together with a network of calcareous lakes and turloughs. The site exhibits some of the best and most extensive areas of oligotrophic limestone wetlands to be found in the Burren and in Europe.

## Conservation Objectives

- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara spp.*
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Turloughs.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Alpine and Boreal heaths.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of *Calaminarian* grasslands of the *Violetalia calaminariae*.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (\* important orchid sites).
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Lowland hay meadows.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davallianae*.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Petrifying springs with tufa formation.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Alkaline fens.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Limestone pavements.
- Caves not open to the public (8310) is integrally linked to lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) (1303) as part of the habitat for the species; therefore, a separate conservation objective has not been set for the habitat in East Burren Complex SAC.
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion albae*).

- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*).
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus*)
- To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

**Potential direct effects:**

Potential impact on populations of this bat foraging and commuting along the Gort River if increased lighting results in strengthening the barrier effect. This could affect satellite roosts associated for the Lesser Horseshoe Bat.

**Potential indirect effects:**

Potential indirect effects identified were potential impacts on water quality impacting on fens and water quality and on otter.

**Potential in-combination effects:**

None identified.

**Mitigation measures:**

Standard construction water quality mitigation measures as set out in the construction management plan required.

**Residual effects/Further analysis:**

None identified.

**NIS Omissions**

None noted

**Conclusion:**

I am satisfied that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of this European site

in light of its conservation objectives subject to the implementation of mitigation measures outlined above.

### **Appropriate Assessment Conclusions**

The proposed works are almost entirely contained within the existing town and do not involve significant ground works or other works likely to result in significant impacts outside the town. The NIS and associated documents have identified some issues with bats foraging along the Gort River – although no Lesser Horseshoe Bats were identified, this species is listed among the QI's for a number of nearby SAC's and could use the river for commuting and foraging. The NIS includes proposals to reduce lighting impacts on the commuting zone and to ensure no possible bat roosts are impacted during the works. The proposed alterations to lighting should significantly improve the local habitat for commuting and foraging Lesser Horseshoe Bats along the river. The other anticipated impact is on water quality impacting on turloughs and associated water features in surrounding SAC's. I am satisfied that with standard control measures during works there would not be any effects outside the boundary of the town and so any effects on surrounding European sites can be ruled out. The use of SuDs in the design should result in a neutral or slightly positive impact on ground and surface water quality.

Having regard to the containment of the works within the existing urban area of Gort and the control measures addressing water pollution and the protection of bats in the course of the works, I consider that it is reasonable to conclude on the basis of the information on the file, which I consider adequate in order to carry out a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans and projects would not adversely affect the integrity of the European sites 000252; 000299; 000238; 002293; 002117; or 001926 or any other European site, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives.

## **10. Recommendation**

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

### **Reasons and Considerations**

The Board reached its decision in accordance with its duties under Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended, and the requirement to, in so far as practicable, perform its functions in a manner consistent with *inter alia* the Climate Action Plan 2025 and the furtherance of the national climate objective.

And in coming to its decision, the Board had regard to the following:

- (a) the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC),
- (b) the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2015,
- (c) the likely consequences for the environment and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which it is proposed to carry out the proposed development and the likely significant effects of the proposed development on a European Site,
- (d) the conservation objectives, qualifying interests and special conservation interests for the Coole Garyland SAC (site code:000252 ), the Lough Cutra SAC (site code 000299) the Caherglassaun Turlough.SAC (site code: 000238), the Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC, site code 002293; the Lough Coy SAC, site code 002117; and the East Burren Complex SAC site code 001926.
- (e) the policies and objectives of the Galway County Development Plan, 2022-2028,

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

## **Appropriate Assessment**

The Commission agreed with and adopted the screening assessment and conclusion carried out in the Inspector's report that the Coole Garyland SAC (site code:000252); the Lough Cutra SAC (site code 000299); the Caherglassaun Turlough.SAC (site code: 000238); the Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC, site code 002293; the Lough Coy SAC, site code 002117; and the East Burren Complex SAC site code 001926, are the only European Sites in respect of which the proposed development has the potential to have a significant effect.

The Commission considered the Natura Impact Statement and associated documentation submitted with the application for approval, the mitigation measures contained therein, the submissions and observations on file, and the Inspector's assessment. The Commission completed an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposed development for the affected European Sites, namely the Coole Garyland SAC (site code:000252); the Lough Cutra SAC (site code 000299); the Caherglassaun Turlough.SAC (site code: 000238); the Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC, site code 002293; the Lough Coy SAC, site code 002117; and the East Burren Complex SAC site code 001926, in view of the site's conservation objectives. The Commission considered that the information before it was adequate to allow the carrying out of an appropriate assessment. In completing the appropriate assessment, the Commission considered, in particular, the following:

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

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

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

### **Proper Planning and Sustainable Development/Likely effects on the environment**

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

## Conditions

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

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

2. Prior to the commencement of development, plans shall be revised for the following requirement:

The proposed public benches in front of the M.Barry Flour Meal and Provision Store building (drawing no.3160-BDP-00-XX-DR-L-0106) shall be removed.

**Reason:** In the interest of visual amenities.

3. The mitigation and monitoring measures identified in the Natura Impact Statement submitted with the application shall be implemented in full. Prior to the commencement of development, details of a time schedule for implementation of mitigation measures and associated monitoring shall be prepared by the local authority and placed on file and retained as part of the public record.

**Reason:** In the interest of protecting the environment, the protection of European Sites and in the interest of public health.

4. A suitably qualified ecologist shall be retained by the local authority to oversee the site set up and construction of the proposed development and implementation of mitigation measures relating to ecology. The ecologist

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

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

5. Prior to the commencement of development, the local authority, or any agent acting on its behalf, shall prepare in consultation with the project ecologist and relevant statutory agencies, a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), incorporating all mitigation measures indicated in the Natura Impact Statement and Ecological Impact Assessment and demonstration of proposals to adhere to best practice and protocols. The CEMP shall include:
  - a. all mitigation measures indicated in the Natura Impact Statement and Ecological Impact Assessment,
  - b. location and extent of silt fencing to be installed on site.
  - c. specific proposals as to how the measures outlined in the CEMP will be measured and monitored for effectiveness,

**Reason:** In the interest of protecting the environment and the European Site.

6. The following nature conservation requirements shall be complied with:
  - a. Prior to the commencement of development, details of measures to protect fisheries and water quality of the river system shall be outlined and placed on file. Full regard shall be had to Inland Fisheries Ireland's published guidelines for construction works near waterways (Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and Adjacent to Waters, 2016). A programme of water quality monitoring shall be prepared in consultation with the contractor, the local authority and relevant statutory agencies and the programme shall be implemented thereafter.

- b. no vegetation removal shall take place during the period of the 1<sup>st</sup> day of March to the 31<sup>st</sup> day of August (inclusive) without the written approval of the Ecological Clerk of Works. Such approval shall be placed on the public file.
- c. a pre-construction bat survey shall be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist during the active bat season, and, any destruction of bat roosting sites or relocation of bat species shall be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist under a Derogation Licence granted by the Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

**Reason:** In the interests of biodiversity and nature conservation.

- 7. The developer shall engage a suitably qualified (licensed eligible) archaeologist to monitor (licensed under the National Monuments Acts) all site clearance works, topsoil stripping, groundworks, dredging and/or the implementation of agreed preservation in-situ measures associated with the development. [specify, as appropriate, following consultation with the Local Authority Archaeologist or the National Monument Service (NMS)]. Prior to the commencement of such works the archaeologist shall consult with and forward to the Local Authority archaeologist or the NMS as appropriate a method statement for written agreement. The use of appropriate tools and/or machinery to ensure the preservation and recording of any surviving archaeological remains shall be necessary. Should archaeological remains be identified during the course of archaeological monitoring, all works shall cease in the area of archaeological interest pending a decision of the planning authority, in consultation with the National Monuments Service, regarding appropriate mitigation.

The developer shall facilitate the archaeologist in recording any remains identified. Any further archaeological mitigation requirements specified by the planning authority, following consultation with the National Monuments

Service, shall be complied with by the developer. Following the completion of all archaeological work on site and any necessary post-excavation specialist analysis, the planning authority and the National Monuments Service shall be furnished with a final archaeological report describing the results of the monitoring and any subsequent required archaeological investigative work/excavation required. All resulting and associated archaeological costs shall be borne by the developer.

**Reason:** To ensure the continued preservation [either in situ or by record] of places, caves, sites, features or other objects of archaeological interest

8. The Local Authority and any agent acting on its behalf shall ensure that all plant and machinery used during the works should be thoroughly cleaned and washed before delivery to the site to prevent the spread of hazardous invasive species and pathogens.

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

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Philip Davis  
Senior Planning Inspector  
7<sup>th</sup> January 2026

## APPENDIX – EIAR AND WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE FORMS.

### Form 1 - EIA Pre-Screening

<b>Case Reference</b>	
<b>Proposed Development Summary</b>	ABP-32066-25
<b>Development Address</b>	Gort, County Galway
<b>In all cases check box /or leave blank</b>	
<b>1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA?</b>  (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)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a 'Project'. Proceed to Q2.
	<input type="checkbox"/> No, No further action required.
<b>2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1, Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?</b>	
<b>EIA is mandatory. No Screening required. EIAR to be requested. Discuss with ADP.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a Class specified in Part 1.  <b>EIA is mandatory. No Screening required. EIAR to be requested. Discuss with ADP.</b>
	State the Class here  <b>EIA is mandatory. No Screening required. EIAR to be requested. Discuss with ADP.</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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?**

<input type="checkbox"/> 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. <b>No Screening required.</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class and meets/exceeds the threshold.  <b>EIA is Mandatory. No Screening Required</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class but is sub-threshold.  <b>Preliminary examination required. (Form 2)</b>  <b>OR</b>  <b>If Schedule 7A information submitted proceed to Q4. (Form 3 Required)</b>	Relevant classes include: Class 10(b)(iv) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the P&D Regulations 2001 as amended which includes "(iv) Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere". Class 14. Works of Demolition Works of demolition carried out in order to facilitate a project listed in Part 1 or Part 2 of this Schedule where such works would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7. Class 15. Any project listed in this Part which does not exceed a quantity, area or other limit specified in this Part in respect of the relevant

class of development but which would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7.

In addition, Section 50(1)(a) of the Roads Act, 1993 (as amended), lists road developments in respect of which there is a mandatory requirement to carry out Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as follows-

- (i) the construction of a motorway,
- (ii) the construction of a busway,
- (iii) the construction of a service area, or
- (iv) any prescribed type of proposed road development consisting of the construction of a proposed public road or the improvement of any existing public road.

I note that Article 8 of the Roads Regulations 1994 (S.I. 119 of 1994) states that: "The prescribed types of proposed road development for the purpose of subsection (1)(a)(iii) of section 50 of the Act shall be –

- a) the construction of a new road of four or more lanes, or the realignment or widening of an existing road so as to provide four or more lanes, where such new, realigned or widened road would be eight kilometres or more in length in a rural area, or 500m or more in length in an urban area; b) the construction of a new bridge or tunnel which would be 100m or more in length." Section 68(1) of the Roads Act references a cycleway and states that a 'cycleway' means "a public road or proposed public road reserved for the

	exclusive use of pedal cyclists or pedal cyclists and pedestrians".
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**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)?**

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
No <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q3)</b>

<b>Case Reference</b>	
<b>Proposed Development Summary</b>	Public Realm works including widening pavements, altering location of bus stop, landscaping, two new off-street carparks.
<b>Development Address</b>	Gort, County Galway.
<b>This preliminary examination should be read with, and in the light of, the rest of the Inspector's Report attached herewith.</b>	
<b>Characteristics of proposed development</b>	The proposed development is within the town of Gort, over an area below the relevant thresholds for urban development. Two brownfield sites are to be developed for carparking. There will be limited use of natural resources, production of waste at construction stage. There would be a potential for pollution and nuisance arising at construction stage. There is no potential for major disasters / accidents to result from the development.
<b>Location of development</b>	The site is within the town of Gort, which is an ACA, and has a range of protected structures. It is within the overall landscape region between the Burren and Slieve Aughty hills. The Gort River runs through the town. There are a range of SAC's and SPA's within 10km, mostly associated with the karst landscape.
<b>Types and characteristics of potential impacts</b>	The potential for pollution, wastes and nuisances arising at construction stage on the population would be controlled and mitigated by way of the implementation of a CEMP. The extent of the impact will be limited to the geographical area of scheme for population. The proposed development is intended to have a potential positive impact on population and human health. Having regard to the nature and location of the development no significant impacts on landscape are

anticipated. Works will reuse excavated materials in the reinstatement of landscaping where appropriate. It is considered the nature of environmental impacts is not complex/intense. While there is a potential for impacts on European Sites and water bodies within the site vicinity, given the waterbodies onsite/adjacent, potential runoff of pollutants from works would be mitigated by way of measures in the CEMP and NIS. Potential impacts on the cultural heritage of the area are considered to be low given the nature of the works, their location and implementation of mitigation measures. No potential significant impacts on cultural heritage are anticipated as the works do not include significant excavations and will not directly impact upon protected structures. There will be no transboundary impacts. The construction phase will be short term. The site is zoned and the Development plan has been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. Subject to mitigation significant cumulative effects are not anticipated. Environmental impact assessment assesses the potential for significant environmental effects. There is no potential for significant environmental effects.

### Conclusion

Likelihood of Significant Effects	Conclusion in respect of EIA
There is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	EIA is not required.

Inspector: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

DP/ADP: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Screening Determination

<b>A. CASE DETAILS</b>		
<b>An Bord Pleanála Case Reference</b>	<b>ACP-323066-25</b>	
<b>Development Summary</b>	<b>Public Realm enhancement works in Gort, Co. Galway</b>	
	<b>Yes / No / N/A</b>	<b>Comment (if relevant)</b>
<b>1. Was a Screening Determination carried out by the PA?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No EIAR required</b>
<b>2. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>3. Has an AA screening report or NIS been submitted?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>The NIS concluded that there were no significant effects on designated EU habitats.</b>
<b>4. Is a IED/ IPC or Waste Licence (or review of licence) required from the EPA? If YES has the EPA commented on the need for an EIAR?</b>	<b>No</b>	
<b>5. Have any other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment which have a significant bearing on the project been carried out pursuant to other relevant Directives – for example SEA</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Development Plan and LAP subject to SEA</b>

B. EXAMINATION	Yes/ No/ Uncertain	<b>Briefly describe the nature and extent and Mitigation Measures (where relevant)</b> (having regard to the probability, magnitude (including population size affected), complexity, duration, frequency, intensity, and reversibility of impact) <b>Mitigation measures</b> –Where relevant specify features or measures proposed by the applicant to avoid or prevent a significant effect.	Is this likely to result in significant effects on the environment?  Yes/ No/ Uncertain
<b>This screening examination should be read with, and in light of, the rest of the Inspector's Report attached herewith</b>			
<b>1. Characteristics of proposed development</b> (including demolition, construction, operation, or decommissioning)			
<b>1.1</b> Is the project significantly different in character or scale to the existing surrounding or environment?	Yes	<b>Minor alterations to roads and pavements within an existing urban area, application of SuDs criteria and standard construction mitigation measures required.</b>	No
<b>1.2</b> Will construction, operation, decommissioning or demolition works cause physical changes to the locality (topography, land use, waterbodies)?	Yes	<b>Minor changes to existing hardstanding, application of SuDs criteria mitigates any alterations.</b>	No
<b>1.3</b> Will construction or operation of the project use natural resources such as land, soil, water, materials/minerals or energy, especially resources which are non-renewable or in short supply?	Yes	<b>Replacement of road and pavement surfaces – not significantly different from normal maintenance and replacement.</b>	No.
<b>1.4</b> Will the project involve the use, storage, transport, handling or production of substance	No		

which would be harmful to human health or the environment?			
<b>1.5</b> Will the project produce solid waste, release pollutants or any hazardous / toxic / noxious substances?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Minor arisings from replacing pavements, all to be disposed of according to CEMP in licensed landfills if required.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>1.6</b> Will the project lead to risks of contamination of land or water from releases of pollutants onto the ground or into surface waters, groundwater, coastal waters or the sea?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Possibility of run-off entering nearby watercourses. To be mitigated by way of standard construction controls.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>1.7</b> Will the project cause noise and vibration or release of light, heat, energy or electromagnetic radiation?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Changes to street lighting are proposed. Mitigation measures to be put in place to ensure there is no disturbance to bats commuting on Gort River.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>1.8</b> Will there be any risks to human health, for example due to water contamination or air pollution?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Dust arisings during works. Standard construction mitigation measures proposed.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>1.9</b> Will there be any risk of major accidents that could affect human health or the environment?	<b>No</b>		<b>No</b>
<b>1.10</b> Will the project affect the social environment (population, employment)	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Positive impacts in improving the Public Realm – more public space, safer traffic movements.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>1.11</b> Is the project part of a wider large scale change that could result in cumulative effects on the environment?	<b>No</b>	<b>No similar developments proposed in the locality.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>2. Location of proposed development</b>			

<p><b>2.1</b> Is the proposed development located on, in, adjoining or have the potential to impact on any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- European site (SAC/ SPA/ pSAC/ pSPA)</li> <li>- NHA/ pNHA</li> <li>- Designated Nature Reserve</li> <li>- Designated refuge for flora or fauna</li> <li>- Place, site or feature of ecological interest, the preservation/conservation/ protection of which is an objective of a development plan/ LAP/ draft plan or variation of a plan</li> </ul>	Yes	<p><b>Several SAC's and SPAs within 15km, some within 3km. NIS addresses all potential issues with mitigations focusing on preventing run-off to rivers and groundwater and bat protection measures.</b></p>	No
<p><b>2.2</b> Could any protected, important or sensitive species of flora or fauna which use areas on or around the site, for example: for breeding, nesting, foraging, resting, over-wintering, or migration, be affected by the project?</p>	Yes	<p><b>Some identified bat usage around Gort River. Mitigation measures have been put in place to reduce light levels impacting on commuting. No potential roosts to be affected.</b></p>	No
<p><b>2.3</b> Are there any other features of landscape, historic, archaeological, or cultural importance that could be affected?</p>	Yes	<p><b>Many protected structures and ACA within the area for construction, but no direct impacts anticipated subject to mitigation to ensure archaeological monitoring and no direct removal of historic fabric.</b></p>	No
<p><b>2.4</b> Are there any areas on/around the location which contain important, high quality or scarce resources which could be affected by the project, for example: forestry, agriculture, water/coastal, fisheries, minerals?</p>	No		No
<p><b>2.5</b> Are there any water resources including surface waters, for example: rivers, lakes/ponds, coastal or groundwaters which could be affected by the project, particularly in terms of their volume and flood risk?</p>	Yes	<p><b>Surface waters discharge to Gort River. Standard mitigation measures put in place to prevent run off during construction. SuDs criteria used to reduce run off following</b></p>	No

		<b>construction. Likely positive benefits in the long term.</b>	
<b>2.6</b> Is the location susceptible to subsidence, landslides or erosion?	<b>No</b>		<b>No</b>
<b>2.7</b> Are there any key transport routes(eg National primary Roads) on or around the location which are susceptible to congestion or which cause environmental problems, which could be affected by the project?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Project involves alterations to two existing Regional roads as they run through the town. Traffic speeds will be slowed deliberately, but no significant impact is anticipated on overall capacity or flows.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>2.8</b> Are there existing sensitive land uses or community facilities (such as hospitals, schools etc) which could be affected by the project?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>The works will change the public realm in the vicinity of schools and health clinics and other town centre services. The overall impact is expected to be positive.</b>	<b>No.</b>
<b>3. Any other factors that should be considered which could lead to environmental impacts</b>			
<b>3.1 Cumulative Effects:</b> Could this project together with existing and/or approved development result in cumulative effects during the construction/ operation phase?	<b>No</b>	<b>No developments identified with the potential for cumulative impacts.</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>3.2 Transboundary Effects:</b> Is the project likely to lead to transboundary effects?	<b>No</b>		<b>No</b>
<b>3.3</b> Are there any other relevant considerations?	<b>No</b>		<b>No</b>
<b>C. CONCLUSION</b>			
<b>No real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.</b>		<b>EIAR Not Required</b>	
<b>Real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.</b>		<b>EIAR Required</b>	

## D. MAIN REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Having regard to: -

1. the criteria set out in Schedule 7, in particular
  - (a) the limited nature and scale of the proposed public realm works development, in an established urban area served by public infrastructure
  - (b) the absence of any significant environmental sensitivity in the vicinity, and the careful design with regard to sensitive receptors
  - (c) the location of the development outside of any sensitive location specified in article 109(4)(a) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)
2. the results of other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment submitted by the applicant, including an NIS, which concluded that there were no significant effects on any qualifying species of an EU designated habitat.
3. the features and measures proposed by applicant envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant effects on the environment, including best practice in construction management, changes to lighting to prevent disturbance to bats, and the use of SuDs design approach to reduce run-off from pavements.

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

Inspector \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Approved (DP/ADP) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

WFD IMPACT ASSESSMENT STAGE 1: SCREENING			
Step 1: Nature of the Project, the Site and Locality			
An Bord Pleanála ref. no.	ACP-323066-25	Townland, address	Gort, Co. Galway
<b>Description of project</b>		Public Realm improvements in the town of Gort	
<b>Brief site description, relevant to WFD Screening,</b>		The site includes most of the existing town centre of Gort and includes two brownfield sites to develop as carparking.	
<b>Proposed surface water details</b>		Standard SuDs layout	
<b>Proposed water supply source &amp; available capacity</b>		Not applicable	
<b>Proposed wastewater treatment system &amp; available capacity, other issues</b>		Not applicable	
<b>Others?</b>		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 runoff, drainage, groundwater)
River Waterbody	0m	Cannahowna_010	Review	At risk	Urban Wastewater	No direct linkage subject to appropriate controls during construction.
Groundwater waterbody	Underlying site	Caherglassaun Turlough (SAC000238)	Poor	At risk	Agriculture.	Karst

<b>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.</b>							
<b>CONSTRUCTION PHASE</b>							
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.	Surface	Cannahowna_010	Urban run-off	None	None	No	Screened out
3.	Ground	Caherglassaun Turlough	Spillage during works	Hydrocarbon Spillages	Standard Construction Measures / Conditions	No	Screened out
<b>OPERATIONAL PHASE</b>							
3.	Surface	Cannahowna_010	None	None	None	No	Screened out
4.	Ground	Caherglassaun Turlough	None	None	None	No	Screened out
<b>DECOMMISSIONING PHASE</b>							
5.	NA						