EIA SCREENING REPORT

Gort Public Realm

Prepared for GalwayCounty Council

MEC Ltd.

This report has been prepared by Minogue Environmental Consulting Ltd with all reasonable skill, care and diligence. Information reported herein is based on the interpretation of data collected and has been accepted in good faith as being accurate and valid.

This report is prepared for Galway County Council and we accept no responsibility to third parties to whom this report, or any part thereof, is made known. Any such party relies on the report at their own risk.

Minogue & Associates
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANCY

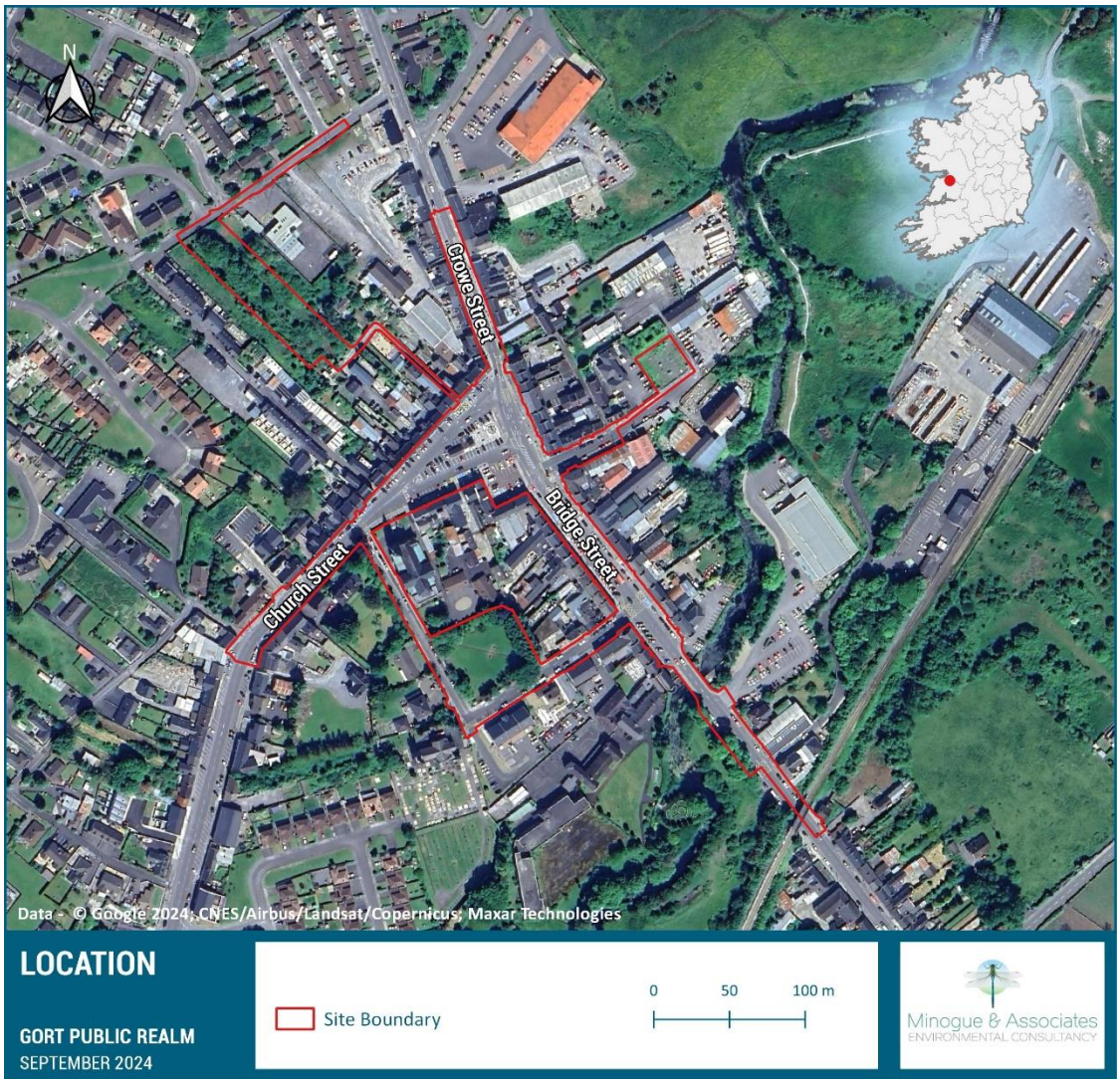
1 Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Minogue Environmental Consulting Ltd was engaged by Galway County Council (GCC) to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report for a proposed public realm project (the project)at Gort Town Centre, Co. Galway. Figure 1.1. shows the project location and boundary over aerial imagery.

FIGURE 1-1 PROJECT LOCATION AND BOUNDARY



1.2 Legislative Background

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a procedure undertaken by a competent authority pursuant to its obligations under the EIA Directive the terms of European Directives on the assessment of the impacts of certain public and private projects on the environment. In accordance with the provisions of Part X of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), an EIA shall be carried out in respect of an application for development which is specified in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, (as amended) ([“the 2001 Regulations”)]. A mandatory

EIA is required for developments which fall within the classes of development prescribed in remit of Schedule 5.

In addition, an EIA of '"sub-threshold"' development EIA may be required, if the competent Planning Authority determines that the proposed development would be likely to have significant impacts on the environment. Schedule 7 of the Regulations details the criteria for determining whether a development would or would not be likely to have significant impacts on the environment considering the characteristics of the proposed development, its location and characteristics of potential impacts.

Thus, Article 93 of, and Schedule 5 to, Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended ("the 2000 Regulations") sets out the classes of development for which a planning application must be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment report (EIAR). Part 1 and Part 2 Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 prescribes the categories of, and thresholds for, prescribed development requiring EIA.

1.2.1 Project Type and thresholds

Schedule 5 Part 1 of the 2001 Regulations is aligned with Annex I of the EIA Directive and identifies those developments for which EIA and the submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) is mandatory. This schedule lists a range of development activities including major infrastructure projects such as airports, motorways or power stations. The proposed development does not fall within any of the classes of prescribed development contained in Part 1 of Schedule 5.

Schedule 5 Part 2 of the 2001 Regulations is aligned with Annex II of the EIA Directive and lists the type of development that may require an EIA. This depends on site area, and quantum of development in relation to thresholds listed and therefore if there is potential for likely significant environmental effects.

Paragraph 10(b) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 contains the following prescribed development:

"b) (i) Construction of more than 500 dwellings

(ii) Construction of a car-park providing more than 400 spaces, other than a car-park provided as part of, and incidental to the primary purpose of, a development.

(iii) Construction of a shopping centre with a gross floor space exceeding 10,000 square metres.

(iv) Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere.

(In this paragraph, "business district" means a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use.)".

In this regard, the relevant category for the public realm project at Gort Town would be "urban development" listed in Schedule 5 Part 2, 10b, iv. European Commission (2015) guidance provides information on the interpretation of definitions of project categories and details potential project types that would meet the definition of 'urban development'. These are as follows:

- Projects with similar characteristics to shopping centres and car parks, such as bus garages, train depots;
- Construction projects such as housing development; concert halls; cultural venues;
- Projects to which the term 'urban' and 'infrastructure' may relate such as construction of sewerage and water supply networks.

The proposed public realm improvement works do not correspond or have similar characteristics to any of the suggested project definitions, and would therefore not be considered under the 'urban development' criteria of Schedule 5 Part 2.

Furthermore, the thresholds for EIA for this project category are listed as development in a business district with a site area over 2 hectares, in a built-up area with a site area of over 10 hectares and elsewhere with a site area over 20 hectares.

For the purposes of EIA, the 2001 Regulations define 'business district' as a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use. A review of current landuse based on the landuse zoning of the Gort plan area, a review of google aerial imagery and site visits over 2024 show that whilst the Market Square and Bridge Street supports retail and commercial uses, the surrounding area within the project is largely comprised of residential use, amenity uses including religious use, an urban park with a limited number of commercial uses with derelict and vacant buildings. It does not correspond to a 'business district; for the purposes of EIA, and more accurately corresponds to a Built Up area.

In summary, the project does not correspond to 'urban development' project definition following European Commission guidance, nor does it meet the threshold for EIA in this project category, being an area of 2.8ha with a mandatory EIA threshold of 10ha in this category.

In relation to criteria applied for mandatory EIA development as listed in Section 50 of the Roads Act 1993, the project does not meet the criteria for EIA given the scale, and nature of the proposed works, relating to public realm measures including reconfiguring of existing urban space, resurfacing /restoration of existing footpaths and increased seating, planting and enhanced pedestrian safety. In light of this, the project does not meet the criteria for such works under the Roads Act 1993, as amended.

However, notwithstanding that the proposed development is "sub threshold", as set out in the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment* (August 2018), screening is the initial stage in the EIA process and determines whether or not specified public or private developments are likely to have significant effects on the environment and, as such, require EIA to be carried out prior to a decision on a development consent application being made.

One of key amendments introduced by the 2014 EIA Directive includes strengthening of the procedures for screening, particularly through the introduction of new information requirements to be provided by the developer (Annex IIA, and transposed into Irish law by Schedule 7A to the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended) and revised selection criteria to be used by the competent authority in making a determination (Annex III of Directive, Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations).

According to European Commission Guidance (2017[1])

"*Screening has to implement the Directive's overall aim, i.e. to determine if a Project listed in Annex II is likely to have significant effects on the environment and, therefore, be made subject to a requirement for Development Consent and an assessment, with regards to its effects on the environment. At the same time, Screening should ensure that an EIA is carried out only for those Projects for which it is thought that a significant impact on the environment is possible, thereby*

[1] Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects Guidance on Screening (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU). European Commission 2017. Page 23.

ensuring a more efficient use of both public and private resources. Hence, Screening has to strike the right balance between the above two objectives."

According to the Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (2018):

"*For all sub-threshold developments listed in Schedule 5 Part 2, where no EIAR is submitted or EIA determination requested, a screening determination is required to be undertaken by the competent authority unless, on preliminary examination it can be concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment. This is initiated by the competent authority following the receipt of a planning application or appeal*

A preliminary examination is undertaken, based on professional expertise and experience, and having regard to the 'Source – Pathway – Target' model, where appropriate. The examination should have regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations.

Where, based on a preliminary examination of the information submitted with the application and any other supplementary information received, the competent authority concludes that, having considered the nature, size and location of the proposed development, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment, this should be recorded with reasons for this conclusion stated, and no EIA required or formal determination made. The recording of the competent authority's view should be brief and concise, but adequate to inform the public. In many cases this considered view will be included in the planner's/inspector's report on the planning application and this may be cross-referenced in the competent authority's decision. Normally, this will be published at the time of the decision of the competent authority."

For the avoidance of doubt, Section 3 of this report, provides an assessment of the project against Schedule 7 criteria of the EIA regulation to which sub threshold development is required to be assessed. Section 4 provides the EIA Screening Determination.

1.3 Screening

1.3.1 Changes to the EIA Screening Process

The EIA Directive (2014/52/EU) has brought a number of changes to the EIA process with a strengthening of the Screening process as follows:

Article 4 (4) of this Directive introduces a new Annex IIA to be used in the case of a request for a screening determination for Annex II projects. This is information to be provided by the developer on the projects listed in Annex II (see below):

Annex II: Information to be provided by the developer on the projects listed in Annex II:

1. A description of the project, including in particular:

(a) a description of the physical characteristics of the whole project and, where relevant, of demolition works (***Section 2.1 and 2.2 Project Description and Public realm proposals***);

(b) a description of the location of the project, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected (***Section 2.4 Receiving Environment***)

2. A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the project (***Section 3 of this report***)

3. A description of any likely significant effects, to the extent of the information available on such effects, of the project on the environment resulting from:

(a) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant *(Section 3 EIA Screening)* ;

(b) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity (*Section 3 EIA Screening*).

4. The criteria of Annex III shall be taken into account, where relevant, when compiling the information in accordance with points 1 to 3 (*Section 3 EIA Screening*).

Article 4(4) specifies that the developer may provide a description of any features of the project and/or mitigation measures to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant effects on the environment. It should be noted that this does NOT include compensation measures.

Article 4(5) Determination of Screening

The competent authority shall make its determination, on the basis of information provided by the developer in accordance with paragraph 4 taking into account, where relevant, the results of preliminary verifications or assessments of the effects on the environment carried out pursuant to Union legislation other than this Directive.

The determination shall be made available to the public and:

(a) where it is decided that an environmental impact assessment is required, state the main reasons for requiring such assessment with reference to the relevant criteria listed in Annex III; or

(b) where it is decided that an environmental impact assessment is not required, state the main reasons for not requiring such assessment with reference to the relevant criteria listed in Annex III, and, where proposed by the developer, state any features of the project and/or measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment.

The EIA Screening prepared will inform the competent authority, Galway County Council, to determine whether an EIA of the project is required. Please see Section 4 of this Report for the EIA Screening Determination as proposed.

1.4 Approach to this EIS Screening

This EIS Screening report has been prepared and informed by the following guidance and guidelines:

- Practice Note on EIA – Office of Planning Regulator, 2021
- Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2018;
- Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects Guidance on Screening (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU), European Commission, 2017.
- Interpretation of definitions of project categories of annex I and II of the EIA Directive, 2015.
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-threshold Development, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2003;
- Guidance on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Statements Environmental Protection Agency 2002.

1.5 Statement of Authority

This report has been prepared by Ruth Minogue, MCIEEM. Ruth has been a practicing environmental consultant for 25 years and has specialised in the area of environmental assessment including Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment. She holds an Advanced Diploma in Planning and Environmental Law (2017, Kings Inn) as well as ongoing CPD through professional institutes including the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management, the Irish Landscape Institute, recent CDP has included Environmental Law Briefing and Nature Based Solutions course at Cranfield University. Ruth is currently undertaking a MPhil in TCD on environmental history.

Additional inputs were provided by Eilis Vaughan MSc, who provided the Geographical Information Systems analysis and mapping outputs. Technical reports and scientific information relied upon include a Bat Survey and impact assessment report prepared by Eire Ecology [2](2024) and a SuDS Assessment by McCloy Consulting[3] (2024). Site visits were carried out in July 2024 to inform the assessment process.

[2] Bat Survey Report Gort Streetscape, Eire Ecology 2024

[2] SuDS Assessment Gort Town Centre Public Realm, Co. Galway September 2024 Mc Cloy Consulting

2 Description of the Proposed Development

2.1 Site Description

The project is located in the town centre of Gort, County Galway and primarily includes the urban centre, that is dominated by built land and artificial surfaces habitats. Three main areas are the focus of the project. The scheme area currently comprises c. 2.8 ha of primarily developed / urban land across Gort town centre including environs and access roads.

2.2 Project Description

Gort Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project on Market Square, Bridge Street, George Street, Crowe Street, Barrack Street, Queen Street, Church Street, and Canon Quinn Park to include:

1. Redesigned paved areas along Market Square, Bridge Street, George Street, Crowe Street, Barrack Street, Queen Street and Church Street including new surface materials, installation of a new lighting scheme, hard and soft landscaping and street furniture (The proposed works are located within the Architectural Conservation Area, and in the vicinity of Recorded Protected Structures RPS No 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 3445, 3451, 3452, 3453, 3459, 3464, 3467, 3468, 3469, 3471, 3472.

2. Provision of an upgraded and expanded pedestrianised civic/public space in the Market Square.

3. Provision of new pedestrian crossings.

4. Installation of new road alignments including reduction in carriageway widths and traffic calming measures.

5. Installation of new street furniture and cycle parking.

6. Rationalised on-street car parking throughout the application area including the provision of new disabled and age friendly parking provision.

7. The provision of 2No. new public off-street car parks and Crowe Street and Barrack Street.

8. Installation of new landscaping including street trees and planting.

9. Upgrade works to the existing Canon Quinn Park including the installation of play equipment, seating, lighting and ancillary infrastructure.

10. Installation of a new signage and way-finding scheme.

11. Undergrounding of overhead cables and the removal of redundant overhead cabling.

12. Installation of upgraded surface water drainage infrastructure including provision of nature-based, sustainable urban drainage solutions.

13. The relocating of existing public bus-stop to Bridge Street/George Street and provision 1No. new coach drop off area on Market Square.

14. All other associated site and ancillary works at Market Square, Bridge Street, George Street, Crowe Street, Barrack Street, Queen Street, Church Street, and Canon Quinn Park.

2.3 Public realm proposals as part of the project

2.3.1 Market Square

TABLE 2-1 PUBLIC REALM MEASURES MARKET SQUARE

Element	Summary
Market Square is the most significant public open space in Gort and lies at the heart of the town. It is a prime location for retail and includes some well established businesses, as well as a popular weekly market. The objective of the proposal is to transform the layout on Market Square to create a large civic space at the heart of the town, set in a pedestrian friendly environment, whilst delivering a functional scheme for all users including businesses, market traders and visitors	
The design actions are as follows: • Transform road layout, introduce a mini-roundabout and tighten carriageway widths to reduce vehicular speed and dominance; • Rationalise on-street parking to reclaim public space for pedestrian users and introduce cycle parking; • Introduce safe and well-located crossing points to make the streetscape pedestrian friendly and easy to navigate; • Create a fully pedestrian and flexible space at the heart of the square, that celebrates the local heritage and character, allows local events to take place and can host the weekly market; • Make Market Square a pleasant space to dwell through the introduction of planting beds, street trees, new feature benches, retractable umbrellas, high quality surfacing and lighting	

2.3.2 Canon Quin Square

TABLE 2-2 PUBLIC REALM MEASURES CANON QUIN SQUARE

Element	Summary
Canon Quinn Park is the only open green space at the heart of the town. Along with Market Square, it is a key public space in Gort Town Centre and should be celebrated as such. Located at the rear of Saint Coleman's Catholic Church and facing Queen Street, it is a quiet area of the town centre, whilst still lying only 150 meters away from Market Square. The proposal focuses on retaining the openness, existing character and flexibility of the park, whilst providing opportunities for new recreational uses of this valuable green space in town.	
The general location of the existing path network is generally retained, with the introduction of a gentle curve to the diagonal central path to allow for a larger continuous open lawn to be retained at the centre of the park for informal recreation and kick-around. A new event space with a raised stage and amphitheatre is created to the south-west corner of the park, along with a new universally accessible entrance from Queen Street. To the north-east of the park, a series of pocket spaces host a variety of play equipments catering for all age groups. Adjacent to this area is an informal 'hang-out' area with large seating plinths dedicated to older children and young adults. 6 new trees are introduced in this central area. The two existing entrances to the park are widened to allow universal access and include wayfinding. A mixed planting buffer to all edge of the park will increase the biodiversity on site. New benches are located along the planting around the perimeter of the park	
Retained open lawn 01 Mixed biodiverse planting to the edges of the park 02 Pockets of play equipment nested in planting 03 Informal playful path 04 Seating timber 'plinths' / hang out area 05 Raised stage for events 06 Amphitheatre for events 07 New entrance to the park from Queen Street 08 DDA compliant, widened entrances with signage 09 New entrance to the park from adjacent lane, opportunity to create a direct pedestrian link to Market Square in the future 10 New and resurfaced footpaths 11 Relocated heritage mill stones 12 Benches along planting areas 13 Cycle stands at park entrance 14 New trees 15	

2.3.3 Bridge Street

TABLE 2-3 PUBLIC REALM MEASURES BRIDGE STREET

Element	Summary
Bridge Street is a key street in Gort Town Centre: it is the main road coming into the town from the South and connects Market Square with the other bank of the Cannahowna/ Gort river through the bridge. With approximately 20 meters width, it is one of the wider streets in the town core, offering many opportunities for public realm enhancement. The proposal is to rebalance the available space, moving away from vehicle dominance and giving space to pedestrians, businesses, visitors and vegetation, making the most of the available street width.	
The design actions are as follows: • The double carriageway width is tightened to 6.4m to calm traffic down and reduce vehicle speed. On-street parking is retained both sides of the street. • The pedestrian footpaths width is maintained / increased to approximately 4m both sides, giving ample space to pedestrians and local businesses to make use of their forecourts for display and outdoor terraces. • The footpaths are resurfaced using the same natural stone paving as Market Square, tying in these two prime spaces. • A controlled crossing point is created to the North of the junction with Queen Street, enhancing pedestrian movement • Pockets of biodiverse and native planting create a feature along the full length of the street, separating pedestrians from traffic and creating an enjoyable environment. These include benches and street trees	

2.3.4 Crowe Street

TABLE 2-4 PUBLIC REALM MEASURES CROWE STREET

Element	Summary
Crowe Street is the main road coming into town from the North, it connects directly with Market Square. This axis has one of the predominant flows of traffic in town. The proposal for Crowe Street is to enhance the public realm to create a sense of arrival in town. This is done by rationalising the road layout and on-street parking, decluttering the streetscape and enhancing the pedestrian environment. The design actions are as follows:	
• The double carriageway width is tightened to 6.4m to calm traffic down and reduce vehicle speed. Tracking has been conducted through the detail design process to ensure large vehicles can safely circulate on Crowe Street. • The pedestrian footpaths width is increased to approximately 2.7m both sides of the street and resurfaced, thus enhancing the pedestrian environment. • A continuous strip of on-street parking is retained to the eastern side of the street. • A controlled crossing point is created to the South of Crowe Street, along with an uncontrolled crossing point to the North	

2.3.5 George's street

TABLE 2-5 PUBLIC REALM PROPOSALS GEORGE'S STREET

Element	Summary
George Street is the direct continuation of Bridge Street on the Southern bank of the Cannahowna/Gort River. It is envisioned that the future Town Park could sit on the adjacent river bank and be accessed from George Street, thus making it an important space for pedestrian connections. The proposal for all the streets included in the public realm enhancement area is to create a consistent, robust and easy to navigate public realm with enhanced pedestrian spaces and safe crossing points	
The design actions are as follows: • The double carriageway width is tightened to 6.4m to calm traffic down and reduce vehicle speed. • The pedestrian footpaths width is increased to approximately 3.8m both sides of the street and resurfaced, thus enhancing the pedestrian environment. • The two bus stops currently located on Market Square are relocated on George Street on both sides of the railway bridge. There is ample pedestrian space for people to wait for the bus and the possibility to increase the bus stop length in the future to accommodate two buses simultaneously. • A controlled crossing point is created in front Centra, along with an uncontrolled crossing point on Station Road	
 Double carriageway width tightened to 6.4m 01 On-street parking both sides of the street 02 Controlled pedestrian crossing with raised table 03 Uncontrolled pedestrian crossing 04 Wider, resurfaced footpath to both sides of the street 05 Native planting pockets 06 Relocated bus stops 07 Existing access to residential/businesses retained 08 Loading bay 09 Indicative aspirational Town Park (not included in this proposal) 10	

2.3.6 Barrack Street

TABLE 2-6 PUBLIC REALM PROPOSALS BARRACK STREET

Element
Barrack Street runs northeast from Market Square, leading to an area which includes the former barracks, workshops and police building. It is a narrow and quiet street with no through traffic. The proposal consists in rationalising the road layout, increasing the footpath width wherever possible,

Element
resurfacing all hard standing areas and creating two uncontrolled pedestrian crossing points. Most importantly, one of the two new off-street parking included in the public realm plan sits at the end of Barrack Street. This parking includes 22 new parking bays, including for 1 disabled and 10 electric vehicles.

2.3.7 Church Street

TABLE 2-7PUBLIC REALM PROPOSALS CHURCH STREET

Element	Summary
Church Street is the main road coming into town from the southwest, just like Crowe Street and Bridge Street, it connects directly with Market Square. The proposed layout for Church Street is functional, geared towards efficient pedestrian and vehicular movement whilst introducing some pockets of vegetation and street trees where space and services allow	

The design actions are as follows:

• The double carriageway width is tightened to 6.4m to calm traffic down and reduce vehicle speed.

• The pedestrian footpaths is retained as existing: 1.9m on the northern side of the street and 2.4m on the southern side. This is to allow the inclusion of on-street parking both sides of street.

• On-street parking is introduced on the southern side of the street to allow visitor to park in close proximity of Market Square and support local businesses nearby.

• The existing controlled crossing point in the centre of Church is relocated further down South the street. With the inclusion of another controlled crossing point to the South of Market Square, this allows an even distribution of opportunities to cross the street, enhancing pedestrian connectivity

Element	Summary
	

2.3.8 Queen Street

TABLE 2-8 PUBLIC REALM PROPOSALS QUEEN STREET

Element	Summary
	Queen Street circles around Canon Quinn Park and connects Bridge Street to Market Square. It is a fairly narrow, quiet, one-way street bordered by vegetation from adjacent properties and Canon Quinn Park; Gort Library is also accessed from Queen Street. The design proposal seeks to enhance this existing character and make it a pleasant pedestrian environment for locals and visitors
	The design actions are as follows: • The single carriageway is tightened to 3.8m to calm traffic down and reduce vehicle speed, whilst still allowing large vehicles to safely circulate. • The pedestrian footpaths width is increased to approximately 2.6m to 3m both sides of the street and resurfaced, thus enhancing the pedestrian environment. • Additionally, the two existing entrances to Canon Quinn Park are resurfaced and widened and a new one is created, adding further interest and opportunities for pedestrian walking down Queen Street. • On-street parking is retained on one side of the street, with a rationalised layout and standardised dimensions. • 5 uncontrolled crossing points are created to enhance pedestrian connectivity and allow good access to Canon Quinn Park. • The existing bus bay in front of the Library is retained
	

2.3.9 New off road parking

TABLE 2-9 NEW OFF ROAD PARKING

Element	Summary
	Behind Lowry''s Lane a new off-street car park is proposed with free, long stay parking. In order to facilitate the possibility of increased traffic along Crowe Street to access the entrance of the new car park, passing bays have been provided where larger vehicles can pass. The car park itself has a mixture of parking bays and cycle stands to accommodate a number of users. These include electrical charging points, larger Recreational Vehicle (RV) parking bays, disabled parking bays as well as regular parking bays. The proposed site has been designed to be largely selfdraining with permeable paving and proposed swales to allow for surface water to naturally peculate into the existing ground. New lighting and an uncontrolled crossing is also included within the design actions create a safe and accessible safe at all times
	

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2.4 Receiving Environment

2.4.1 Introduction

Schedule 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended, outline the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by a proposed development. These are:

- Human beings
- Fauna and flora
- Soil
- Water
- Air/climatic factors
- Landscape
- Cultural heritage, including the architectural and archaeological heritage and cultural heritage
- Material assets

Figures 2.5 onwards present baseline maps for the project site and surrounding area.

2.4.2 Human beings

The Galway County Development Plan (CDP) 2022 -2028 sets out policy objectives for development across the county until 2028. The Galway CDP 2022 -2028, aims to "*Promote the creation of an attractive county to live, work, visit and enable businesses to flourish in an environment that offers a range of housing options, robust and diverse range of employment opportunities, access to quality infrastructure and community facilities with a high quality sustainable environment for all.*"

The Galway CDP 2022 -2028 identifies Gort as a self-sustaining town, which entails high levels of population growth and a limited employment base which is reliant on other areas for employment and or services which require targeted "catch-up" investment to become more sustaining. The growth strategy for Gort is to consolidate its designation as a self-sustaining town and continue to support expansion of its employment base along with facilitating residential development to support the sustainable growth of Gort. The scheme is particularly aligned with the Galway CDP's Policy Objectives relating to Placemaking, Compact Growth and Regeneration, Galway Transportation Strategy and Natural Heritage and Biodiversity.

The population of Gort according to the 2022 census was 2,870 Population [2022]. Gort is located with Rural West Air Quality Zone (Air zone D) and air quality is classified as good as of 8th October 2024; the closest air quality monitoring stations are Ennis, Co Clare and Briarhill, Co Galway.

The EPA noise mapping tool (Report period 2017) indicates that the M18 motorway east of the town is subject to a maximum value of Lden levels of >75dB, with lands adjacent to the motorway itself up to 60-64dB.

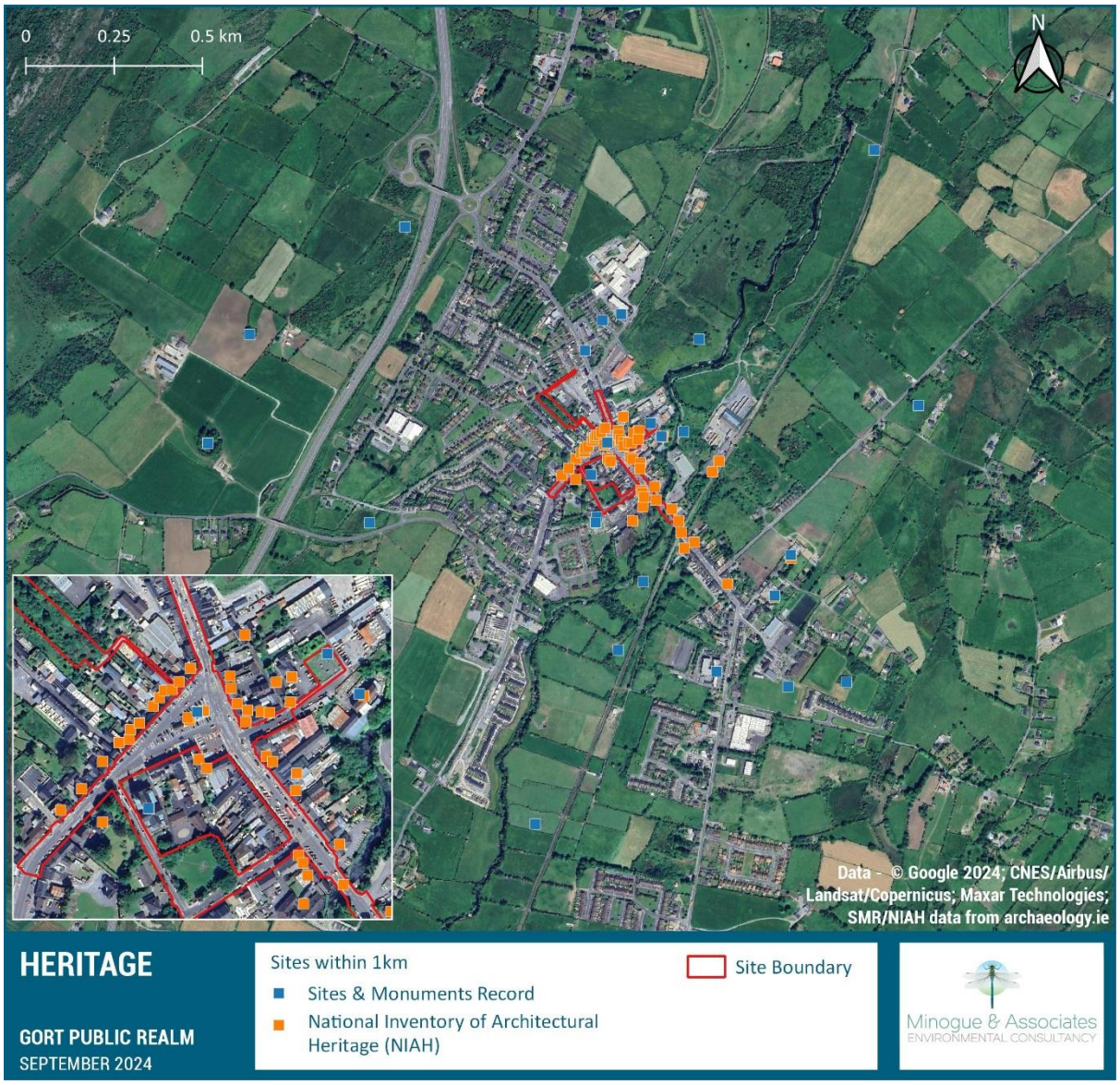
2.4.3 Cultural Heritage

As an early settlement, Gort developed on elevated ground adjacent to the present Market Square which forms the principal open space and focus of the town.

As the Figure below shows, the architectural heritage of the town is reflected in the concentration of buildings listed on the National Inventory of Architectural heritage. According to the Architectural Inventory for Gort 2004, Gort's principal significance lies in the combination of its street pattern, plot sizes, architectural coherence, distinctive landmark buildings or groups and countryside setting. The majority of buildings span the late 18th to late 19th centuries and share many characteristics. A large proportion of buildings are in the classical vernacular style, ranged along two wide intersecting roads

which focus on Market Square. The river and its banks, surviving military buildings, traditional shopfronts and narrow lanes entered through carriage arches are distinctive and important features. Stone walls are another significant feature of the area, particularly those around Slipper Street and Barrack Street. The retention of the character of the historic core in Gort is recognised as being a major attraction. Gort for its size contains a significant number of buildings of national or regional significance for a town of its size[4]. Gort Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) covers the majority of the town centre, all areas included in the public realm enhancement plan sit within Gort's ACA. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) lists 55 monuments, buildings and structures of regional significance in Gort's Town Centre. Please see Figure 2.2 for mapping of the sites and monument record and NIAH sites in and adjacent to the project area.

FIGURE 2-1 SITES LISTED ON THE NATIONAL INVENTORY OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREA



[4] Gort Local Area Plan 2013-2019 (extended)

2.4.4 Fauna and Flora

2.4.4.1 Protected sites

No European Sites occur at in the project site. The nearest European Sites to the project site are the Coole Garryland Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC)(Site Code: 00252), approximately 0.79km to the north and west of the plan area. The Coole-Garryland Special Protection Area (SPA)(Site code: 004107) is the nearest SPA, at 1.19km north and west of the site.

The nearest proposed Natural Heritage Area (p NHA) to the project site is the Coole Garryland pNHA located 0.79km north and west of the project area. The next pNHA is the Polldullagh Cave pNHA located approximately 1.72 south of the plan area.

Please see Figures 2.3 presents SACs and SPAs at 5, 10 and 15km buffers of the project area; Figure 2.7 presents NHAs/pNHAs within 5, 10 and 15km of the project area.

A Screening for Appropriate Assessment and subsequent Natura Impact Statement have been prepared under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive and accompanies this EIA Screening report under separate cover.

FIGURE 2-2 SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION 15KM

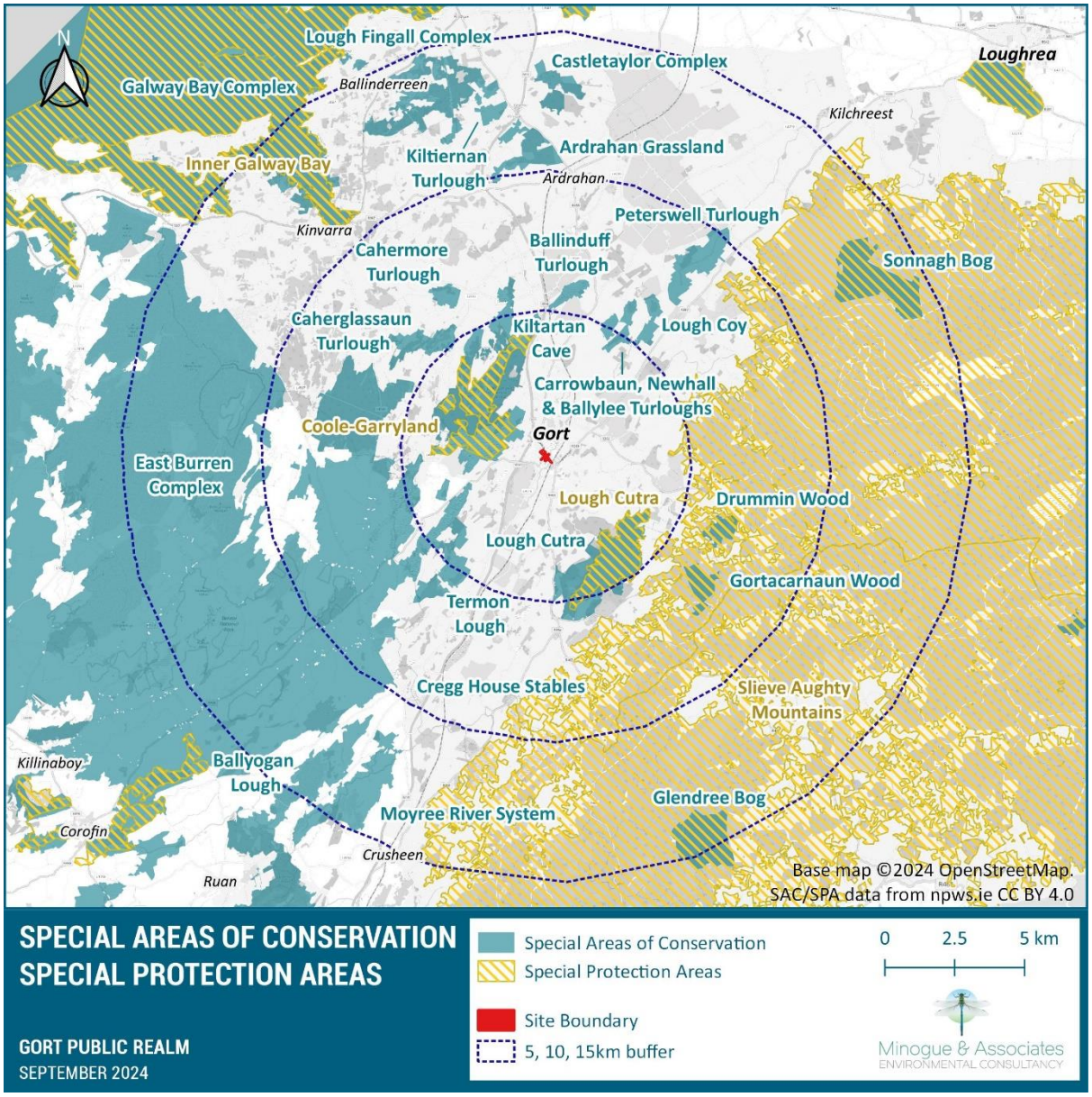
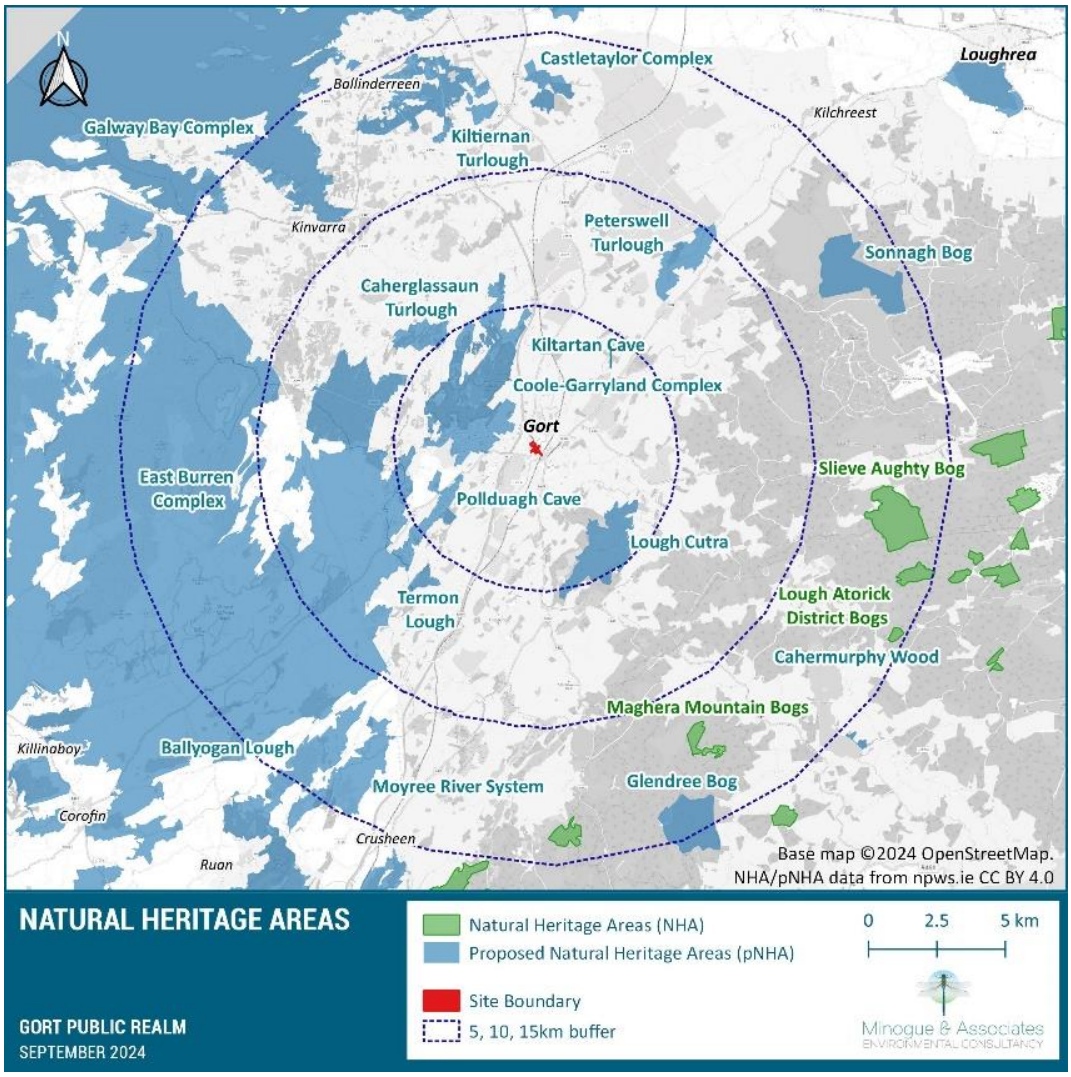


FIGURE 2-3 NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS AND PROPOSED NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS 15KM



2.4.4.2 Habitats and species

The current land cover within the project site is characterized by built lands and artificial surfaces with the parkland and amenity planting present at Canon Quin Park. Some trees are present at the proposed off street parking area. A description of land cover and habitats in presented below in Table 2.10

TABLE 2-10 LANDCOVER AND HABITATS

Area	Summary
Market Square	Comprises built land and artificial surfaces no woodland habitats are present such as trees or ornamental planting.
Canon Quinn Park	Comprises amenity grassland with trees of various sizes and species, a large row of Leylandii are present on the eastern boundary of the park.
Bridge Street	Comprises built land and artificial surfaces, with the bridge crossing the Gort River that flows north east through the town. The Gort River is crossed by Bridge Street.
Crowe Street	Comprises built land and artificial surfaces including the street and housing/built development
Georges Street	Comprises built land and artificial surfaces including the street and housing/built development

Area	Summary
Barrack Street	This comprises bare ground, built land and artificial surfaces, with a stone wall. A ditch where the Gort river was previously diverted around the old Barracks provides a hydrological connection to the Gort River
Queen Street	Comprises built land and artificial surfaces including the street and housing/built development. The stone walls support some ivy growth along parts of Queen Street.
Church Street	Comprises built land and artificial surfaces including the street and housing/built development
Off street parking (Lowry Lane)	This comprises spoil, bare ground, recolonising bare ground with grass. with some woodland habitat in the form of semi mature trees. A review of aerial photography indicated the presence of these trees from 1995 aerial imagery.

2.4.4.3 Fauna

2.4.4.3.1 NON-VOLANT MAMMALS

No evidence indicating the presence of protected non-volant mammals, such as badgers, has been recorded within the project site during site visit in July 2024...A desktop search of National Biodiversity Centre database based on the plan boundary and immediate areas returned records of the following protected species under the EU Habitats Directive, EU Birds Directive and Wildlife Act 2000, within the past twenty years.

FIGURE 2-4 POLYGON SEARCH NBDC

TABLE 2-11 NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY CENTRE DATABASE

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
Barn Swallow (Hirundo rustica)	5	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Black-headed Gull (Larus ridibundus)	6	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
Black-tailed Godwit (Limosa limosa)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Coot (Fulica atra)	7	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Goldeneye (Bucephala clangula)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Greenshank (Tringa nebularia)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis)	2	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex I Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Linnet (Carduelis cannabina)	6	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Pheasant (Phasianus colchicus)	6	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section I Bird Species
Common Pochard (Aythya ferina)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Redshank (Tringa totanus)	4	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
Common Snipe (Gallinago gallinago)	4	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section III Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Starling (Sturnus vulgaris)	7	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Swift (Apus apus)	7	26/05/2012	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Wood Pigeon (Columba palumbus)	7	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section I Bird Species
Dunlin (Calidris alpina)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex I Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Eurasian Curlew (Numenius arquata)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
Eurasian Teal (Anas crecca)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Eurasian Wigeon (Anas penelope)	2	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
European Golden Plover (Pluvialis apricaria)	2	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section II Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III,

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
			Section III Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
Great Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo)	4	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Great Crested Grebe (Podiceps cristatus)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Hen Harrier (Circus cyaneus)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex I Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
House Martin (Delichon urbicum)	6	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
House Sparrow (Passer domesticus)	7	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Little Grebe (Tachybaptus ruficollis)	5	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Long-tailed Duck (Clangula hyemalis)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section II Bird Species
Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos)	7	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section I Bird Species
Mew Gull (Larus canus)	2	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Mute Swan (Cygnus olor)	7	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Northern Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus)	6	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern ||

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
			Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
Northern Pintail (Anas acuta)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
Northern Shoveler (Anas clypeata)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section III Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus)	1	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex I Bird Species
Rock Pigeon (Columba livia)	2	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species
Sand Martin (Riparia riparia)	3	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Sky Lark (Alauda arvensis)	4	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Spotted Flycatcher (Muscicapa striata)	4	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula)	6	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus)	2	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex I Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Yellowhammer (Emberiza citrinella)	5	31/12/2011	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
Eurasian Badger (Meles meles)	4	31/12/2008	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts
European Otter (Lutra lutra)	2	11/10/2010	Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive || Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive >> Annex II || Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive >> Annex IV || Protected Species: Wildlife Acts
Lesser Horseshoe Bat (Rhinolophus hipposideros)	10	26/01/2015	Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive || Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive >> Annex II || Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive >> Annex IV || Protected Species: Wildlife Acts

A further search of the NBDC database returned a record of evidence of otter activity in 2005, with one otter spraint observed on flat ledges downstream of the bridge, approximately 250m downstream, just beyond the Aldi shop.

2.4.4.3.2 BATS

Bat surveys were undertaken by EireEcology[5] over 2024 and the full report is provided under separate cover. In summary, the surveys revealed the presence of seven bat species as follows:

- Common pipistrelle (Pipistrellus pipistrellus)
- Soprano pipistrelle (Pipistrellus pygmaeus)
- Leisler's bat (Nyctalus leisleri)
- Brown Long- eared bat (Plecotus auratus)
- Natterer's Ba (Myotis nattereri)
- Daubentons bat (Myotis daubentonii), and
- Lesser Horseshoe Bat (Rhinolophus hipposideros)

The project site is not situated within a core zone of influence for SAC designated Lesser Horseshoe Bat roosts, the site is located between the Coole Garryland Complex SAC (code: 000252), 1.2km northwest. Lough Cutra SAC (code:000299) is located 2.9km to the south east. Furthermore, several smaller Lesser Horseshoe Bat roosts are found surrounding the project site. The Eire Ecology report also identifies LSH bat roosts based on Bat Conservation Ireland's database.

2.4.4.4 Invasive species

No high impact invasive species were recorded during site visit in July 2024. However, a review of the NBDC database based on the plan area polygon returned the following records; these include high impact invasive species including Cherry Laural.

TABLE 2-12 INVASIVE SPECIES IN POLYGON

Species	Count	Date	Status
Canada Goose (Branta canadensis)	1	31/12/2011	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> High Impact Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Regulation S.I. 477 (Ireland) || Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive

[5] Bat Survey Report, Eire Ecology, September 2024

Species	Count	Date	Status
			|| Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species
Cherry Laurel (Prunus laurocerasus)	1	31/12/2010	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> High Impact Invasive Species
Himalayan Honeysuckle (Leycesteria formosa)	1	10/06/2021	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Medium Impact Invasive Species
Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus)	1	31/12/2010	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Medium Impact Invasive Species
Budapest Slug (Tandonia budapestensis)	1	07/08/1970	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Medium Impact Invasive Species
Common Garden Snail (Cornu aspersum)	3	07/08/1970	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Medium Impact Invasive Species
Jenkins' Spire Snail (Potamopyrgus antipodarum)	2	07/08/1970	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Medium Impact Invasive Species
Keeled Slug (Tandonia sowerbyi)	2	07/08/1970	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Medium Impact Invasive Species
Wrinkled Snail (Candidula intersecta)	1	31/12/1940	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Medium Impact Invasive Species
Fallow Deer (Dama dama)	2	31/12/2008	Invasive Species: Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> High Impact Invasive Species || Invasive Species: Invasive Species >> Regulation S.I. 477 (Ireland) || Protected Species: Wildlife Acts

Cherry Laurel is listed on the Third Schedule and subject to restrictions under Regulations 49 and 50 SI 477 of 2011. Fallow deer are listed as mammals to which specified provisions of Regulations 49 and 50 apply also.

2.4.5 Water resources

The plan area is located within the Galway Bay South East Water Framework Directive catchment (code 29) and Cannahowna_SC_010 sub-catchment. The Beagh river which is the outflow from Loch Cutra goes underground after 3km and then reappears as the Cannahowna/Gort River which flows through Gort. The river goes underground again at Kiltartan, where it is joined by flow from other hill river. The Cunnahowna/Gort River runs immediately adjacent to the plan area at Bridge Street. The site is located within Hydrometric Area, HYDRO Catchments29_676.

Water quality is monitored downstream at the bridge over the Gort River (site RS29C010100) and downstream of the wastewater treatment plant (site RSC010200) and the most recent data available (2021) states Q value of 3-4 and the river overall is classified as moderate quality under the Water Framework Directive. The river is at risk of not meeting the Water Framework Directive objectives for the surface water body by 2027.

Figure 2.5 presents the plan area and surface water quality, Figure 2.6 presents surface water flows (indicative).

FIGURE 2-5 SURFACE WATER QUALITY AND PLAN AREA

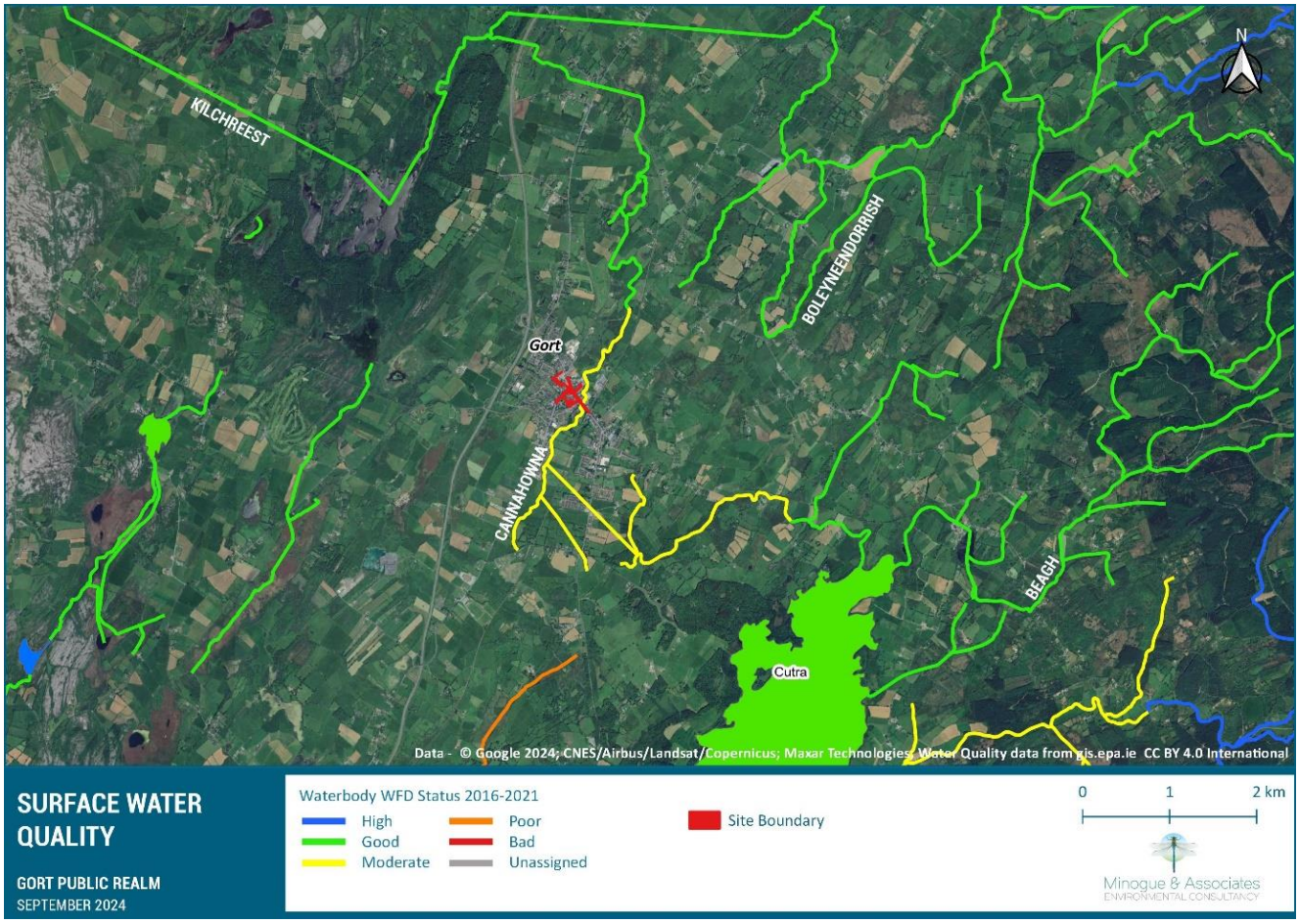
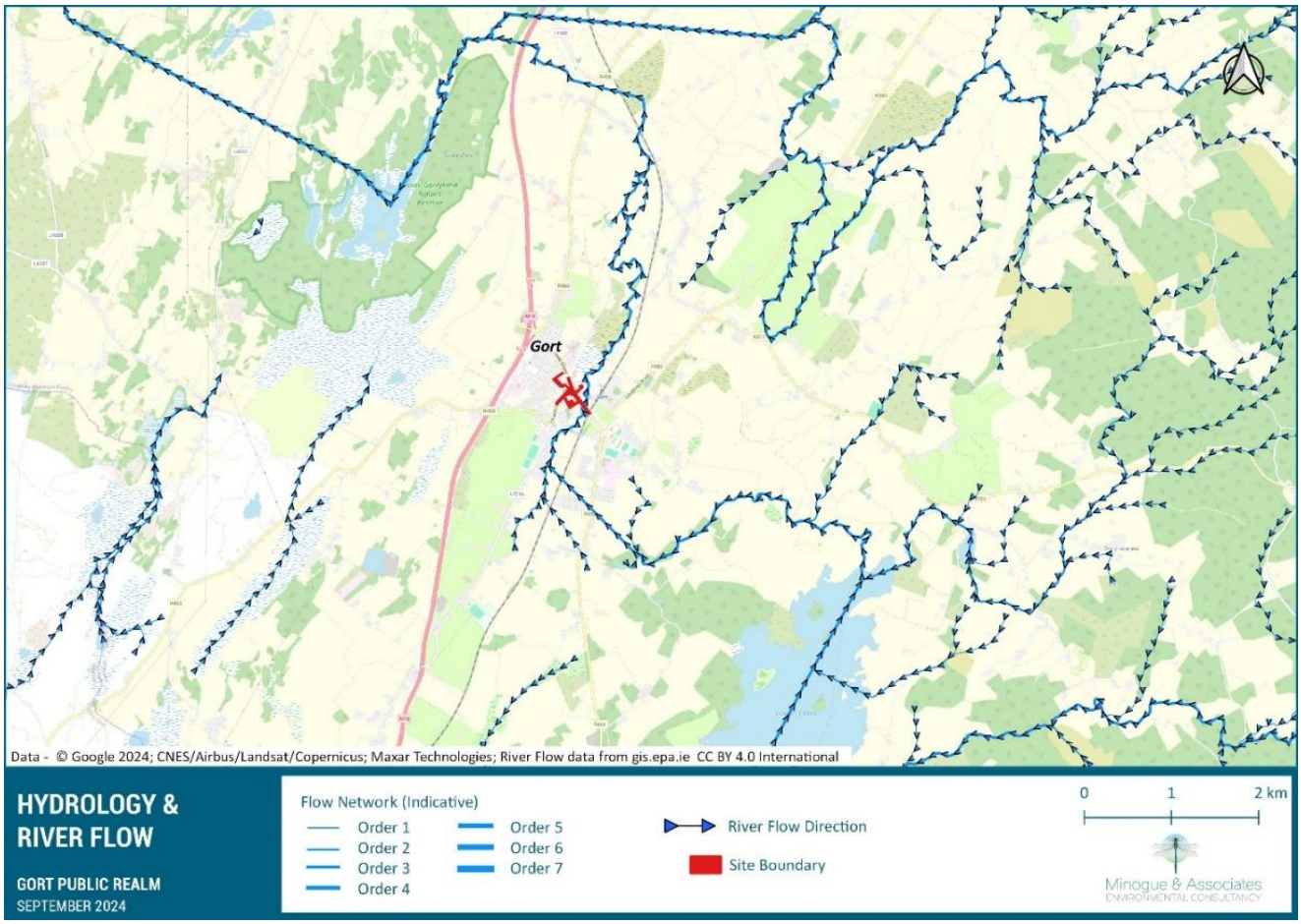


FIGURE 2-6 SURFACE WATER FLOWS (INDICATIVE)



2.4.6 Soil and Geology

The bedrock underlying the plan area comprises various families of limestone with Visean shelf limestone to the west of the plan area and Waulsortian limestones to the east of town of Gort. Karst features are common in the vicinity of, but not located within the public realm plan boundary. The plan area is located the GWDTE-Caherglassaun Turlough The GWB occupies the area between Kinvara-Gort lowlands. The land surface is low lying and relatively flat, with elevations ranging from sea level to 30 mAOD. The GWB is bounded by the coastline at Kinvara. The boundary to the east is with the poor aquifer lithologies of the Derrybrien GWB. To the north and south, surface water divides act as the boundaries. The groundwater body is 256km2.

Groundwater vulnerability underlying the subject lands ranges from extreme to rock at surface. Two no. karst features are identified by the GSI to the south of the plan area. These related to the Gort Kinvara karst system and are the Coole Garryland complex, a very large complex of turloughs, risings and sinks in the Gort lowlands, located c 1.2km north and west of the plan areas. The second includes the Beagh Sink - Pollduagh System, a sequence of linked karstic features along the course of the Beagh River located c .1.8km south east of the plan area. A springwell is mapped to the east of the Convent, c 105m east of the Currahowan/gort River and 334m from the nearest plan area at the Bridge Street crossing of the above river.

The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) note in their first draft Gort Kinvara Groundwater Body Description that a large number of karst features occur, including turloughs, caves, dolines, swallow holes and springs. It notes the GWB is composed primarily of high transmissivity karstified limestone

(Rkc). There is a high degree of interaction between surface water and groundwater. In the eastern area water frequently sinks and rises before being transmitted underground mostly to Kinvara.

As such it is likely that surface waters draining to ground at the plan area are likely to discharge to the Cannahowna/Gort River which runs adjacent to the southeastern part of the plan area at Bridge Street or the Beagh River further south. Given the plan area is within the Caharglassaun Turlough groundwater body, groundwater pathways represent a functional pathway to groundwater dependant habitats within this groundwater body. Groundwater within the plan area and groundwater body is classified as being at risk of note meeting the Water Framework Directive objectives for good status by 2027.

Soil within the plan area is predominately 'made soils' reflecting the established urban landuse. See figures 2.7 to 2.9 for further information.

FIGURE 2-7 BEDROCK GEOLOGY AND PROJECT AREA

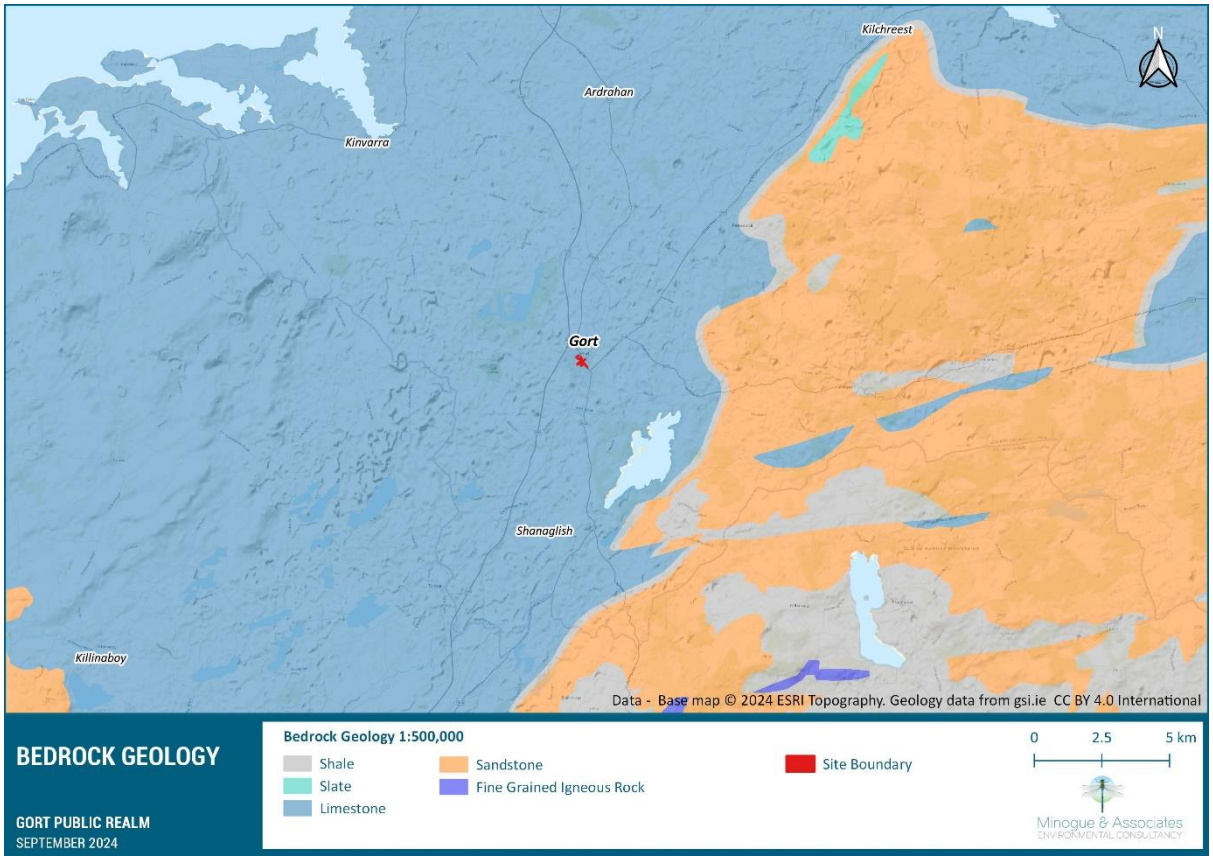


FIGURE 2-8 GROUNDWATER VULNERABILITY AND PLAN AREA

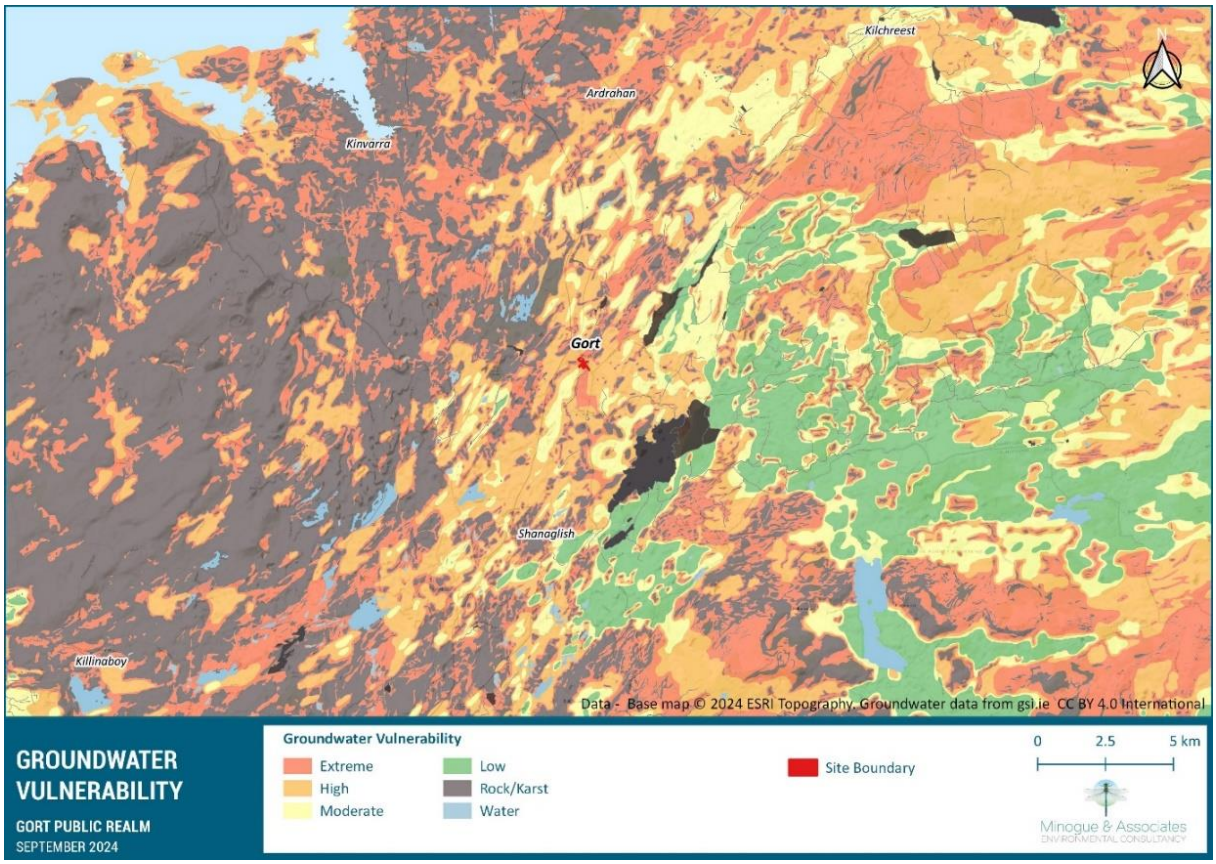
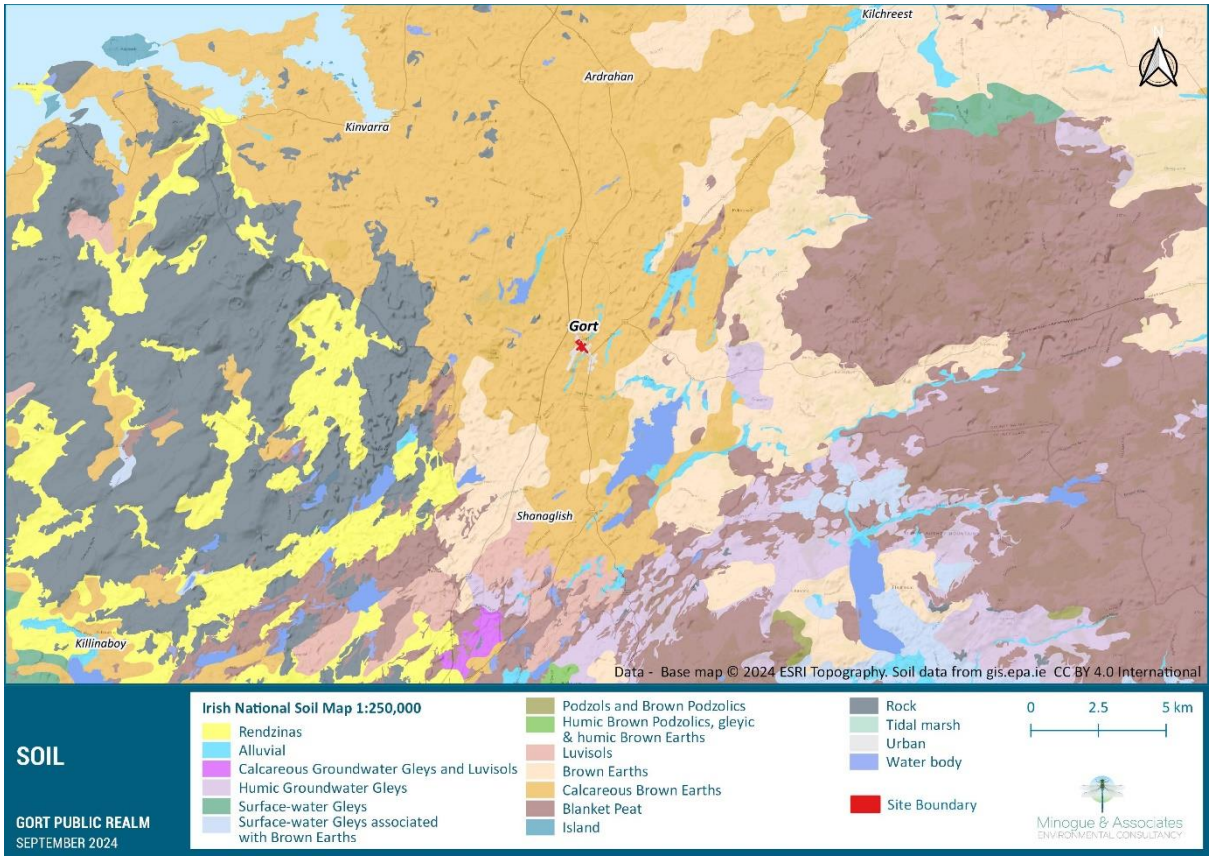


FIGURE 2-9 SOIL TYPE AND PLAN AREA



2.4.7 Landscape

Two civic spaces lie at the heart of the town, the Market Square and Canon Quinn park to the rear of St. Coleman's Catholic church. Church Street and Queen Street form part of an urban block with Bridge Street and Market Square at the centre. Barrack Street, running broadly northeast from Market Square, leads to an area which includes the former barracks, workshops and local Garda Station. The town lies within the Urban Environs Landscape Type within the Galway County Development Plan 2022 -2028.

2.4.8 Air and Climatic factors

The Galway County Climate Action Plan 2024 -2029 identifies climate actions on a statutory basis. The actions are grouped around a number of themes, as follows:

- Governance and Leadership
- Energy and Built Environment
- Transport
- Communities and Enterprise
- Circular Economy
- Land Use and Green Infrastructure
- Adaptation to Climate Risk

Green infrastructure, transport and adaptation to climate risk are relevant to the Gort public realm project.

2.4.9 Material Assets

The town is located approximately 32 kilometres South of Galway and 64 kilometres North from Limerick Gateway on the Atlantic Economic Corridor. Gort is connected to the M6 Galway to Dublin Motorway via the N18 to Oranmore and via N66 at Loughrea. The railway station operates daily connections to Galway and Limerick. Shannon airport is approximately a 40-minutes drive from the town. The strategic geographical location of Gort makes it accessible to most major towns and tourist attractions in County Galway and County Clare. The main road, defined by Crowe Street, Bridge Street and Georges Street is part of the R458, and Gort is served by bus route 434 to Galway and 934 to Loughrea.

The public water supply for Gort is supplied from the Gort Regional Water Supply Scheme which is sourced from the Gort/Cannahowna River, the water treatment plant is located at Rindifin Townland. Gort is serviced by a public wastewater collection network with both primary and secondary treatment. The Gort Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) is located on the Kinincha Road to the north of the town. The treated effluent from the WWTP is finally discharged into the Cannahowna/Gort River which goes underground at Kiltartan before finally draining into Corranroe Bay south of Kinvara.

Currently surface water drains into the existing drainage system in the project area, and within the project area there are four surface water drains which discharge into the Gort river. The surface water runoff is untreated. The water is collected in roadside gulleys along the carriageway and is directed into the river.

The DEHLG and the OPW published national flood risk management guidelines in 2009 entitled The Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009. The Flood Risk Management Guidelines 2009 require Planning Authorities to ensure that, where relevant, flood risk is a key consideration in preparing development plans, local area plans and the assessment of

planning applications. The aim of the Guidelines is to avoid flood risk where possible, substitute less vulnerable uses when avoidance is not possible and mitigate and manage the risk where avoidance and substitution are not possible. Flooding has historically been an issue for the town due to the complex groundwater and karst system.

2.5 Mitigation measures

The following measures relate to biodiversity, flora and fauna, water resources and cultural heritage. They are derived from the Bat Survey report (Eire Ecology, 2024) Natura Impact Statement and SuDS strategy, all of which are prepared in support of this planning application. The mitigation measures outlined in the following sections aim to ensure that all potential negative impacts associated with the project are avoided or minimised to an imperceptible level.

2.5.1 Best Practice Construction Approach

All construction works, relating to the activities and construction sequence outlined in Section 2 above, will be undertaken in accordance with the following:

- Inland Fisheries Ireland's *Requirements for the Protection of Fisheries Habitat during Construction and Development Works.*
- GE-ENV-01104 The Management of Invasive Alien Plant Species on National Roads – Standard (TII)
- GE-ENV-01105 The Management of Invasive Alien Plant Species on National Roads – Technical Guidance (TII)
- CIRIA (Construction Industry Research and Information Association) Guidance Documents
    - Control of water pollution from construction sites (C532)
    - Control of water pollution from linear construction projects: Technical Guidance (C648)
    - Control of water pollution from linear construction projects: Site Guide (C649)
    - Environmental Good Practice on Site (C692)
    - Guidelines for the Crossing of Watercourses during the Construction of National Road Schemes
    - Guidelines for the Management of Noxious Weeds and Non-Native Invasive Plant Species on National Roads
    - Guidelines for the Protection and Preservation of Trees, Hedgerows and Scrub Prior to, during and Post Construction of National Road Schemes.

2.5.2 Measures to Minimise Impacts to Water Resources

All wastewater generated during the construction phase will be directed to the Irish Water sewer network and then to the existing Irish Water Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP). Given the nature of the public realm works no additional wastewater requirements are part of the project and no operational requirements exist.

2.5.3 Management of Surface Water

The construction management of the site will take account of the recommendations of the CIRIA guides as listed in Section 2.5.1, plus

- Control of Water Pollution from Construction Sites (2001) and Control of Water Pollution from Linear Construction Projects (2006) and
- Inland Fisheries Ireland's (IFI's) Requirements for the Protection of Fisheries Habitat during Construction and Development Works.

The provision of these design features will ensure that surface water emitted from the project site during the construction phase is adequately treated. Measures to minimise impacts to Habitats

To control dust emissions during construction works, standard mitigation measures shall include:

- spraying of exposed earthwork activities and site haul roads during dry and/or windy conditions; provision of wheel washes at exit points; control of vehicle speeds and speed restrictions (20 km/h on any un-surfaced site road);

- covering of haulage vehicles; and, sweeping of hard surface roads.

These procedures will be strictly monitored and assessed on a daily basis. Dust screens will be implemented at locations where works will take place within 100m of sensitive ecological receptors (i.e. Gort River) during the construction phase.

2.5.4 Measures to reduce the spread of invasive species

It is confirmed that no non-native invasive species listed on the Third Schedule of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 were recorded within the proposed development site however records exist on the NBDC database. Mitigation measures to ensure no accidental introduction or spread of invasive species in light of the ongoing construction activity in and around the development site are outlined below:

• In the event that additional topsoil and quarried stone is required on the site, it will be sourced from a stock that has been screened for the presence of any invasive species and where it is confirmed that none are present.

• All machinery will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to arrival and departure from the site (through pre-agreed Biosecurity Protocols) to prevent the spread of invasive species. This process will be detailed in the contractor's method statement.

These will be developed in line with

• TII: The Management of Invasive Alien Plant Species on National Roads – Standard (2020)

• NRA (2008). Guidelines for the Management of Waste from National Road Construction Project.

• Biosecurity protocols available for aquatic and riparian species available on the Control of Aquatic Invasive Species and Restoration of Natural Communities in Ireland (CAISIE) www.caisie.ie.

2.5.5 Mitigation Measures for Breeding Birds during Construction

Removal of vegetation (e.g. scrub and grassland) should be avoided, between the 1st of March and the 31st of August, to avoid direct impacts on nesting birds. Where the construction programme does not allow this seasonal restriction to be observed, then these areas will be inspected by a suitably qualified ecologist for the presence of breeding birds prior to clearance. Areas found not to contain nests will be cleared within three days of the nest survey. Where the vegetation is not cleared within three days of checks, a repeat check will be required. Should nesting birds be encountered during surveys, the removal of vegetation will be required to be delayed until after the nesting has finished.

2.5.6 Mitigation Measures for Bats including Lesser Horseshoe Bats

The following is taken from the Bat Survey report prepared by Eire Ecology (2024).

Loss of roosting habitat: Tree felling should ideally be undertaken in the period September to late October/early November, however can also be conducted from later January until the end of February. Outside of these time an Ecological Clerk of Works will need to first verify if impacts will occur.

Loss of foraging and commuting habitat: Cannon Quinn Park: BMP design report proposes a planting regime within the park including the use of native trees such as Sweet cherry, Strawberry tree, crab apple and hawthorn. Numerous all Ireland Pollinator plan species have been chosen for new flowerbeds here. These should substantially increase the invertebrate diversity and abundance in the park resulting in an improvement in the biodiversity value of this section.

Car Park by County Council building (off street parking proposal): While several trees within the proposed car park will be felled, the proposed development will see additional tree planting and raingarden species thus overall impacts in this respect will be limited,.

No Lesser Horseshoe Bats were recorded or observed in these areas, with records being confined to the Gort River.

Disturbance: Where lighting is unavoidable during construction, low intensity lighting and motion sensors will be used to limit illumination. Exterior lighting, during construction, will be designed to minimize light spillage, thus reducing the effects on areas outside the proposed development, and consequently on bats, i.e: lighting will be directed away from mature trees/treelines around the periphery of the site boundary and woodland areas to minimise disturbance to bats. Directional accessories will be used to direct light away from these features, eg; through the use of light shields (Stone, 2013). The luminaries will be of the type that prevent upward spillage of light and minimise horizontal spillage away from the intended lands.

Operation: Dark Zone: it is essential that Gort River ecological corridor is restored by a change in lighting along the bridge. A lighting plan including a lux diagram has been produced by BDP. An extract from the diagram showing the proposed lights by the bridge is shown below.

Three pairs of lights will be installed on the bridge fitted at a height of 0.35m to prevent any lights shining on the river. While these lightbars have a temperature of 3000k they will sit below the top of the existing wall which will ensure they do not saturate the natural environment below. The streetlight

(84D) alongside its southern neighbour (83D), identified as having some impact on the river will be replaced with a 6m pole with a directional light with a colour temp of 2,200k.

At the proposed Barrack Street car park (62G to 65G), bat friendly lighting will be installed using a colour variant lacking the blue light component particularly attractive to invertebrates. Lights here will have a 2,200k colour and a reduced height of 6m. No bat roosts were found within the ruins so the main purpose is to reduce light saturation of close by important dark zones.

Currently the Canon Quinn park has low bat favourability. In order to make the park more usable by bats 6m poles are proposed here with a colour component to f2200K (66A to 77A). this should allow Pipistrelle bats and Leisler's bat easier access. The spotlight shining on the park will be removed. It is expected these measures will result in a marked increase in bat activity here.

The proposed car park by the County Council building is not a viable habitat for LSH given a lack of connectivity to SAC habitats. Mitigation measures proposed for this section including installing reduced height lamp posts (6m); (96G to 108G) using a light without a blue component (2200k). The most frequently occurring bats found here, Soprano and Common pipistrelle and Leislers bats are all capable of fliying above this height. Lights along Lowry's Lane will be positioned at a height of 3m and have a colour temp of 2200k thus allowing Pipistrelles and Leisler's to continue to use this area.

2.5.7 Ecological Clerk of Works

An appropriately qualified Environmental/Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will be employed for the duration of the Construction Contract. The ECoW must be a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) or equivalent body.

The ecologist performing the ECoW role will attend the site on a weekly basis to check that all works are being completed to the appropriate standards. This will form a key element in the delivery of the environmental protection measures as listed above at project stage.

3 EIA Screening

3.1 Environmental Factors to be considered in the EIA Screening

This Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report assesses whether this proposed development requires "full" Environmental Impact Assessment. The legislation requires screening to be undertaken to determine whether specified public or private developments are likely to have significant effects on the environment and, as such, require EIA to be carried out prior to a decision on a development consent application being made. As described in Section 1.2.1 this project does not meet the criteria or categories for mandatory EIA nor correspond to development of over 2 hectares in a business district for urban development, nor corresponds to Roads Development under the Roads Act 1993, as amended.

As further referenced above, the 2014 EIA Directive introduces a new Annex IIA (which is transposed into Irish planning law as Schedule 7A to the 2001 Regulations) to be used by competent authorities carrying out EIA screening determinations. Schedule 7A requires that the following information be provided by a developer in respect of projects listed in Annex II:

1. A description of the proposed development , including in particular:

a) a description of the physical characteristics of the whole proposed development and, where relevant, of demolition works.

b) a description of the location of the proposed development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected.

2. A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the proposed development.

3. A description of any likely significant effects, to the extent of the information available on such effects, of the project on the environment resulting from:

a) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant.

b) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity.

4. The compilation of the information at paragraphs 1 to 3 shall take into account, where relevant, the criteria set out in Schedule 7.

3.2 Impact Assessment

Having considered the above environmental factors, the aim of the next section is to address likely impacts on the environment by the implementation of the proposed development. Whether an EIA would be deemed relevant to the scale of the project and the environment will then be determined. The following sections presents the EIA Screening Report based on the criteria contained in Schedule 7a and are grouped under the following headings.

1. Planning Applications within the past five years – Table 3.1

2. Characteristics of the Proposed Development - Table 3.2

3. Location of the Proposed Development - Table 3.3 and

4. Characteristics of Potential Impact Tables 3.4 and 3.5

The screening process assesses the most significant potential impacts in relation to the themes outlined below in Table 4.3. These are considered as follows:

The likely significant effects of projects on the environment must be considered in relation to criteria set out in points 1 and 2 of this Annex, with regard to the impact of the project on the factors specified in Article 3(1), taking into account:

(a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);

(b) the nature of the impact;

(c) the transboundary nature of the impact;

(d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;

(e) the probability of the impact;

(f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;

(g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved projects;

(h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

3.3 Projects for the Cumulative Assessment

The proposed development was considered in combination with other projects in the area that could result in cumulative effects on the environment.

The online planning system myplan.ie was consulted on the 5th October 2024 for the subject lands and immediate surrounds. Please see Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1 below. Note Figure 3.1 below includes all applications since 2020. This cumulative assessment focused on past four years only.

A small number of other projects within the area are approved for planning permission over the past four years (2020 to 2024), the details of these projects are as shown in Table below.

TABLE 3-1 PLANNING APPLICATIONS APPROVED IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS IN PROJECT AREA

Planning reference and address	Summary of application	Planning
23-58	for the construction of a new two storey dwelling with an enclosed roof terrace, within the footprint of the existing walls of dilapidated stables. Gross floor space of proposed works: 96.8 sqm. Gross floor space of work to be retained: 43.01 sqm. Gross floor space of any demolition: 1.3sqm Development Address Ballyhugh , Gort , Co. Galway	permission
2261207	for change of use from shop unit to use as a restaurant / cafe with ancillary take away facilities. Gross floor space of proposed works: 88.20 sqm Development Address Ballyhugh , Bridge Street , Gort	permission
21 867	for a commercial & residential development comprised as follows 1. the demolition of extension to the rear of the existing public house known as 'Cummins Bar' and associated storage sheds on site. [2] the construction of a new rear extension to the public house to provide a kitchen, toilets, stores, amenity, and circulation spaces including alterations to the existing floor layout to accommodate same. [3] the provision of a new storage shed. [4] the refurbishment of the first and second floor residential space to include the removal/demolition of a first floor bathroom [5] All associated site work, services landscaping and open spaces. Gross floor space of proposed works: 101.50 sqm	permission
246 0830	for the demolition of rear domestic extension and retention and completion of rear domestic extension and alterations. Gross floor space of work to be retained: 61.46 sqm. Gross floor space of any demolition: 23.60 sqm Development Address Ballyhugh , Bridge St Gort , Co Galway	permission

The project however will not have the potential to combine with other land use activities to result in likely significant effects to qualifying habitats or species of the European sites or other environmental parameters. This is due to the planning applications above relating to existing landuse activities such as refurbishment of existing buildings , development on rear extension lands or change of use of existing buildings.

3.3.1 Assessment of effects

The aim of the next section is to address likely impacts on the environment by the implementation of the proposed development. A brief overview of the sensitivities and impacts will be highlighted. Whether an EIA would be deemed relevant to the scale of the project and the environment will then be determined. The following sections present the EIA Screening based on the criteria contained in Schedule 7a and are grouped under the following headings:

1. Characteristics of the Proposed Development - Table 3.2

2. Location of the Proposed Development - Table 3.3 and

3. Characteristics of Potential Impact - Tables 3.2 and 3.3

TABLE 3.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Screening Question	Response
1. Characteristics of projects The characteristics of projects must be considered, with particular regard to:	
(a) the size and design of the whole project	The project relates to the existing urban centre of Gort town centre focused on public realm improvements through reconfiguration of space, improved permeability, SUDs, and enhanced lighting and planting proposals at locations as described and mapped in Section 2. The project is located within a well established urban environment with existing levels of human presence and associated noise and traffic. Of itself the project is not identified as giving rise to significant negative environmental effects due to scale, nature and size of the proposed development. The proposals in and of themselves are consistent with the objectives of the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, Gort Local Area Plan 2013 -2019 (extended), and the Gort Town First Plan and seek to enhance and improve the urban environment including increasing native plantings and attenuating surface water through SuDS measures.
(b) cumulation with other existing and/or approved projects;	The proposed development was considered in combination with other projects in the area that could result in cumulative effects on the environment. Please see Table 3.1 for information on these projects. No significant environmental effects are identified from interaction or in combination with other existing or approved projects.
(c) the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity;	Due to the scale and nature of the project, small volumes of natural resources will be used during the construction process. Natural resources will not be used from the surrounding environment. Given the above approaches the project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment.
(d) the production of waste;	Yes, but not significant. Ancillary wastes will be managed to be separated to appropriate waste streams for local reuse or for disposal during to suitably licensed facilities in the region. Likely significant effects on the environment are not identified.
(e) pollution and nuisances;	The construction phase be phased with construction compounds in the proposed car parks, all over 100m from the Gort river.

Screening Question	Response
	For other sites the construction activities relate to traffic calming and increased space for pedestrians and cyclists with additional measures around increasing green space and additional planting as well as SUDs. No instream works are proposed, and minor path works are proposed at the bridge over the Gort river, see above mitigation measures in Section 2.5. Furthermore the provision of SUDs will improve surface water run off in the project area. The project is not expected to result in any likely significant adverse effects on the environment and are identified as contributing positively to a number of factors in particular human beings, water, flora, cultural heritage, air quality/climatic factors and material assets.
(f) the risk of major accidents and/or disasters which are relevant to the project concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge;	The risks of major accidents are not considered to be significant subject to standard construction practices being followed through the construction phases. The project will include proper site management, maintenance and operation of all machinery and works associated with the construction phase, on site safety and training. Given the above approaches, the project does not pose significant risk of major accidents and/or disaster.
(g) the risks to human health (for example due to water contamination or air pollution).	As above, significant risks to human health are not identified for this proposal. Positive effects are identified in relation to Population and Human Health and Material Assets due to the augmentation of street infrastructure for public use. Given the above approaches the project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment
Will the proposed development create a significant amount of nuisance during its construction or operation?	It is not anticipated that significant noise levels will arise during construction (they will be temporary and restricted to machinery) and operational noise is not identified as being significant. Given the above approaches the project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the characteristics of the proposed development.

Rationale: The works associated with the project site are minor in scale and nature, construction activities are localised and minor; with the application of standard construction practice guidance no significant adverse effects are identified.

TABLE 3.3 . LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Screening Question	Response
The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by projects must be considered, with particular regard to: **(a) the existing and approved land use;**	The project as summarised in Section 2.2 to 2.3 relates to public realm enhancement and improvements that will provide for improved space for pedestrians and cyclists, traffic calming, enhanced green space, lighting and SUDs. Given the overall approach and measures as presented in Section 2 of this report, the project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment. The existing landuse is urban and the proposed development enhances rather than detracts from the urban landuse and public realm. The bat survey has identified the Gort River in particular as a significant corridor for bats including Annex II species, the Lesser Horseshoe Bat. Impacts on all bat species have been considered in the bat survey report and the Natura Impact Statement for Lesser Horseshoe Bats. As Section 2.4 outlines the groundwater is complex and at risk of not meeting WFD objectives of good status. Given the size of the project and the area of the groundwater body combined with the approach to the works that places construction compounds over 100m from the Gort River, phasing of works plus Ecological Clerk of Works, this provide sufficient and appropriate protection measures.
(b) the relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground	The works will not impact the natural resources in the area . The works do not result in likely significant effects on the environment.
(c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas: **(i) wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths;** **(ii) coastal zones and the marine environment;** **(iii) mountain and forest areas;** **(iv) nature reserves and parks;** **(v) areas classified or protected under national legislation; Natura**	The proposed development includes SUDS measures to improve surface water run off throughout the project areas. The SuDS strategy as outlined in Section 2.1.2 will attenuate estimated 80% of surface water within the plan area. Given the existing conditions which currently provide for surface water run off to roadside gulleys and discharge without attenuation to the Gort River, this will improve the existing baseline conditions and will eliminate any risk of polluted surface water being discharged from the project site during operation. This represents an improvement on the current baseline environment whereby surface water run off drains to roadside

Screening Question	Response
2000 areas designated by Member States pursuant to Directive 92/43/EEC and Directive 2009/147/EC;	gullies and discharge to the River Gort with out an attenuation. A screening statement for Appropriate Assessment and Natura Impact Statement has been prepared by MEC Ltd. This has, on the basis of the best scientific information available which the authors consider is adequate to make the conclusion that the project alone or in combination with other plans or projects will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Coole Garryland Complex SAC, Coole Garryland Complex SAC, Lough Cutra SAC, Caherglassaun Turlough SAC, Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC, Lough Coy SAC and East Burren Complex SAC in view of their conservation objectives. No in combination effects are foreseen. In combination effects have been excluded. Mitigation measures must be in place to ensure there are no significant impacts on the surface or ground water that leads to conservation sites, or the lighting emissions associated with the proposal. Given the above approaches the project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment.
(vi) areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure;	The implementation of mitigation measures as presented in Section 2.5, fully implemented by the competent authority, the project does not result in likely significant effects on water resources in the environment. Given the above approaches the project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment.
(vii) densely populated areas;	The project site is within an established urban area and given its size, type and scale, no negative effects are identified in relation to this criterion with positive effects identified for a number of EIA topics in line with enhancing and improving the public realm.
(viii) landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance	Given the above approaches the project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment, no such effects are identified.

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the location of the proposed development.

Rationale: The project in and of itself is designed to contribute and improve features of the public realm in the town of Gort. The works as proposed in this development are considered to result in

negligible environmental effects given the above approach the potential construction related effects is reduced to minimal effects.

The screening process assesses the most significant potential impacts in relation to the themes outlined below in Table 3.4 below. These are considered as follows:

3.3.2 Type and Characteristics of the Potential Impacts

The likely significant effects of projects on the environment must be considered in relation to criteria set out in points 1 and 2 of this Annex, with regard to the impact of the project on the factors specified in Article 3(1), taking into account:

(a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);

(b) the nature of the impact;

(c) the transboundary nature of the impact;

(d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;

(e) the probability of the impact;

(f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;

(g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved projects;

(h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

TABLE 3-4. LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Environmental Topic	Potential Impact
Human Beings	The project does not result in likely significant negative effects on the environment in relation to Human beings due to the scale, location, type of project and approach to construction. Post construction positive effects are identified for number of topics including human beings, air quality, landscape and material assets.
Flora and Fauna	The project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment in relation to Flora and Fauna. No instream works are proposed and the project in and of itself is not identified as giving rise to effects on flora and fauna. Additional planting measures contribute positively at local scale to flora and fauna and lighting design is sensitive to wildlife considerations including, in particular the Lesser Horseshoe Bat, an Annex II species.
Soil and Geology	The project does not result in likely significant effects on soil and geology due to the scale, size, type and location of the project and the approach to construction.
Water	No instream works proposed and the SUDs measures contribute positively to surface and groundwater quality. The construction approach will reduce the risk of any construction related activities on the water resources. The project does not result in likely significant effects on water resources in the environment.

Environmental Topic	Potential Impact
Air Quality and climate	Emissions during works phase will be minimized through best practice and will be temporary in duration and nature. The project does not result in likely significant negative effects on the air quality and climate and through enhanced measures for pedestrians and cyclists is positive in relation to this topic. .
Noise and Vibration	Noise during the construction phase may result in temporary and relate only to the construction elements of the works. The project does not result in likely significant effects on the environment.
Cultural Heritage	The project is located within the town centre of Gort which is of significant cultural heritage importance. The public realm measures seek to enhance and contribute to the setting and context of the architectural heritage of the town. Given the significance of the built heritage of the town, the following section provides the conservation impact assessment of the public realm measures. Given the scale, type and duration of the project no significant negative effects on this parameter are identified. Positive effects are identified.
Landscape	The area will retain its urban design and character, with measures relating to the public realm contributing positive to overall landscape setting and character. No significant negative effects identified.
Interrelationship between above parameters	The key interrelationship arises between human beings, water resources, fauna and cultural heritage. Given the approach outlined in Section 2, the project does not result in significant negative effects on the environment and is expected to enhance the wellbeing of the community in the longer-term and enhance these topics.

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the potential impacts on environmental parameters.

Rationale: Localised and temporary negligible impacts are identified associated with construction. The nature of the receiving environment and the proposed development, together with the effective implementation of the standard construction and installation measures means that there is no real likelihood of significant negative effects on the environment. The public realm measures will contribute positively to the urban character and cultural heritage of the town.

TABLE 3.5. LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Characteristics of potential impacts The potential significant effects of proposed development in relation to criteria set out under Tables 3.3. and 3.2 above, and having regard in particular to:	
(a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	Minor to negligible temporary impacts are identified primarily at construction stage The geographic area of the proposed works are confined to the immediate project site, accordingly, there is no significant impact associated with the operational phase of the development.
(b) the nature of the impact;	Impacts are identified as temporary as they relate to the construction stage and sufficient and detailed measures as shown in Section 2.
(c) the transboundary nature of the impact;	There are no transboundary impacts identified for the proposed project.
(d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;	Given the scale, size and nature of the project no significant effects are identified subject to complete and full implementation of all mitigation measures.
(e) the probability of the impact;	There is low probability of impacts given the approach to construction, the location, scale and type of development proposals. .
(f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;	Impacts identified for topics are not significant and will be temporary in nature, as they relate to construction phase. The operational impacts are positive across a number of topics as they seek to enhance and support the public realm of the town. .
(g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved projects;	The proposed development was considered in combination with other projects in the area that could result in cumulative effects on the environment. Please see Table 3.1 for information on these projects. No significant environmental effects are identified from interaction or in combination with other existing or approved projects. The proposed works have been assessed cumulatively within this Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report and concludes that potential cumulative effects are not identified.

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the characteristics of the potential impacts.

Rationale: Minor, localised and temporary impacts are identified associated with the construction phase of this project. Positive, long term impacts are identified relating to human beings, air

quality/climatic factors, cultural heritage and landscape in particular. The scale, nature, design and location of the project is not identified as giving rise to significant negative effects across the EIA topics.

3.3.3 Identification of the Relevant Assessments Available

In consideration of a recent high court case (Waltham Abbey Residents Association v. An Bord Pleanala & ORS), the following statement was made:

"The kind of assessments that should be brought together in the statement under 299B(1)(b)(ii)(II)(C) include those under the following directives:

(i) directive 92/43/EEC, the habitats directive: see EC EIA, Guidance on Screening, 2017, p. 44;

(ii) directive 2000/60/EC, the water framework directive: see EC EIA, Guidance on Screening, 2017, p. 44;

(iii) directive 2001/42/EC, the SEA directive: see EC EIA, Guidance on Screening, 2017, p. 44;

(iv) directive 2002/49/EC, regarding environmental noise;

(v) directive 2008/50/EC, the clean air for Europe directive;

(vi) directive 2007/60/EC, regarding the assessment and management of flood risks; as well of course as

(vii) any other relevant provision of EU law."

For this EIA Screening Report, the following sources are pertinent:

(i) Galway County Development Plan 2022 2028

(ii) Natura Impact Report for the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 and Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

(iv) Irish Water Annual Environmental Report 2020 for Gort Wastewater Treatment Plant

(v) Relevant Planning applications

3.3.4 Results of Relevant Available Assessments

3.3.4.1 Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, SEA ER and NIR

The plan is consistent with the following objectives for Gort in the Galway County Development Plan 2022 -2028:

PM 6: Health and Wellbeing: Promote the development of healthy and attractive places by ensuring:

(a) Good urban design principles are integrated into the layout and design of new development;

(b) Future development prioritises the need for people to be physically active in their daily lives and promote walking and cycling in the design of streets and public spaces

(c) New schools and workplaces are linked to walking and cycling networks

(d) The provision of open space considers different types of recreation and amenity uses with connectivity by way of safe, secure walking and cycling routes.

(e) Developments are planned for on a multi-functional basis incorporating ecosystem services, climate change measures, Green Infrastructure and key landscape features in their design

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

NHB 7: Require mitigating measures in certain cases where it is evident that biodiversity is likely to be affected. These measures may, in association with other specified requirements, include establishment of wildlife areas/corridors/parks, hedgerow, tree planting, wildflower meadows/marshes and other areas. With regard to residential development, in certain cases, these measures may be carried out in conjunction with the provision of open space and/or play areas

NHB 9: Seek to protect bats and their roosts, their feeding areas, flight paths and commuting routes. Ensure that development proposals in areas which are potentially important for bats, including areas of woodland, linear features such as hedgerows, stonewalls, watercourses and associated riparian vegetation which may provide migratory/foraging uses shall be subject to suitable assessment for potential impacts on bats. This will include an assessment of the cumulative loss of habitat or the impact on bat populations and activity in the area and may include a specific bat survey. Assessments shall be carried out by a suitably qualified professional and where development is likely to result in significant adverse effects on bat populations or activity in the area, development will be prohibited or require mitigation and/or compensatory measures, as appropriate. The impact of lighting on bats and their roosts and the lighting up of objects of cultural heritage must be adequately assessed in relation to new developments and the upgrading of existing lighting systems.

BGI 2: Facilitate the ongoing development and improvement of a green/blue infrastructure network for urban and rural areas, connecting both natural and semi-natural corridors such as including green spaces, open spaces, green amenities, residual land, rivers and canals. Enhancements along natural features may include the provision of riparian buffers, community food programmes (allotments) and wild areas for pollination thus ensuring the provision of natural areas for the benefit of biodiversity, wildlife and climate adaptation.

3.3.5 Gort Local Area Plan

The scheme meets the requirements as set out by policies in the Gort LAP, including:

Policy UD1 – Urban Design and Landscape, by focussing on the development of a high-quality, well-landscaped and appropriately scaled built environment with a strong civic and commercial core. It also supports policy.

Policy BH1 – Built Heritage, as the scheme aims to celebrate the heritage of Gort, providing a more appropriate setting for key heritage assets and the Architectural Conservation Area.

Policy BH2 – Cultural Heritage, as the design provides flexible spaces for events, markets and activities, to support cultural life and provide space for performance, art installations, gatherings and self-expression.

Policy NH1 – Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, as the scheme will enhance biodiversity across the town centre.

Policy CF1 – Community Facilities and Amenities, the scheme will be in accordance with this policy as it seeks to improve local amenity space at Canon Quinn Park and the public realm space in the town centre which will provide accessible space for the community.

Policy ED1 – Economic Development, the scheme will support economic development and employment creation in Gort by creating a more attractive and vibrant town centre.

Policy TI1 – Sustainable Transport, walking and cycling, the scheme will create an improved environment for pedestrians and reduce car dominance, in line with this policy.

The landuse zoning in the Galway County Development Plan for the project area Town Centre /Commercial (C1).

The project is consistent with these landuse zonings and above policy provisions. The Galway CDP and SEA ER states the wastewater capacity at Gort is within capacity for targeted growth. As this project does not relate to residential development provision this issue does not directly interact with the project.

The Natura Impact Report of the Galway County Development Plan 2022 -2028 concludes as follows: "*Having incorporated mitigation measures, it is concluded that the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 is not foreseen to give rise to any adverse effects on the integrity of any European Site, alone or in combination with other plans or projects24. This evaluation is made in view of the conservation objectives of the habitats or species, for which these sites have been designated*."

3.3.5.1 Annual Environmental Report (AER) Gort Wastewater Treatment Plant, Irish Water, 2022[6]

The annual mean hydraulic loading is less than the peak Treatment Plant Capacity. The annual maximum hydraulic loading is greater than the peak Treatment Plant Capacity. Further details on the plant capacity and efficiency can be found under the sectional 'Operational Performance Summary'. The design of the wastewater treatment plant allows for peak values and therefore the peak loads have not impacted on compliance with Emission Limit Values.

The WWTP discharge was compliant with the ELV's set in the wastewater discharge licence. The ambient monitoring results meet the required EQS. The EQS relates to the Oxygenation and Nutrient Conditions set out in the Surface Water Regulations 2009. The discharge from the wastewater treatment plant does not have an observable impact on the water quality. The discharge from the wastewater treatment plant does not have an observable negative impact on the Water Framework Directive status.

3.3.5.2 Water Framework Directive

The plan area is located within the Galway Bay South East Water Framework Directive catchment (code 29) and Cannahowna_SC_010 sub-catchment. The Beagh river which is the outflow from Loch Cutra goes underground after 3km and then reappears as the Cannahowna/Gort River which flows through Gort. The river goes underground again at Kiltartan, where it is joined by flow from other hill river. The Cunnahowna/Gort River runs immediately adjacent to the plan area at Bridge Street. The site is located within Hydrometric Area, HYDRO Catchments29_676.

Water quality is monitored downstream at the bridge over the Gort River (site RS29C010100) and downstream of the wastewater treatment plant (site RSC010200) and the most recent data available (2021) states Q value of 3-4 and the river overall is classified as moderate quality under the Water Framework Directive. The river is at risk of not meeting the Water Framework Directive objectives for the surface water body by 2027. Similarly, the groundwater body is at risk of not meeting the WFD

[6] D0195-01_2022_AER.pdf (water.ie) accessed 6th October 2024

objectives for 2027. The attenuation for c 80% of the surface water from the plan via SuDS will improve surface water quality emissions associated with the project.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Screening Determination

Article 4(5) of the EIA Directive states:

The competent authority shall make its determination, on the basis of information provided by the developer in accordance with paragraph 4 taking into account, where relevant, the results of preliminary verifications or assessments of the effects on the environment carried out pursuant to Union legislation other than this Directive.

The determination shall be made available to the public and:

(a) where it is decided that an environmental impact assessment is required, state the main reasons for requiring such assessment with reference to the relevant criteria listed in Annex III; or

(b) where it is decided that an environmental impact assessment is not required, state the main reasons for not requiring such assessment with reference to the relevant criteria listed in Annex III, and, where proposed by the developer, state any features of the project and/or measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment.

As established in the preceding Section 1.2.1 of this report (EIA Project Type and Thresholds), given the nature and scale of the proposed public realm measures that form the project at Gort, County Galway, the proposals do not correspond to any project type, nor do they meet the thresholds and criteria for the most appropriate potential project type of 'urban development' as set out in the EIA Directive and Schedule 5 of the 2011 Regulations.

The EIA Screening Report has provided an overview assessment of the Proposed Development against the Schedule 7 criteria of 2011 Regulations for the avoidance of doubt.

Section 3 examined the nature of the development including the size and location of the development, and the types and characteristics of likely potential effects. Construction works are anticipated to result in temporary negative effects on certain parameters, whilst the operation phase will result in long term positive effects via improvement of permeability and public realm. The approach to construction will include best practice standard construction measures. The public realm measures will provide for improved permeability, safer spaces for walkers and cyclists and enhanced public realm overall. Integration of SUDs and planting regime will contribute to improved surface water run off and local wildlife features.

Given the scale and nature of the project and taking account of all available information, the overall probability of impacts on the receiving environment arising from the proposed development is considered to be negligible with positive effects identified for a number of EIA topics primarily human beings, cultural heritage, water, landscape, material assets, air/climatic factors.

The information provided in this EIA Screening Report can be used by the competent authority Galway County Council to conclude and determine that an EIA is not required for the proposed project as there will be no significant negative effects.

The overall conclusion for this screening appraisal is that having considered the appropriate criteria, Environmental Impact Assessment for the project is not required.

References

Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (2018)

Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects Guidance on Screening (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU). European Commission 2017.

OPR Practice Note PN02 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening (2021)

Galway County Development Plan 2022 2028

Natura Impact Report for the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

Irish Water Annual Environmental Report 2022 for Gort Wastewater Treatment Plant

Archaeological Impact Assessment Archer Heritage Planning Ltd for GalwayCounty Council. 2022

Interpretation of definitions of project categories of annex I and II of the EIA Directive, 2015.

EU and Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects - Guidance on Screening, 2017.

Government of Ireland EIA Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding sub-threshold development, 2003.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment, 2018.

Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, EPA 2022