



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

PL-501184-CC-26

Development

Replacement of 1 no. illuminated 7.34m x 5.21m advertising display with 1 no. digital 6.28m x 3.4m advertising display on the gable wall of 30/31 Washington Street, Cork (a Protected Structure Ref Nos. PS868 and PS1098) and all associated site works

Location

30/31 Washington Street and 16 Washington Street West, Cork

Planning Authority

Cork City Council

Planning Authority Reg. Ref.

26/44493

Applicant(s)

JCDeceaux Ireland Limited

Type of Application

Permission

Planning Authority Decision

Refuse Permission

Type of Appeal

First Party

Appellant(s)

JCDeceaux Ireland Limited

Observer(s)

None

Date of Site Inspection

30th June 2026

Inspector

Clare Clancy

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1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The subject appeal relates to two separate sites as follows; The first appeal site relates to the western gable of 30/31 Washington Street which is a commercial premises called the Washington Inn in Cork City centre. It occupies a prominent corner site at the junction of Washington Street and Cross Street thus addressing two street frontages. The building is four storey in scale and forms part of a continuous terrace of similar buildings fronting onto Washington Street. There is an existing advertising billboard sign mounted on the western façade along with lighting above.
- 1.2. Cork Courthouse adjoins the site to the west which is a defining focal building within the area, and St. Francis Roman Catholic Church is located to the north. The surrounding area is characterised by a dense mixed-use urban environment comprising of restaurants, bars, retail, office and other uses. Both 30 and 31 Washington Street are protected structures and 31 Washington Street is listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) as of 'regional' importance. The site is located within North Main Street Architectural Conservation Area.
- 1.3. The second site associated with the appeal is located adjacent to 16 Washington Street which is an existing apartment complex, on the southern side of the road, approx. 250 m to the west of the Washington Inn. The site comprises of a boundary wall with advertising signage mounted on it. It is located within the North Mall / The Marsh ACA.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. Permission is sought as follows:
 - Replace the existing illuminated advertising signage (7.34 m x 5.21 m) mounted on the western façade of the building fronting onto Cross Street, replacing it with a digital advertising display (6.28 m x 3.5 m) and associated site works and services) at 30/31 Washington Street.
 - Removal of existing advertising signage comprising of 3 no. advertising displays (6.3 m x 3.5 m) mounted on a boundary wall, adjoined to 16 Washington Street.
- 2.2. The following is noted:

- The proposed signage will be 4.5 m above ground level.
- Digital display will be static, no motion and will remotely change at intervals of 10 seconds.
- A camera will be located above the display to monitor the display remotely.
- Luminosity will operate from dawn to dusk below recommended maximum of 300 candelas per m² per Professional Lighting Guide 05/23 (PLG 05): Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements including Digital Displays.
- A condition is proposed to comply with a curfew between 0200 and 0600.

2.3. The following documents are provided in support of the application:

- Planning Application Report (MacCabe Durney Barnes)
- Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment Replacement Advertising Signage (Keenan Lynch Architects)

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

By Order dated 24th March 2026 Cork City Council refused permission for the proposed development for the following reasons:

1. *Having regard to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028, paragraph 11.200, 11.194 and 11.195, it is considered that the proposed development by reason of its scale and location, and the transition from static to digital display and the introduction of illumination with changing display will result in an increased visual prominence that would be incongruous with the established character of the streetscape and architectural conservation area and would result in significant visual obtrusion and unnecessary visual clutter. Furthermore, permitting this type of development would establish an undesirable precedent for the proliferation of digital advertising in proximity of sensitive heritage assets in the city center area and would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.*

2. *Having regard to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028, Strategic Objective 7 and Objective 8.19 and 8.23, it is considered that the proposed digital display would have an adverse impact on the character of the protected structure (30 Washington Street) and the setting and special interest of the courthouse, a protected structure of national significance, and would result in a negative impact on the character of the North Main Street Architectural Conservation Area. Their proposals would fail to have regard to the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2011) and would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.*
3. *Having regard to the illuminated nature of the proposed sign and its changing display, the proposed development would result in a distraction to road users which would endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard, contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.*

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

Main Planning Report (20/03/2026)

- The proposed development was assessed having regard to the development management standards with specific reference to Paragraph 11.200 CDP Digital Advertising/Signage and the three listed criteria concluding that details in relation to material finishes were insufficient.
- Notwithstanding the reduced size of the proposed digital signage and the removal in advertising signage along Washington Street, the proposed development represented an unacceptable intensification of advertising signage use at the location.
- The transition from static to digital display and the introduction of illumination would result in an increased visual prominence that will be incongruous with the established character of the streetscape, would result in significant visual obtrusion, negatively impacting the integrity of the protected structure and the character of the wider Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

- The proposed development would give rise to precedent for proliferation of digital advertising signage in proximity to sensitive heritage assets in the city centre.
- The nature of the signage in terms of lighting and changing movement could create a traffic hazard and would amount to unnecessary visual clutter.
- No objection was raised in regard to the permanent removal of the three number existing advertising displays adjacent to 16 Washington St. West. However, as it is linked to the proposed replacement signage on the basis of it being permitted, a recommendation of refusal was considered for the application as a whole.
- No impacts on existing adjoining residential amenities was anticipated, due to no opposing residential properties in close proximity to the display.
- Noted the Conversation Report which recommended a split-decision (refuse permission for the proposed replacement signage, grant permission for the removal of the existing signage adjoining 16 Washington Street).
- Noted that the Traffic Report which recommended refusal on the basis of the proposed digital display potentially distracting drivers on a heavily trafficked road.
- It was concluded that EIA and Appropriate Assessment were not required and that the subject site is located in Flood Zone A and B.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- Traffic Report (18/03/2026) – Recommended refusal of traffic grounds.

The site is located on a heavily trafficked national road (N22) at the junction with Cross Street, where multiple conflict points already exist between vehicles and cyclists. The introduction of a changing digital display has the potential to distract drivers at this complex junction increasing the risk to road safety.

- Conservation Report (18/03/2026) – Recommended split decision.

The architectural heritage impact assessment provided by the applicant did not assess the digital nature of the proposed advertising and associated likely visual impacts. Only the potential impact on the protected structure at 30

Washington Street. was considered. There was no consideration in relation to adjoining heritage assets including the adjoining Courthouse and the North Main Street ACA.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

None.

3.4. Third Party Observations

One third party observation was received from Dylan Collins. The following issues were raised:

- No form of advertising signage should be permitted on this prominent gable wall, particularly a digital display given its highly visible location on Washington Street and adjacent to the Courthouse and within the historic streetscape.
- The proposal to paint the gable wall should not be supported, instead the brickwork should be reinstated.
- Washington Street has experienced the erosion of its historical character through proliferation of unauthorised and visually intrusive signage. Permitting the proposed replacement sign even at a reduced scale, would further contribute to the degradation of the streets heritage value.

4.0 Planning History

Most Recent:

30-31 Washington Street

- P.A. Ref. TP16193/90 – Permission granted for change of use from retail to bar (no. 31).
- P.A. Ref. TP16221/90 – Permission granted for change of use from residential to offices on upper floors (no's 30 and 31).

16 Washington Street (adjacent to site to east)

- P.A. Ref. 2140770 – Permission granted for change of use from laundrette to gaming casino/arcade.
- P.A. Ref. 2241330 – Permission granted for partial change of use existing café to accommodate an extension of a permitted gaming casino/arcade.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028

Volume 1 Written Statement

➤ Chapter 1 Introduction

- 5.1.1. Strategic Objective 7: Heritage, Arts and Culture. Objective to protect and enhance the unique character and built fabric of the city, its neighbourhoods, urban towns and settlements by caring for Protected Structures, archaeological monuments and heritage, Architectural Conservation Areas and intangible heritage. Identify, protect, enhance and grow Cork's unique cultural heritage and expression in an authentic and meaningful way. Ensure Cork's heritage, culture and arts are celebrated and developed to create an attractive, vibrant and inclusive place to live, work, study and visit.

➤ Chapter 8 Heritage, Arts and Culture

- 5.1.2. The following objectives are relevant:

- Objective 8.17: Conservation of the City's Built Heritage
- Objective 8.19: Record of Protected Structures
- Objective 8.22: National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH)
- Objective 8.23: Development in Architectural Conservation Areas

Development in Architectural Conservation Areas should have regard to the following:

- a) Works that impact negatively upon features within the public realm, such as stone setts, cobbles or other historic paving, railings, street furniture, stone kerbing etc. shall not be generally permitted;

- b) Design and detailing that responds respectfully to the historic environment in a way that contributes new values from our own time. This can be achieved by considering layout, scale, materials and finishes and patterns such as plot divisions in the surrounding area;
- c) Historic materials and methods of construction should be retained and repaired where this is reasonable, e.g. historic windows and doors, original roof coverings, metal rainwater goods should be retained along with original forms and locations of openings etc;
- d) Repairs or the addition of new materials should be appropriate and in keeping with the character of the original structures.

- Objective 8.27 Elements of Built Heritage

Cork City Council will ensure the protection of important elements of the built heritage and their settings as appropriate.

➤ Chapter 11 Placemaking and Managing Development

5.1.3. This chapter sets out the Council's guidance for development proposals. Of particular significance is the importance of achieving development to the highest architectural and urban design standards and quality. The following sections are relevant to the development proposal.

11.193 Shop Fronts and Commercial Façades

- Sets out policies for shop fronts facades and advertising. The plan states that shop fronts and facades are among the most important elements in determining the character, quality and image of commercial streets. It therefore seeks to:
 - Retain, preserve and restore original shop fronts, pub fronts and facades.
 - Ensure contemporary shop fronts are sympathetic in their materials, proportions and relationship to the upper floors.
 - Reduce visual clutter by controlling the number and type of signs.
 - Protect and enhance the architectural character of the city, with particular care in ACAs.

11.194 Advertising on Buildings

In general advertising on buildings should conform to the following:

1. Be sympathetic in design and colouring both to the building on which they will be displayed and their surroundings;
2. The City Council will aim to reduce visual clutter and control the number of signs and advertising that are displayed;
3. Shop front advertising should be designed as an integral part of the shop front;
4. Not obscure architectural features such as cornices or window openings;
5. Illuminated signs or other advertising structures will not be allowed above the eaves or parapet level on buildings in any part of the city.

11.195 Facia Signage & Illuminative & Projecting Signs

As a general principle fascia signs and projecting signs should be simple in design, not excessive in illumination or size. The following basic guidelines will be applied in assessing planning applications:

1. Plastic derived fascias with product advertising and internally illuminate fascias will not be permitted;
2. Projecting signs should be of 2.4m clearance above street level;
3. Internally illuminated signs shall be restricted;
4. The design of illuminated signage should be sympathetic to the building on which it is to be displayed;
5. Overall illumination of fascia signage or shop fronts of distinctive architectural features should be discreet and limited to spot-lighting, up lighting or disguised minimalist strip lighting;
6. The daytime appearance when unlit will also be considered;
7. The use of banners, flags, billboards and other forms of advertising will be strictly controlled in the City Centre;
8. Product advertising on canopies will not be permitted.

11.196 Advertising Hoardings (Billboards)

- Seeks to restrict visual clutter from outdoor advertising. It states that new advertising hoardings and billboards will generally not be permitted, with

particular controls on changing or intrusive forms of advertising that may negatively impact the character and appearance of the city. Tri version signage will not be permitted.

11.200 Digital Advertising/ Signage

The use of digital advertising and signage is playing a more prominent role in urban environments, including the replacement of paper advertisements. While it can play a positive role in displaying public information, there is a need to control digital advertising and signage in terms of its design and location to prevent visual clutter particularly in areas such as historic parts of the city (Architectural Conservation Areas etc.), predominantly residential and high amenity areas such as waterways. It can also have adverse impacts on public and traffic safety.

As well as the above the following criteria should be considered as part of applications for digital advertising / signage:

1. Details of material, finishes and colours;
2. The maximum luminance of the advertisement display during night-time hours (darkness) should not exceed 300 cd/sqm;
3. No more than one advertisement to be displayed every ten seconds, changed by means of a fade transition of the display.

11-201 Protected Structures

Key points include:

- Development of a protected structure or within the curtilage of a protected structure is addressed in Chapter 8.
- Any proposed works must ensure that the special character and significance of the structure is not negatively affected.
- Alterations, extensions or interventions should be sympathetic to the building's historic fabric, materials and architectural features.
- The council will resist inappropriate changes that could damage the character appearance or heritage value of a protected structure.
- Any development proposals must demonstrate a high standard of conservation practice and respect the building setting and context.

11.223 Architectural Conservation Areas

This notes that development within an ACA is addressed in Chapter 8. Development proposals must be sympathetic to the existing streetscape, respecting the scale, materials, design and his historic character of surrounding buildings.

➤ Chapter 12 Land Use Zoning Objectives

- 5.1.4. Both sites are located in the city centre where the zoning objectives is ZO 5:City Centre, the stated object of which is *'to consolidate and facilitate the development of the central area and to promote its role as a dynamic mixed-use Center for community, economic, civic, cultural and residential growth'*.

The following is also relevant:

- Section 12.4 to 12.6 relates to Permitted Uses
- Section 12-8 to 12.9 relates to Non-conforming Uses.

12.9 states where such non-conforming uses are legally established, their reasonable expansion or improvement within their curtilage will be considered on their own merits provided there is no serious detrimental impact on the primary land use zoning objective for the area or environment, having regard to other relevant objectives of this Plan.
- ZO 5.1 – Refers to Cork City's role as a key driver for economic and population growth.
- ZO 5.2 – Refers to the purpose of the zoning which is to promote the continued economic, civic, cultural and residential growth of the City Centre, and to create a thriving urban community.
- ZO 5.4 – Development proposals must demonstrate how the proposal would respect, reflect or contribute to the character and vibrancy of the City Centre, commensurate with the nature and scale of the development. Developments must deliver a quality urban environment and public realm with a focus on accessibility and permeability.

Volume 3 Part 1 Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs)

- North Main Street – the ACA covers North Main Street and part of South Main Street encompassing the core of medieval Cork. It includes sever landmark

historic buildings that contribute to its civic cultural and architectural importance within Cork City. The conservation objectives seek to protect the area's historic character, architectural heritage, archaeological heritage and traditional streetscape while allowing appropriate redevelopment and adaption that respects these heritage values.

- North Mall / The Marsh – the ACA covers the historic area between the North and South Channels of the River Lee, an area that was previously marshlands. The area developed during the 18th and early 19th centuries and contains Cork's largest concentration of Georgian townhouses including grand residences along North Mall and Grenville Place. The conservation objectives seek to protect the Georgian architectural character, historic street pattern, riverside setting and unified terraces whilst ensure new development or alterations preserve and enhance the area's distinctive historic and architectural qualities.

5.2. Section 28 Guidelines

5.2.1. Architectural Conservation Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011)

The Guidelines provide guidance to planning authorities in assessing applications involving Protected Structures. The following is relevant:

- Section 6 – Development Control and the Protection of Architectural Heritage - This deals with assessing planning applications affecting protected structures and sets out the principles that works must not harm the special character of the building.
- Section 7 – Development within Architectural Conservation Areas - This section deals with buildings located within an ACA with particular emphasis being placed on development preserving or enhancing the character the character or appearance of an ACA. Individual interventions should be assessed not only on the building itself but on impact on the wider historic environment.
- Section 6.9 – Shopfronts and Signage – This section highlights that signage should be designed sensitively and be appropriate to the building and St. streetscape. Advertising should not dominate or obscure architectural features,

modern signage solutions must respect historic buildings and their surroundings.

5.2.2. Spatial Planning and National Routes Guidelines for Planning Authorities January 2012

- Section 3.8 sets out the following:

To protect the safety and function of the national road network by limiting unnecessary roadside advertising and ensuring that only essential, authorised signage is provided. In this regard, the following is noted:

- Road signage on national roads should be strictly controlled for both road safety and environmental reasons.
- Planning authorities should prevent an excessive number of signs, particularly outside the 50-60 kmh speed limit areas as too many signs can reduce the effectiveness of official traffic and directional signs, create visual clutter, distract drivers and obstruct visibility at junctions, bends and interchanges.
- The guidance specifically states that using parked truck trailers as advertising hoardings or roadside car sales visible from national roads should be treated as unauthorized development, with existing enforcement powers used where appropriate.

For tourist and leisure facilities signage, planning authorities are directed to National Road Authorities (now TII) policy on the Provision of Tourist & Leisure Signage on National Roads (March 2011).

5.3. **Natural Heritage Designations**

The nearest European designated site is Cork Harbour SPA (Site Code 004030) which is located approx. 3.5 km from the subject site.

6.0 EIA Screening

- 6.1. The proposed development is not a class for the purposes of EIA as per the classes of development set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (or Part V of the 1994 Roads).

7.0 The Appeal

7.1. Grounds of Appeal

A First Party appeal was made by the applicant JC Deceaux Ireland Limited. The appeal is accompanied by a Supplementary Report for Planning Appeal Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment Replacement Advertising Display (Keenan Lynch Architects) in support of the grounds of appeal and with specific reference to matters related to architectural heritage. For completeness, I propose to consolidate the substantive issues raised in the grounds of appeal overall under the following headings and which may be summarised as follows:

Proposed Development

- The Conservation Officer assessed the application as a new development rather than a replacement structure with de minimis impact relative to the existing development.
- The site is approximately 8 m² in area and accommodates an existing illuminated painted panel advertising structure positioned on the gable wall of the property.
- The replacement signage will be mounted lower on the building and will reduce the existing advertising display area by approx. 44% from 38.24 m² to 21.35 m² (a reduction of 16.89 m²) thereby increasing visible wall display.
- The luminosity of the digital display will be internal and will comply with best practice guidelines and will operate below recommended maximum of 300 candelas per m² dusk to dawn and will replace existing external lighting. This is a planning gain.

- It is proposed to implement a 0200 am to 0600 am curfew to control lighting display/ use.

Removal of Advertising Displays

- Existing signage adjacent to 16 Washington Street and extending to 19 m in length along the street will be permanently removed.
- The applicant will accept a planning condition to remove these advertising displays.

Planning Policy

- The appeal site is zoned 'ZO 5.2. Advertising structures are not 'Open for Consideration'. However Section 12.4 (Permitted Uses) and Section 12.5 (Non Conforming Uses) sets out the evaluation criteria for development proposals and it allows for granting of permission on this established site for advertising as a non-conforming use.
- The development plan addresses outdoor advertising policy in Sections 11.191 to Section 11.200.

Visual Amenities

- The appeal site is located in a busy commercial area and outdoor advertising is an appropriate use in a city centre environment, particularly in a commercial area with night-time activities and services.
- The proposed display would be high quality design, will have a less impact on the streetscape and will be switched off during night time hours.
- The reason for refusal relates to Section 11.195 (Fascia Signage & Illumination & Projecting Signs) which addresses fascia or shop front signage and is not relevant to outdoor advertising that has been in situ as part of the streetscape since the 1960s.
- The proposed development provides for a more modern and contemporary display to update and replace the existing and is consistent with 11.194 (Advertising on a Buildings) and is appropriate.
- The proposal would materially reduce visual clutter.

- Under Section 11.200 (Digital Advertising/Signage), the criteria is met in terms of design, scale and operation which the PA generally accepted. The matter referred to in the assessment related to 'an unacceptable intensification or advertising use at this location'. With the removal of 3 no. signs proposed, the proposed development would significantly reduce visual obtrusion and unnecessary visual clutter.

Architectural Heritage

- The existing advertising signage has been in situ since the 1960s and prior to that there is evidence of advertising in the form of hand painted lettering c.1900 – 1920 (Figure 16 Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment). The proposal seeks to replace existing signage with modern signage of reduced scale. It does not introduce a new impact on existing built heritage.
- Precent decisions for similar type proposals in other local authorised demonstrate that digital advertising can be permitted on protected structures and adjacent to ACAs provided they represent an upgrade over existing signage (Table 2 and Table 3 of submission).
- The replacement of existing signage with the proposed modern digital signage will enhance the visual impact to the building's western façade which will be more discreet in design, with lighting contained within display panel, and the proposed works are reversible. Signage fixings would be remote to the historical impact of the building and there would be limited works to the gable wall fabric to install and remove the proposed signage. Therefore the impact to the existing building would be limited.
- In the context of reason no. 2, Objectives 8.19 (Record of Protected Structures) is a broad policy and regulatory framework for the consideration of an application. The proposed development provided an appropriate level of detail and is compliance with this objective.
- The proposed development falls under Objective 8.23 (b) (Development in Architectural Conservation Areas). The applicant's Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment demonstrated that the impact of the proposed development would have a neutral to positive impact on the existing structure.

- The existing signage is illuminated by lights mounted to the gable wall which project light downwards which generates light overspill and cannot be controlled to the same effect as modern digital lighting. The proposed new digital lighting does not result in new visual intrusion.
- The PA failed to consider the existing sign with the proposed sign having regard to the existing site context, with the exception of the reduced size being of modest benefit. The PA did not take into account that the existing sign already has impacts on the adjoining Courthouse and ACA.
- The proposal to remove the 3 no. signs is in an ACA and while there is no obligation to remove the signs, little regard was given to the proposal in light of the planning gain benefiting the area.
- In addressing the PA's concerns regarding the lack of assessment/commentary provided regarding the proposed replacement signage, it is submitted that the replacement signage will require less maintenance, lighting control will facilitate a reduction in lighting emissions and includes a curfew, the advertising images will not need to be physically removed. The proposal will have a static display and the advertisements will be changed remotely.
- The proposed replacement signage would have more visual engagement than the existing signage.

Road Safety

- The Roads Report is misinformed on analysis of traffic hazard having regard to international research.
- The proposed replacement signage will not endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazards.
- Previous decisions of other local authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála accepted that digital advertising signages do not give rise to traffic safety issues (Table 3 sets out precedent decisions for digital advertising displays) and the proposed development is not consistent with these previous decisions by An Coimisiún Pleanála, Dublin City Council or Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

- Photos included of examples of other digital advertisement displays permitted at Milltown Dublin 6, Loughlinstown on the N11, Clonliffe Road Dublin.

Note to the Commission:

The appeal is accompanied by the following:

- Guidance for Digital Roadside Advertising and Proposed Best Practice Transport for London (Waterman March 2013)
- Copy of Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment Replacement Advertising Display (Keenan Lynch Architects) submitted in support of planning application.

7.2. Planning Authority Response

None.

7.3. Observations

None.

8.0 Assessment

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

- Impact on Heritage/Visual Amenities
- Road Safety
- Other Matters

8.1. Impact on Architectural Heritage/Visual Amenities

- 8.1.1. In relation to the reasons for refusal, the PA refused permission for the proposed replacement signage in terms of its scale, location and design and the consequent impacts that it would have on the receiving architectural heritage context (reason one).

In the second reason for refusal, the grounds for refusal relate to the impact that the proposed replacement signage would have on the existing protected structure, the adjoining courthouse and the North Main Street ACA. The applicant submits that the PA carried out its assessment based on a new proposal rather than as the replacement of the existing advertising signage with new signage.

- 8.1.2. I note that the gable façade which relates to 30 Washington Street and fronts onto Cross Street is a protected structure (PS868) but is not recorded on the NIAH survey data. However, 31 Washington Street also a protected structure (PS10989) is recorded on the NIAH survey as a building with a 'Regional Rating'¹. I note that many of the buildings within ACA on Washington Street are recorded on the NIAH.
- 8.1.3. I note the report of the PA and the Conservation Report whereby the proposed development is acknowledged as the replacement of existing signage that has been in situ for a substantial period of time, and that the principle of the proposal is not opposed. The main issue of concern relates to the provisions of 11.200 (Digital Advertising/Signage) with specific reference to the need 'to control digital advertising and signage in terms of its design and location to prevent visual clutter particularly in areas such as historic parts of the city (Architectural Conservation Areas etc.)'. The specific concerns raised relate to the proposed new signage giving rise to increased visual prominence which would be incongruous with the established character of the streetscape.
- 8.1.4. The existing advertising signage is located at a prominent location, at the corner of Cross Street and Washington Street. It is mounted on a protected structure located within an ACA, adjacent to Cork Courthouse. It covers a significant portion of the gable wall above the ground floor shop front. There are long range views of it from the N22 as the road travels east in the direction of Washington Street (c.335 m away). It can also be easily viewed from the location of the existing advertising signage that is proposed to be removed. Therefore, I consider it to very visually prominent.
- 8.1.5. While I acknowledge that there is some merit in the applicant's proposal to reduce the footprint of advertising signage on the façade, the proposals introduce a form of advertising that is illuminated, visually dominant and dynamic by being brightly lit and consistently changing at 10 second intervals. Notwithstanding, I consider that it is

¹ <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie>

necessary to assess the proposal on its own merits against the objectives of the development plan and not just on the basis that advertising already exists at this location.

- 8.1.6. I note that policy 11.194 (Advertising on Buildings) requires fascia and projecting signs to be simple in design, not excessive in illumination or size, and that illuminated signage be sympathetic to the building on which it is to be displayed with overall illumination being discreet. In my view, a digital advert display is inherently illuminated and designed to attract attention. Unlike a traditional paper advertisement billboard sign like that already existing on the building, it cannot reasonably be described as being discreet or sympathetic to the architectural character or the historic façade of the building.
- 8.1.7. In relation to policy 11.195 (Fascia Signage & Illuminative & Projecting Signs), I note that this provision seeks to ensure that signage respects the architectural composition of buildings and does not detract from their appearance. In my opinion there is no question that the proposed digital display would become the dominant visual element of the facade which would diminish the appearance of the architectural detailing and the historic fabric of the existing building.
- 8.1.8. The provisions of policy 11.200 (Digital Advertising/Signage) requires particular regard to be given to existing site context, heritage context and public realm. I note the applicant's argument that the modern design and integrated lighting would reduce visual clutter. An additional benefit outlined is the need for maintenance of the existing signage, whereas the proposal would be less disruptive. The issue of concern in their view in terms of the impact on the protected structure is whether the proposed digital display is such that it would have a negative impact, when compared to the existing signage. The existing protected structure immediately adjoins a prominent civic building i.e. Cork Courthouse, fronting onto it. Both buildings lie within the North Main Street ACA. The significance of the area in which it is located in, extends to the existing historic streetscape. I acknowledge that the existing signage already gives rise to visual impact. However, I consider that the introduction of a bright illuminated, changing digital display would further compound the visual impact, and would detract further from the architectural consistency of the building and the streetscape and would further erode the special character of the ACA designation which it seeks to preserve.

- 8.1.9. Having regard to the foregoing, it is my consideration that these policies establish a clear policy objective that advertising should be subordinate to the architecture of historic buildings, discrete in its illumination, and should preserve the character and appearance of protected structures. The proposed development in my opinion fails to meet these objectives by virtue of its illumination, changing imagery and increased visual prominence. It would become a dominant feature on the western façade of the building detracting from the protected structure including the adjoining courthouse, and would adversely affect the special character and appearance of the ACA. For these reasons I consider that the proposed development is contrary to these policies 11.194 (Advertising on Buildings), 11.195 (Fascia Signage & Illuminative & Projecting Signs) and 11.200 (Digital Advertising/Signage) and I recommend refusal on this basis.
- 8.1.10. As part of the proposal, the applicant is seeking to remove existing signage on a boundary wall to the west of the site. The applicant contends that removal of these advertising structures will reduce visual clutter and will provide an overall planning benefit. I note that these existing advertising signs are located c. 235 m to the west of 30 Washington Street, are at street level and do not occupy a prominent position, however I note that they do sit within the North Mall/ The Marsh ACA. While the removal of such structures is acknowledged as a positive measure and welcomed, I do not consider that it would justify the replacement of the existing advertising display with a more prominent advertising display, that would otherwise conflict with the stated policies of the development plan in terms of the protection of architectural heritage and thereby having an adverse impact on the receiving environment.

8.2. Road Safety

- 8.2.1. The third reason for refusal relates to public safety by reason of traffic hazard. In this regard, I note the Roads Report wherein the area engineer raised concerns that the proposed digital advertising display has the potential to distract drivers and may therefore impact on road safety.
- 8.2.2. I note the provisions of 11.200 (Digital Advertising/ Signage) and that the proposed replacement sign generally complies with the listed requirements in terms of details on the design and operational use of the proposed sign.

- 8.2.3. At time of site inspection, I noted that Washington Street which is a national road (N22) serves as a key urban arterial route within the city centre and as a consequence is a very busy road. The site is located adjacent to the junction of the N22 with Cross Street and in proximity to Little Cross Street which is a pedestrianised street to the south. There is a lot of pedestrian movement in the area particularly at Little Cross Street, Cross Street and west of the Courthouse. There is no pedestrian crossing between Little Cross Street and Cross Street, however I noted that the junction of Courthouse Street (bounding the courthouse to the west) and the R608 (Wandersford Street) is a light controlled junction.
- 8.2.4. I note the concerns of the PA in this regard and as highlighted in the Roads Report. The area engineer has raised that the proposed digital display would distract motorists approaching the area and particularly around Cross Street. Having inspected the site and considered the submissions, I concur with this assessment. While I acknowledge that an existing static advertising display is currently on the western facade of the building, the proposed development in my opinion represents a material change in the nature and impact of the advertising display. The introduction of a digitally illuminated sign with changing content would increase the visual prominence of the advertisement and would create a heightened risk of driver distraction. The subject site is located in close proximity to a controlled junction whereby drivers are required to adhere to traffic signals, vehicle movements and be aware of pedestrian crossings and cyclists and other turning movements. In this context the introduction of such a sign would represent an additional distraction within a complex traffic environment.
- 8.2.5. I note that the applicant in the grounds of appeal has referred to international research studies related to digital displays and road safety to make the case that there is little difference between traditional advertising and digital displays with moving content in terms of the their impacts on driver attention. While I note these studies, I have had regard to the provisions of Section 28 Guidelines 'Spatial Planning and National Routes (January 2012)' which I consider to be relevant to the proposed site. These Guidelines in Section 3.8 recognise the need to control roadside signage on national roads in the interests of road safety, and to avoid driver distraction and visual clutter. Although the site is located within an urban speed environment, the route remains part of the national road network and I am satisfied that the objectives of the Guidelines remain applicable in seeking to protect the safe and efficient operation of the road.

Therefore, having regard to the location of the sign, its visibility to approaching traffic, I consider that the proposal could have the potential to adversely affect road user and attention and would thereby give rise to an unacceptable road traffic safety concern. Accordingly, I concur with the report of the area engineer and consider that refusal on road traffic safety grounds is justified in this case.

8.3. Other Matters

Precedent Decisions

- 8.3.1. The matter of precedent has been raised in the context of the proposed development. The applicant has referred to examples of similar type developments in similar site contexts permitted by An Coimisiún Pleanála and other local authorities. While such examples may provide context, they do not establish a precedent that requires a similar outcome in this current case. In this regard, it is established planning practice that each application must be assessed on its individual merits and on a site-specific basis, having regard to the particular characteristics of the site, the significance of the protected structure and the relevant provisions of the development plan. Having regard to the foregoing, I am satisfied that the determination of this appeal should be based on the particular circumstances of the case before the Commission rather than on permissions granted in other cases.

9.0 AA Screening

Screening the need for Appropriate Assessment: Screening Determination (Stage 1, Article 6(3) of Habitats Directive)

I have considered case PL-501184-CK-26 in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

The appeal site is located at 30/31 Washington Street on the western façade of the existing building fronting onto Cross Street, Cork City centre. The proposed development comprises the removal of the existing advertising signage and replacing with new digital advertising signage. It is also proposed to remove 3 no. existing advertising signs further to the west adjacent to 16 Washington Street. It has no direct hydrological or other connection to a European site.

The closest European site relative to the appeal site are:

- SPA: 004030 - Cork Harbour SPA – approx. 3.8 km to the southeast.

No nature conservation concerns were raised in the planning application or in the planning appeal.

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.

The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- The nature and scale of the proposed development.
- The separation distance and intervening lands from the nearest European sites and the absence of any hydrological or other pathways,
- Taking into account the screening determination of the PA.

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.

Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) is not required.

10.0 WFD Screening

10.1.1. An assessment of the proposed development has been undertaken with regard to the objectives set out in Article 4 of the EU Water Framework Directive.

10.1.2. Having considered the nature, scale, and location of the proposed development, it is concluded that the proposal will not result in any risk of deterioration in the status of any water body, including surface waters (rivers and lakes), groundwater, transitional waters, or coastal waters. This applies to both qualitative and quantitative status, and in respect of temporary and permanent effects.

In addition, the proposed development will not adversely affect the achievement of established environmental objectives, including the protection, maintenance, and improvement of water body status, as required under the Directive.

10.1.3. Accordingly, the proposed development is considered to be compliant with the requirements of Article 4.

11.0 Recommendation

Having regard to the foregoing, I recommend that permission is refused for the reasons and consideration set out below.

12.0 Reasons and Considerations

1. Having regard to the the provisions of 11.194 (Advertising on Buildings), 11.195 (Fascia Signage & Illuminative & Projecting Signs) and 11.200 (Digital Advertising/Signage) of the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028, the location of the proposed development on the façade of a Protected Structure proximate to Cork Courthouse which is a Protected Structure, and within the North Main Street Architectural Conservation Area, it is considered that the proposed replacement digital advertising display by reason of its prominence and changing illuminated nature would introduce a visually dominant and active element onto the façade of the Protected Structure which would adversely affect the legibility of the structure, neighbouring protected structures, and would negatively impact the character, setting and heritage amenity of both the Protected Structures and the Architectural Conservation Area. The proposed development would be contrary to Objectives 8.17, 8.19, 8.22 and 8.23 of the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 and would, therefore be, contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
2. Having regard to the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 including in particular the provisions of 11.200 (Digital Advertising/Signage), the provisions of the “Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities January 2012 (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government)” in particular Section 3.8, the location of the site within Cork City centre, the proposed digital advertising display by reason of its scale, illumination, changing content and prominent location on the façade of the existing building and its visibility to drivers approaching the site particularly from the west on a public road which is a national route (N22), it is considered that

the proposed development would create an unacceptable level of visual distraction thereby endangering public safety by reason of a traffic hazard and as such, would 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.

Clare Clancy
Planning Inspector

24th July 2026

Appendix 1 – Form 1 EIA Pre-Screening

Case Reference	PL-501184-CC-26
Proposed Development Summary	Replacement of 1 no. illuminated 7.34m x 5.21m advertising display with 1 no. digital 6.28m x 3.4m advertising display on the gable wall of 30/31 Washington Street, Cork (a Protected Structure Ref Nos. PS868 and PS1098) and all associated site works
Development Address	30/31 Washington Street and 16 Washington Street West, Cork
IN ALL CASES CHECK BOX / OR LEAVE BLANK	
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'Project' for the purposes of EIA?	☒ Yes, it is a 'Project'. Proceed to Q.2.
	☐ No, No further action required.
(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)	
2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1, Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?	
☐ Yes, it is a Class specified in Part 1. EIA is mandatory. No Screening required. EIAR to	State the Class here

be requested. Discuss with ADP.	
☒ No, it is not a Class specified in Part 1. Proceed to Q3	
3. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) OR a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of Roads Regulations 1994, AND does it meet/exceed the thresholds?	
☒ No, the development is not of a Class Specified in Part 2, Schedule 5 or a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of the Roads Regulations, 1994. No Screening required.	
☐ Yes, the proposed development is of a Class and meets/exceeds the threshold. EIA is Mandatory. No Screening Required	
☐ Yes, the proposed development is of a Class but is sub-threshold. Preliminary examination required. (Form 2) OR If Schedule 7A information submitted proceed to Q4. (Form 3 Required)	
4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted AND is the development a Class of Development for the purposes of the EIA Directive (as identified in Q3)?	

Yes ☐	
No ☒	Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q3)

Inspector: _____ Date: _____

