



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report PL-500154-LS

Development	Retention of two 'Maldron Hotel' and 'Midway' signs on the eastern elevation and replacement of three existing signs with new ones.
Location	Maldron Hotel, Meelick, Portlaoise , Co. Laois
Planning Authority	Laois County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	2560291
Applicant(s)	Dalata Hotel Group plc
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Refuse Permission
Type of Appeal	First Party Normal Planning Appeal
Appellant(s)	Dalata Hotel Group plc
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	19 th December 2025
Inspector	F O'Donnell

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The subject appeal site is located to the immediate northwest of Junction 17 of the M7 Motorway interchange, to the east of the N77 National Secondary Road and within c. 1.8 metres to the south of the centre of Portlaoise town. The site has a stated area of 3.58 hectares and comprises the Maldron Hotel, an immediately adjacent and conjoined health and fitness centre to the west, a conjoined Food Court to the north, a recently constructed Appelgreen Service Station further to the north and includes associated access, parking and circulation spaces. There is an existing band of mature tree screen planting along the southern boundary of the site with the M7 Motorway. The overall site is accessed directly from the eastern side of the N7. The Portlaoise Plaza is located on the opposite side (west) of Junction 17 and is not readily visible from the main M7 Motorway carriageway. The maximum speed limit of 120 kmph applies along the M7 Motorway proximate to the subject appeal site.
- 1.2. The subject appeal site is not located within an Architectural Conservation Area nor are there any Protected Structures within the general vicinity of the site.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The Proposed Development comprises RETENTION and PERMISSION and includes the following:
- RETENTION of
 - 2 no. high level 'Maldron Hotel' and 'Midway' signs affixed to the eastern elevation. The said signs are located above the third floor of the building below roof level. The Maldron Hotel Sign has a maximum height of 1.9 metres, a maximum length of 7.2 metres. The Midway sign has a maximum height of 1.8 metres, a maximum length of 7.2 metres.
 - 1 no. High Level 'Midway' sign affixed to the southern elevation. The said sign is located above the third floor of the building below roof level. This Midway sign has a maximum height of 1.8 metres, a maximum length of 7.2 metres.

- PERMISSION for
 - Replacement of these existing signs with the erection of new signs and all other associated site development works.

Southern Elevation

- Sign 1A (13.9m x 1m) is a high-level sign to replace existing 'Midway' sign on the southern elevation. Sign 1B (4.8m x 1.1m) is a new high-level 'Applegreen symbol – JCT 17 – M7' sign which is also proposed on the southern elevation.
- It is proposed to remove an existing illuminated Maldron Hotel Symbol high-level sign on the southern elevation.

Eastern Elevation

- Sign 2A (5.3m x 1.4m) is a high-level sign to replace existing 'Maldron Hotel' sign on the eastern elevation. Sign 2B (8.6m x 1.6m) is a high-level 'JCT17 - M7 – Applegreen' sign to replace existing 'Midway' sign on the eastern elevation. Sign 2C (2.2m x 2.2m) comprises of 4no. square panel signs below existing high-level signs on the eastern elevation of the hotel. The said 4 no. signs (Sign 2C) are indicated to include advertisements for M&S Food, Burger King, Clubvitae and Grain & Grill.
- All signage is to be internally illuminated by means of white LEDs.

West Elevation

- It is proposed to remove 2 no. existing (Maldron hotel and Midway) high-level illuminated signs on the southern elevation.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Request for Further Information

- The Local Authority issued a Request for FURTHER INFORMATION on 8th July 2025, as follows:

1. *The Planning Authority have concerns with the proliferation and quantum of signage proposed on the site, especially given the destination and businesses are well advertised by signage approved under 24/60399. The applicant is requested to respond to the following matters:*

a. Southern Elevation

- i. The Planning Authority has concerns with sign 1A and 1B, given the approved advertisement totem under 24/60399. Please submit a response justifying why this is required.*
- ii. Proposed Retention – Confirm how long the existing signage proposed for retention has been in situ.*
- iii. ‘Maldron Hotel’ – Demonstrate how the signage is in accordance with Policy DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan, 2021 – 2027.*

b. East Elevation

- i. The Planning Authority has concerns with sign 2A, 2B and 2C, given the approved advertisement totem under 24/60399. Please submit a response justifying why this is required and how it is in accordance with Policy DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.*
- ii. How visible would the signage be from the public road, including the M7 Motorway?*

2. *The Planning Authority refers the applicant to the response from TII which is as follows:*

The Authority has examined the above application and considers that it is at variance with official policy in relation to control of development on/affecting national roads, as outlined in the DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012), as the proposed development by itself, or by the precedent which a grant of permission for it would set, would adversely affect the operation and safety of the national road network for the following reason(s):

- *The erection of the proposed sign(s), by the precedent which the grant of permission would set, could lead to a proliferation of such developments which would adversely affect the operational efficiency and safety of the national road network.*

Please submit a detailed response.

3.2. Decision

- The Local Authority issued a decision to REFUSE permission on 12th September 2025 for the following reasons:
 1. *Having regard to the location of the hotel structure, which is highly visible from the M7 Motorway, the erection of the proposed sign(s), by the precedent which the grant of permission would set, could lead to a proliferation of such developments which would adversely affect the operational efficiency and safety of the national road network.*

The proposed development would therefore be materially contrary to the provisions of Department of Environment, Community & Local Government Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) and Development Management Standard DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and would therefore be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
 2. *Development Management Standard DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 outlines the considerations against which advertising structures will be assessed including inter alia, their impact on the visual amenity of the area. The signage, if permitted, would seriously injure the visual amenities of the area, would fail to accord with the general provisions of Development Management Standard DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.*

3.3. Planning Authority Reports

3.3.1. Planning Reports

- The **Local Authority Planner** considered the proposed development to be unacceptable in terms of design, visual amenity and roads. As per the initial Planning Report and Assessment dated 7th July 2025, the Local Authority Planner recommended that permission be REFUSED for same 2 no. reasons which were subsequently attached to the Decision of the Local Authority to REFUSE permission. A Direction from the A/ Senior Planner to seek Further Information, as issued, is attached to the end of this Local Authority Planners Report and recommendation to Refuse Permission dated 7th July 2025. The Direction from the A/Senior Planner is dated 8th July 2025.
- Following receipt of the Response for Further Information the Local Authority Planner, as per the Report dated 11th September 2025, recommended that permission be REFUSED as per the 2 no. reasons for refusal issued as part of the Local Authority Decision to Refused Permission.

3.3.2. Other Technical Reports

- The **Road Design** Office raised no objection to the proposed development subject to 4 no. standard conditions. The fourth recommended condition stated that *'the development shall ensure all external lighting shall be cowled away from the public road.'*

3.4. Prescribed Bodies

- **Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)** as per the submission dated 4th June 2025 state the following:
 - *The Authority has examined the above application and considers that it is at variance with official policy in relation to control of development on/affecting national roads, as outlined in the DoECLG Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012), as the proposed development by itself, or by the precedent which a grant of permission for it would set, would adversely affect the operation and safety of the national road network for the following*

reason(s): The erection of the proposed sign(s), by the precedent which the grant of permission would set, could lead to a proliferation of such developments which would adversely affect the operational efficiency and safety of the national road network.

- **Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)** as per the submission dated 1st September 2025 state the following:
 - *With reference to the further information submitted in connection with the above planning application, I wish to advise that the Authority's position remains as set out in our letter of 04-Jun-2025.*

Please acknowledge receipt of this submission in accordance with the provisions of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as amended.

3.5. Third Party Observations

- None.

4.0 Planning History

4.1. Planning History on the subject Appeal site:

- **24/60399:** Applicant: Petrogas Group Ltd. Permission GRANTED to erect a Main ID sign (or totem sign) measuring 13m in height.
- **Appeal Ref. no. ABP-300994-18 (Local Authority Planning Reg. Ref. No. 17/538):** Applicant: Petrogas Group (Applegreen). Permission GRANTED for a filling station, retail unit and signage.
- **Appeal Ref. no. ABP-240814 (Local Authority Planning Reg. Ref. No. 11/280):** Permission REFUSED for Petrol station, shop, carwash, signage, vehicular access via previously permitted entrance and exit roads (05/1297). Lands adjacent to Togher Interchange for 1 no. reason relating on the basis of the impact of the proposed development upon the efficiency, operation and safety of the national road network.

- **08/1479:** Permission REFUSED for Revisions to previously permitted hotel (04/1549) to add petrol filling station with retail buildings, car wash, 19 carparking spaces and associated siteworks on Lands Adjacent to Togher for 1 no. reason relating to contravention of Policy TR3 of the Development Plan which seeks to protect the carrying capacity of the national transportation network and that the proposal would impact upon the “operational efficiency” of the Togher Interchange and the adjacent national road network.
- **07/555:** Permission REFUSED for revisions to planning reg. ref. no. 04/1549 to provide a Petrol Station and ancillary Retail Unit for 3 no. reasons relating to traffic hazard, the preference to provide Motorway Services within the Inland Port Area and the design of the Petrol Station which does not meet the NRA criteria and the potential erosion of the operational efficiency of the infrastructure that the proposed development has together with other permitted and planned developments.
- **06/1251:** Retention GRANTED of floor space (199m²) at 1st floor level created over food retail units 1 and 2 at ground floor level for use as restaurant and dining as part of unit 1 with access from unit 1 on the ground floor of the food court and retention of elevation changes comprising of 2 double doors at ground floor and window at first floor.
- **06/1027:** Permission REFUSED for revisions to planning reg. ref. no. 04/1549 to provide a Petrol Station, Retail Unit and a Drive-thru takeaway for 5 no. reasons relating to a Material Contravention of the Development Plan owing to the agricultural zoning of the land, Contravention of the Development Plan Objective to locate a Motorway Services Station at Togher Interchange Inland Port Development, Proximity to the M7 Motorway in contravention of National Roads Policy in relation to frontage development on National Roads, Traffic Hazard owing to intensification of use and the precedent the proposal would set for further similar type developments.
- **04/1549:** Permission GRANTED for a 4 storey 90 bedroom hotel and a leisure facility.
- **Appeal Ref. no. 209646 (Local Authority Planning Reg. Ref. No. 04/660):** Outline Permission REFUSED for a Hotel, Gym, Offices, Restaurant and

Retail for 3 no. reasons relating to the location of the site on Un-zoned lands, the proximity of the site to the M7 Motorway and Motorway Junction, the serious traffic impacts arising and the negative Retail Impact the proposals would create.

4.1.1. Relevant Planning History in the general area

Site c. 155 metres to the West on the opposite side/ west of the N55

- **Appeal Ref. no. ABP-303040-18: (Local Authority Planning Ref. No. 18/216)** Applicant: Pat McDonagh. Permission GRANTED for a Motorway service area and rest area. Condition no. 3 states: *‘The second totem sign at the egress point, at the western end of the site, shall be omitted from the development. Reason: To avoid visual clutter, in the interest of visual amenity.’*

Site c. 5.1 km metres to the Northwest on the east side of the M7

- **Appeal Ref. No. ABP-322697-25 (Local Authority Planning Reg. Ref. No. 2560135):** Applicant: Portlaoise Plaza Ltd. Retention REFUSED for signage and advertisement as constructed on site for 2 no. reasons similar to the 2 no. reasons issued under by the Local Authority Decision to REFUSE permission in the subject case, Planning Reg. Ref. No. 25/60291.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Development Plan

- *Laois County Development Plan, 2021 to 2027 (Volume 1 – Written Statement)*

5.1.1. I have reviewed the Development Plan, and I consider the following Chapters, Sections and Policies to be of most relevance to the subject proposal.

5.1.2. Chapter 7 Retail and Town/ Village Centre Management

- ***DM TC 9: SHOPFRONT ADVERTISEMENTS***

The Council expects the standard of advertisement to be of high quality and not to detract from the appearance of the shopfront or the street. As a general

rule, subtle and simple schemes with regard to colours, size, design and lettering work best.

In dealing with applications the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:

- 1) Where a business occupies more than one building, the fascia advertisement should not extend uninterrupted across two or more shopfronts;*
- 2) The fascia advertisement should not extend beyond the pilasters/vertical shop front surround and not obstruct any other architectural detail, such as the cornices, corbels or first floor window sills;*
- 3) Shop advertisements generally do not require illumination other than street lighting or lighting of shop windows. Only late opening premises, such as public houses and restaurants, should require additional illumination;*
- 4) Modern boxed fascia advertisements, which project from the face of the building, with internal illumination are not acceptable. Neon and fluorescent lighting is not acceptable. If necessary, external illumination should be kept to a minimum and discreetly positioned; spot lighting, recessed trough lighting and halo lighting are generally acceptable;*
- 5) The fascia board should normally state only the name or trade of the business and the street number. Avoid oversized lettering and the application of too much additional information as this can create visual clutter. Letters should generally not exceed 60 percent of the height of the fascia;*
- 6) Painted wooden, matt finished advertisements or individually applied brass or chrome letters are preferred over large areas of highly polished finishes, glossy plastic or perspex advertisements;*

- 7) *Lettering or sign writing should usually be applied directly to the fascia. Avoid adding new fascia boards to an existing one;*
- 8) *Projecting hanging signs are a traditional form of additional advertising of commercial premises, they can complement the colour and design of the fascia, it can add interest and originality to a building and street scene;*
- 9) *No more than one hanging sign per shopfront and they should keep an adequate vertical clearance from the pavement and not project over any carriageways;*

The erection of speakers on the exterior of commercial or residential premises will not be permitted.

- **DM TC 10: ADVERTISEMENTS ON PUBLIC ROADS**

Permanent advertising signs on public land along the public road network for example finger post signs and signs for businesses are subject to a license under Section 254 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Planning permission is required for signs on private land along public roads, other than those exempted by the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

In dealing with applications the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:

- 1) *Compliance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) and the Transport Infrastructure Signage on National Roads (March 2011) and any updated versions of these documents, when the development concerns a national roadway.*
- 2) *Signs should be of a different colour scheme to that of tourist signage;*
- 3) *Within urban speed limits signs will not be permitted for businesses;*

- 4) *Signs for rural businesses shall not compete with road signs or otherwise endanger traffic safety. They will only be considered at an appropriate junction on a regional road and one sign at each junction leading to the business;*
- 5) *Signs will not be permitted where there is a proliferation of signage within a small area that leads to visual clutter and which may constitute a traffic hazard;*
- 6) *For reasons of road safety, signs for commercial enterprises must not distract from road signs, changes to road layout or traffic lights/crossings;*
- 7) *Signs for tourism attractions and facilities will only be considered while on brown signs.*

5.1.3. Chapter 13 General Location and Pattern of Development. The subject appeal site is zoned for Enterprise and Employment use. Signage or Advertising signage is not expressly referenced in the Land Use Zoning Matrix set out in Table 13.3.

- *Portlaoise Local Area Plan, 2024 to 2030*

5.1.4. I have reviewed the Portlaoise Local Area Plan and I consider the following Sections and Policies to be of most relevance to the subject proposal. The subject Appeal site is zoned Enterprise & Employment as shown on Map no.'s 2.2 and 2.10.

5.1.5. **Appendix B: Togher Masterplan.** The subject appeal site is located within the defined boundary of the Togher Masterplan area. Section 9 of the Masterplan relates to the Public Realm Design Standards. Section 9.3 relates to Signage and reads as follows:

'Signage is particularly important within the area. A full signage plan is to be undertaken for each road/street. The signage plan shall be uniform with an agreed logo and design not only to provide wayfinding but also to establish the character of the area. Each business name shall be on the specific signs within each character area.

The signage shall be made of stainless steel, with new logos on each of the signs. Signs are to be erected at Park points of entry and at junctions.

Motorway signs for Portlaoise shall be subject to compliance with Policy on the Provision of Tourist & Leisure Signage on National Roads. Hoardings and large Advertising Signs will be prohibited within this area. All motorway signage proposals are required to be progressed in accordance with TII's traffic sign approval procedure.'

5.2. Guidelines

5.2.1. Department of Environment, Community & Local Government **Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)**. Chapter 3 outlines that the '*control of roadside and adjoining signage and lighting is an important contributor towards achieving enhanced road safety and planning authorities should use their regulatory and enforcement powers accordingly.*'

5.2.2. With specific reference to Signage, the following is stated in Section 3.8:

- **Section 3.8 Signage** reads as follows:

On national roads, the erection of signage needs to be tightly regulated for road safety and environmental reasons¹. Planning authorities must avoid proliferation of roadside signage, especially outside the 50-60 kmh speed limit areas in a manner that would reduce the effectiveness of essential signage such as directional and other authorised road traffic signs, create visual clutter and distractions for road users and/or reduce visibility at junctions, interchanges and bends.

In particular, the practice of random parking of large truck trailers on lands visible from the public road as a form of advertising hoarding and/or the sale of cars on the roadside should be regarded by planning authorities as forms of unauthorised development. Enforcement mechanisms are available under existing statutory codes and should be used as necessary under such planning legislation and other legislative codes taking account of the road safety, planning and environmental impacts of such practices.

¹ In the case of planning legislation, planning permission under section 34 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 is required for signage on private property, while advertisement structures are also covered by a licence issued under section 254.

Advice and guidance in respect of signage on national roads concerning major tourist and leisure features and facilities has been outlined in the NRA's Policy on the Provision of Tourist & Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011) which is available to download from the publications section of the NRA's website – (Website link provided).

5.2.3. Transport Infrastructure Ireland's policy statement on the Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011)

Section 5.2 states the following:

'Advertising, commercial or retail signage should not be erected on the high speed national road network outside of built up areas. In addition, those who attempt to erect such signs do so without appropriate traffic management and health and safety measures to ensure their safety and the safety of other road users.'

5.3. Natural Heritage Designations

5.3.1. The site is not located within or adjacent to a Natura 2000 site. The nearest Natura 2000 sites are as follows:

- River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code: 002162) located c. 9.4 km to the east.

5.4. EIA Screening

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

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

6.1.1. **Setting, Context and Nature of the Proposed Development:** The proposed development, as presented, is for the replacement of Existing Signage and for the erection of New Signage. The proposals will not result in any material or negative planning impacts in terms of scale, amenity, visual or any other point of view. The signage proposed carries a significant commercial function by announcing to passing motorists the presence of the Hotel and the range of other adjacent services available. The signage is only visible when travelling in a westbound direction and when exiting the M7 at the Junction 17 slip road. The proposed signage is in keeping with other Hotel Signage elsewhere and is consistent with other signage visible elsewhere along the Motorway network. The signage would not represent a significant departure from the established built environment in terms or visual character of the area. The site, by reason of its setting, location and the nature of its use necessitate site-specific identification signage.

6.1.2. Development Plan Policy:

The proposed signage does not constitute advertisements on the public road as they are proposed to be located on an existing building and will be in sight of a public road. This does not infer that policy DM TC 10 applies necessarily to all such signage. The DM TC 10 Policy is clearly concerned with Road Signage which is not the case for the subject proposals.

The Applicant submits that Policy DM TC 9 is more applicable to the subject case which relates to a building. The Applicant considers the proposed development to be fully compliant with the relevant elements of this objective in design terms. In Response to Point no. 1 of Policy DM TC 09, the Applicant refers to Section 3.8 of the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) and submits that

- As the existing Hotel is set back from and elevated above the public road, the proposed signage does not result in a proliferation of road signage as the signage is not located along a public roadway.

- The proposals do not impact on existing Motorway signage and will therefore not serve to detract from the function and effectiveness of existing and essential roadside signage.
- The proposals will not create visual clutter. Having already been in place for over 15 years it is not likely to create undue distractions for road users and/ or reduce visibility at the existing Junction 17 interchange.
- The Applicant submits that Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) document 'Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads', is not applicable to the proposed development does not provide any signage on the mainline of the Motorway or any National Road. The Applicant submits the proposals do not compete with or distract from normal road signs and do not require any road design alterations.
- The Applicant submits that the proposed signage replaces existing Hotel signage, essentially on a like for like basis and that it is proposed to be affixed to existing elevations where signage has previously been permitted and has operated over an extended time period.

6.1.3. The Applicant quotes from the remaining points (2 to 7) of DM TC 10 and submits, as follows:

- The proposed new Maldon signage is part of the Company's rebranding in the UK and Ireland and will not serve to detract from existing tourist signage or the identification of such signage by motorists.
- Owing to the position of the proposed signage it does not compete with any road signage.
- Existing signs have been in place over an extended time period. The design, scale and form of the existing hotel building serves to absorb the signage.
- The signage will only be visible to motorists travelling in a western direction along the Motorway and along the slip road off the Motorway at Junction 17.
- The signage is not readily visible from the south ,west and north owing to its orientation and location.

- The Applicant considers the proposed signage does not conflict with Policy DM TC 10 and submits it does not seek to prohibit signage but rather to seek to regulate such signage for the purposes of controlling excessive or inappropriate impacts.

6.1.4. **Visual Amenity and Proliferation:**

- Signage has been in place for in excess of 15 years.
- The assertion of the Local Authority that the signage would seriously injure the visual amenities of the area is not supported by any objective evidence such as a visual impact assessment.
- The totem signage permitted under planning reg. ref. no. 24/60399 relates to a separate area of the overall site and has a different context and setting to that of the proposed signage. The totem signage is not visible when travelling west along the M7 Motorway. The existing and proposed signage at the subject building therefore remain extremely important for assisting in advertising the services available on the subject site to passing motorists. A limited view of the existing totem sign is available to motorists looking east towards the western corner of the site from where the N77 (Abbeyleix Road) meets with the Junction 17 roundabout. It is reasonable to expect the signage to be visible from the motorway as otherwise their purpose and function would be null and void.
- Under planning reg. ref. no. 04/1549, signage was permitted on both the southern and eastern elevations.
- The signs which are the subject of this appeal (including Signs 2A, 2B, and 2C) are intended to identify the business and assist in wayfinding for passing motorist. The signs do not represent duplication.
- The signs have been carefully designed to integrate with the existing building, are not visually overwhelming and do not serve to detract from the appearance of the building.
- The signs are not prominent along the M7 Motorway and are significantly mitigated for by distance and intervening landscaping.

6.2. **Planning Authority Response**

None.

6.3. **Observations**

None.

6.4. **Further Responses**

- None.

7.0 **Assessment**

7.1. **Introduction**

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

- Signage Proliferation, Visual Clutter, Operational Efficiency and Road Safety
- DM TC 9 (Shopfront Design)
- Visual Amenity

7.3. **Signage Proliferation/ Operational Efficiency and Road Safety**

- *Signage Proliferation and Visual Clutter*

7.3.1. The proposed signage changes relate to the Western, Southern and Eastern elevations of the existing Hotel Building. The signage proposed to be retained and the proposed new signage solely relates to the Southern and Eastern Elevations. The Commission will note the prominent location of the subject appeal site relative to the adjacent M7 Motorway (Junction 17). The decision of the Local Authority to refuse permission in relation to the proliferation of such advertising signage developments is consistent with other decisions within the same functional area along the M7 Motorway corridor.

7.3.2. I note DM TC 10 of the Development Plan which is concerned with Advertisements on Public Roads, and which specifically refers to the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012). I note Section 3.8 of the said Guidelines is concerned with Signage where with specific regard to National Roads, the following is stated:

‘On national roads, the erection of signage needs to be tightly regulated for road safety and environmental reasons. Planning authorities must avoid proliferation of roadside signage, especially outside the 50-60 kmh speed limit areas in a manner that would reduce the effectiveness of essential signage such as directional and other authorised road traffic signs, create visual clutter and distractions for road users and/or reduce visibility at junctions, interchanges and bends.’

7.3.3. The maximum speed limit of 120 kmh applies along the M7 Motorway to the south of the subject appeal site, i.e. outside the 50-60 kmh speed limit area. Such areas, according to the above guidance extract, require tight regulation for road safety and environmental reasons where proliferation of road signage is to be avoided by Local Authorities. I note there are a number of directional and other authorised road traffic signs located along the westbound carriageway of the M7 Motorway, which include traffic information signs altering motorists to Exit 17.

7.3.4. I note the nature and extent of the proposed 2 no. new/ internally illuminated signs proposed above the third floor and below roof level on the southern elevation, (1 no. of which relates to the Hotel itself and the other to a separate third party business) and the proposed 6 no. new internally illuminated signs proposed on the Eastern elevation (1 no. of which relates to the Hotel and the remainder (5 no.) to other third party businesses). In my opinion, the proposed new signage (8 no. internally illuminated advertising signs in total) will result in visual clutter at this location.

7.3.5. Planning policy DM TC 10 states, inter alia, that the Planning Authority will have regard to the Guidelines, where the development relates to a National Road. In my opinion, the proposed development, if permitted, would establish the principle for extensive advertising signage (including third party advertising signage) at a location where it is the clear intention of the policy, at such locations (National Roads), to

avoid the proliferation of roadside signage in order to preserve effectiveness of essential signage such as directional and other authorised road traffic signs.

- 7.3.6. Having regard to the nature and extent of the signage proposed, the visual clutter arising, the prominence of the subject site relative to this important intersection of two National roads, I am satisfied that the proposed development, if permitted, would set an undesirable precedent for similar development elsewhere along the M7 Motorway and in the general area, which could lead to a proliferation of similar developments, which would, in turn, serve to adversely impact the operational efficiency and safety of the public road network.

7.4. DM TC 9 (Shopfront Design)

- 7.4.1. The Applicant considers Policy DM TC 9 (Shopfront Design) to be more applicable to the subject proposals than DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) as it relates to a building. Policy DM TC 9, in my opinion, is more applicable to Shopfront Design on a public street, in the conventional sense, as opposed to the setting of the subject Hotel building at the edge of the urban development boundary, adjacent to a Motorway and the proposed signage on the rear (south) and side (east) elevations. The most relevant policy to the subject proposals therefore, in my opinion, remains DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads). Nevertheless, there are certain design principles set out in Policy DM TC 9 which are worthy of consideration, including requirements in relation to illumination of Shop Advertisements (Point no. 3), the avoidance of modern boxed fascia advertisements, which project from the face of the building, with internal illumination, which are not deemed to be acceptable (Point no. 4), the fascia should normally only state the name or trade of the business, oversized lettering to be avoided and the application of too much additional information as this can create visual clutter, letters should generally not exceed 60% of the height of the fascia (Point no. 5).
- 7.4.2. As the Commission will note, the proposed 8 no. advertising signs (2 no. on the Southern elevation and 6 no. on the Eastern elevation), are all proposed to have internal illumination. Aside from the 2 no. proposed Hotel advertisement signs on each of the respective elevations (south and east), the remaining signs are all proposed to advertise third party businesses. The extent of advertising proposed, as previously stated, in my opinion, presents visual clutter and the lettering appears

oversized relative to the height of the fascia. In my opinion, notwithstanding that DM TC 10 is considered to be the most applicable Policy to the subject proposal, the Applicant has not demonstrated full adherence to the requirements of Policy DM TC 11.

7.5. Visual Amenity

- 7.5.1. The second reason for refusal is further concerned with Policy DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) and, in particular, the considerations against which advertising structures will be assessed including, inter alia, their impact on the visual amenity of the area.
- 7.5.2. I have set out further above, in Section 7.3 of this Report, my assessment of the proposed development in accordance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012), in particular, Section 3.8 (Signage) and including the issue of Visual Clutter.
- 7.5.3. I note the proposed colour scheme and appearance of the 2 no. Applegreen signs on the respective side and east elevations. The information provided on the said third party advertisement signs, in addition to the Applegreen logo, includes the text 'JCT 17' and 'M7' with a Motorway intersection image in between the text. Although the signs are finished in a dark green colour, they could, in my opinion, in certain light, be confused as Motorway information signage. The subject appeal site, although located within the urban development boundary, is adjacent to the rural area. The aforementioned Applegreen signage could, in my opinion, compete with other road signs and, as a result, endanger traffic safety. The proposed signage arrangement, in my opinion, detracts from existing road signage. I am therefore satisfied that the proposed development, as presented, conflicts with the provisions of Policy DM TC 10 and would, if permitted, result in visual clutter and seriously injure the established visual amenities of the area.

8.0 Appropriate Assessment

- 8.1.1. I have considered the retention and proposed signage in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

- 8.1.2. The subject site is located approximately 9.4 km to the west of the River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code: 002162).
- 8.1.3. The proposed development comprises the retention of two 'Maldron Hotel' and 'Midway' signs on the eastern elevation and replacement of three existing signs with new ones. No nature conservation concerns were raised in the planning appeal.
- 8.1.4. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because it could not have any effect on a European Site.
- 8.1.5. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:
- The small scale and nature of the development.
 - The location of the site relative to the nearest European Site (River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code: 002162)) and the lack of any connections to same.
 - Taking into account the screening report/ determination of the Local Authority.
- 8.1.6. I conclude, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- 8.1.7. Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000) is not required.

9.0 Water Framework Directive

- 9.1.1. The Triogue_20 river traverses the east of the site.
- 9.1.2. The proposed development comprises the retention of signage and proposed signage.
- 9.1.3. No water deterioration concerns were raised in the planning appeal.
- 9.1.4. I have assessed the proposed development and I have considered the objectives as set out in Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive which seek to protect and, where necessary, restore surface & ground water waterbodies in order to reach good status (meaning both good chemical and good ecological status), and to prevent deterioration. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am

satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any surface and/or groundwater water bodies either qualitatively or quantitatively.

9.1.5. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- The small scale and nature of the development
- The lack of any connectivity from the proposed development to the Triogue_20 river

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

10.0 Recommendation

10.1. I recommend that permission be refused for the following reasons and considerations.

11.0 Reasons and Considerations

1. Having regard to the location of the hotel structure, which is highly visible from the M7 Motorway, the erection of the proposed sign(s), by the precedent which the grant of permission would set, could lead to a proliferation of such developments which would adversely affect the operational efficiency and safety of the national road network. The proposed development would therefore be materially contrary to the provisions of Department of Environment, Community & Local Government Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) and Development Management Standard DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and would therefore be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2. Development Management Standard DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 outlines the considerations against which advertising structures will be assessed including inter alia, their impact on the visual amenity of the area. The signage, if permitted, would seriously injure the visual amenities of the area, would fail to accord with the general provisions of Development Management Standard DM TC 10 (Advertisements on Public Roads) of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

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

F O'Donnell

15th January 2026

Appendix 1 - Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

[EIAR not submitted]

An Coimisiún Pleanála Case Reference	PL-500154-LS		
Proposed Development Summary	Retention of two 'Maldron Hotel' and 'Midway' signs on the eastern elevation and replacement of three existing signs with new ones.		
Development Address	Maldron Hotel, Meelick, Portlaoise , Co. Laois		
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes	X
		No	
2. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and does it equal or exceed any relevant quantity, area or limit where specified for that class?			
Yes			EIA Mandatory EIAR required
No	X	The proposed development is not a Class.	Proceed to Q.3
3. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) but does not equal or exceed a relevant quantity, area or other limit specified [sub-threshold development]?			
		Threshold	Comment (if relevant)
			Conclusion
No	X		No EIAR or Preliminary Examination required
Yes			Proceed to Q.4

4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?

No	No – N/a	Preliminary Examination required
Yes		Screening Determination required

Inspector: _____ Date: _____