

Our Case Number: ACP-322958-25



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Development Application Unit
C/O The Manager
Government Offices
Newtown Road
Wexford
Co. Wexford
Y35 AP90

Date: 01 September 2025

Re: Athlone link road phase 2. Proposed link road, joining the Crescent Junction (R915) to Southern Station Road Junction
Athlone, County Westmeath

Dear Sir / Madam,

An Coimisiún Pleanála has received your recent submission in relation to the above mentioned proposed development and will take it into consideration in its determination of the matter.

Please note that the proposed development shall not be carried out unless the Commission has approved it with or without modifications.

If you have any queries in relation to the matter please contact the undersigned officer of the Commission at laps@pleanala.ie

Please quote the above mentioned An Coimisiún Pleanála reference number in any correspondence or telephone contact with the Commission.

Yours faithfully,

Lauren Griffin
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-8737244

AA02

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64 Sráid Maoilbhríde
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64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
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Lauren Griffin

From: Lauren Griffin
Sent: Monday, 1 September 2025 10:04
To: Simon Dolan (Housing)
Subject: RE: S177AE - Athlone Link Road

A Chara,

The Commission acknowledges receipt of your email; official correspondence will issue in due course.

Kind regards,

Lauren

From: Simon Dolan (Housing) <Simon.Dolan@npws.gov.ie>
Sent: Friday, August 29, 2025 3:44 PM
To: LAPS <laps@pleanala.ie>
Subject: S177AE - Athlone Link Road

Caution: This is an **External Email** and may have malicious content. Please take care when clicking links or opening attachments. When in doubt, contact the ICT Helpdesk.

A Chara,

Attached please find the Archaeological & Nature Conservation recommendations.

Regards,



Simon Dolan

An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Executive Officer
Aonad na nIarratas ar Fhorbairt
Development Applications Unit
Oifigí an Rialtais
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Bóthar an Bhaile Nua, Loch Garman, Contae Loch Garman, Y35 AP90
Newtown Road, Wexford, County Wexford, Y35 AP90



Planning Ref: S177AE Athlone Link Road
(Please quote in all related correspondence)

29 August 2025

The Secretary
An Coimisiún Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 V902

Via email: laps@pleanala.ie

Re: Notification under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended

Proposed Development: S177AE application for Athlone link road phase 2.

A chara

I refer to correspondence received in connection with the above. Outlined below are heritage-related observations/recommendations co-ordinated by the Development Applications Unit under the stated headings.

Archaeology

It is noted that the proposed development is large in scale and given the scale, extent of the proposed development it could impact on subsurface archaeological remains.

In line with national policy, see Section 3.6 of the Frameworks and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage 1999, the Department recommends that an Archaeological Impact Assessment, as outlined below, should be prepared to assess any impact on archaeological remains within the proposed development site. This assessment should be submitted as Further Information. This will enable the Planning Authority and this Department to prepare an appropriate archaeological recommendation before a planning decision is taken.

Archaeological Investigations

1. The applicant is required to engage the services of a suitably qualified archaeologist to carry out an archaeological impact assessment of the development site. No sub-surface developmental work, including geotechnical test pits, should be undertaken until the archaeological assessment has been completed and commented on by this Department.

2. The archaeologist shall carry out any relevant documentary research and inspect the

Aonad na nIarratas ar Fhorbairt

Development Applications Unit

Oifigí an Rialtais

Government Offices

Bóthar an Bhaile Nua, Loch Garman, Contae Loch Garman, Y35 AP90

Newtown Road, Wexford, County Wexford, Y35 AP90



development site. As part of the assessment a programme of test excavation shall be carried out at locations chosen by the archaeologist (licensed under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004), having consulted the site drawings and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

3. Having completed the work, the archaeologist shall submit a written report stating their recommendations to the Planning Authority and to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Where archaeological material/features are shown to be present, preservation in situ, preservation by record (excavation) or monitoring may be required.

Reason: To ensure the continued preservation (either in situ or by record) of places, caves, sites, features or other objects of archaeological interest.

Nature Conservation

These observations are intended to assist An Coimisiún Pleanála in relation to identifying potential impacts on European and national nature conservation sites, biodiversity and environmental protection in general, in the context of the current proposal.

The Department acknowledges the submission of an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) with the application. These reports state that there would be a collective loss of interconnected non-annex woodland, scrub and grassland habitats on site, which currently provide suitable refugia for a range of protected species. Due to the patchy nature of green spaces within typical urban environs, such areas are known to act as ecological linkages between similar green spaces and as roosting and breeding refugia for a range of species.

One point of query raised lies within the avifaunal survey data, in which the EclA report identifies the red-listed Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) as being recorded on site. Given the locality within the central landmass of Ireland, this observation is highly likely to be Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*), a green-listed species (BoCCI)¹.

Pollution control measures during the construction phase:

Groundworks and associated construction activities including demolition works, earth moving and cementitious works have significant impact potential on natural watercourses from the release of sediments and pollutants via surface waters and drainage channels. Vulnerable aquatic habitats can be negatively impacted as a result of poor on-site construction practises and unmitigated activities.

It is recommended that all mitigation measures outlined in the EclA and NIS should be strictly adhered to. The provision of a suitably qualified Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) is recommended to oversee the works. Subject to all mitigations being implemented in full, including the provision of an appropriately managed sustainable urban drainage system (SuDS), no significant residual hydrological impacts on the River Shannon Callows SAC (000216) and Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096) are

¹ <https://birdwatchireland.ie/birds-of-conservation-concern-in-ireland/>



anticipated due to the localised nature of the proposed development within the surrounding urban landscape.

Biodiversity mitigation measures:

The Department refers to the identification of residual impacts within the EclA report, which states that *'The local breeding bird and bat populations may be temporarily displaced during the construction stage'*. This assessment is likely to be an underestimate of the scale of residual faunal impacts resulting from the construction phase of the project, given that the scale of available non-annex habitats on site will be significantly reduced. The permanent loss of a large majority of these areas would generate localised, medium-term impacts on habitat availability until such time that the proposed replanting mitigations lead to the provision of vegetation of sufficient age to adequately provide replacement habitat, albeit over a smaller area. It is therefore recommended that, where possible, the retention of existing vegetation is preferable over a discontinuity in the availability of suitable breeding/roosting habitat resulting from site clearance works.

As referenced in the preliminary construction environmental management plan (CEMP), the undertaking of pre-construction ecological surveys within the project area and the zone of influence (Zoi) is advised to determine the presence of protected species prior to the commencement of works. It is recommended that the removal of any vegetation, including tree felling operations, should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season (1st March – 31st August). This time restriction includes structures within which demolition works are to proceed and active nest sites have been identified. If such works are to be undertaken during the bird-nesting season, pre-commencement breeding bird surveys are recommended to identify suitable habitat within which nests may be deemed to be active. All works relating to avifaunal and other ecological considerations should be carried out under the supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist.

Bats

The EclA notes that an external survey of suitable trees on site as potential bat roosts was conducted on the 22nd March 2023 in accordance with the relevant guidelines. This could be considered to be outside of the optimal period for peak bat activity. Pre-construction bat surveys should be undertaken at an optimal time period for detecting active sites.

As species listed under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC), all bats species in Ireland are strictly protected under Article 12. If any potential damage or disturbance to bat roosts identified on site is envisaged as part of the mitigation works, Westmeath County Council would be required to submit an application to NPWS under Regulation 54 to apply for a derogation licence. This should process should take place in advance of any formal planning consent from An Coimisiún Pleanála for said works.

Swift boxes

As referenced in the EclA section on mitigations, wildlife enhancement measures should consider the provision of suitable nesting habitat for those species found to currently utilise the area, including the Common Swift (*Apus apus*). The Swift population in Ireland



has experienced a 40% decline over the last 15 years due to the renovation of old structures and consequently are now a red-listed species in the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI)².

It is recommended that Swift nest box measures should be incorporated in to all urban public realm projects in Ireland where known populations exist or have become locally extinct due to the loss of former nest sites. Nest box measures, as detailed by Swift Conservation Ireland³, include build-in Woodstone boxes that can be incorporated into new walls, and external Schwegler 17A triple entrance nest boxes.

You are requested to send further communications to this Department's Development Applications Unit (DAU) at manager.dau@npws.gov.ie where used, or to the following address:

The Manager
Development Applications Unit (DAU)
Government Offices
Newtown Road
Wexford
Y35 AP90

Is mise, le meas

Simon Dolan
Development Applications Unit
Administration

² <https://birdwatchireland.ie/birds-of-conservation-concern-in-ireland/>

³ <https://www.swiftconservation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Swift-Conservation-Building-Next-Boxes-Booklet.pdf>