



Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Phort Láirge
Waterford City & County Council

Planning Report

Re: Proposed extension to, and widening of, the existing runway at Waterford Regional Airport along with associated works including widening of the taxiway, extension to the car parking area, re-alignment of security fencing, new navigation lighting, underground holding tank, demolition of two existing houses to the north of the runway and alterations to site drainage

Report by: Liam McGree – Senior Planner

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Despite the fact that Waterford Regional Airport is generally recognised as a piece of key regional infrastructure, there have been no scheduled air services operating out of Waterford Airport since June 2016¹.

1. National Aviation Policy

National Aviation Policy² states that “Ireland recognises the important role that regional airports play in their areas and in regional development” and sets out a number of actions which are intended to support regional airports, including Waterford Regional Airport.

However, this policy document also highlights the fact that exchequer support for operational expenditure at regional airports will be phased out over a maximum period of 10 years, in accordance with EU Guidelines. In the future, exchequer support for capital expenditure will be limited to safety and security related expenditure and clear business plans will be required from airports seeking such supports. Also, in considering funding to regional airports, the Department will take account of the level of regional involvement, including investment by local authorities and / or business.

On the 11th of June 2019 the Minister for Transport Tourism and Sport announced a decision, in principle, by Government to give €5 million of an Exchequer grant towards a €12 million runway extension project at Waterford Airport. The remaining cost of the project will be met

¹ Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Regional Aviation Statistics Quarter 3 2019

² A National Aviation Policy for Ireland, published by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, August 2015

from private investor and local authority interests who have committed to funding €5 million and €2 million respectively in return for an equity shareholding in Waterford Airport.

The runway, when extended from its existing length of 1,433 metres to 2,287 metres, will be able to accommodate large commercial passenger aircraft such as Boeing 737s and Airbus 320s.

As part of his assessment, the Minister said that ‘the airport’s proposal is fully aligned with the commitment in Project Ireland 2040 to support the dispersal of economic growth throughout all the regions’.

The Minister said he was ‘optimistic about the potential upside of the proposal and was particularly struck by the commitment of the private sector investors to commit not just funding but their business expertise and experience to driving the airport forward’

While this is a very new and innovative way to support such projects, the Minister recognises the need to secure value for money in any dispersal of public funds. In that regard, the Minister announced that ‘this support was being provided subject to a number of conditions’. The Minister said that formal confirmation of the funding was dependent on the Airport being able to demonstrate, following the necessary procurement processes, that the project can be delivered for the estimated amount of €12 million. The Exchequer contribution of €5 million will only be paid when all upgrade works are completed and the runway is confirmed to be ready for service by the Irish Aviation Authority.

The Minister also stated that this announcement reaffirms this Government’s pledge to encourage balanced regional development and to provide equal opportunities for growth and prosperity across all the regions including the South East.

2. The National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) recognises regional airports as “key infrastructure for national and regional development”. Waterford Regional Airport is recognised in the NPF as a key strategic regional and national asset where it states that “Waterford and the wider south-east region is served by a regional airport and the Port of Waterford at Belview and Rosslare-Europort, which are geographically close to EU trading partners and will be important in Ireland’s response to Brexit”.

3. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

The Southern Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) states at section 6 that the return of scheduled passenger services to Waterford Airport and associated investment in Infrastructure is one of the key elements in making the Waterford Metropolitan Area a successful enterprising Economic Engine Driving Metropolitan and Regional Enterprise Growth.

The RSES goes on to state at section 6.3 that:

- *Waterford Airport is a key piece of strategic infrastructure for the Waterford MASP and Gateway for the wider South-East Area*
- *Investment in a runway extension would enhance the international connectivity of Waterford for Business (including the large multi-national companies involved in export trade), support the development of TUSE Research and Development with international partners and provide for increased tourist traffic.*
- *The runway extension of 500m sought by the Airport Authority would provide for the accommodation of up to 1,700 flights per annum including larger Boeing 737 and Airbus A320 aircraft.*

In addition, Waterford MASP Policy Objective 13 states that:

It is an objective to support the further development of Waterford Airport and, in particular, the development of:

- *an extension of the existing runway to accommodate larger aircraft;*
- *improved transport linkages and services between the airport, Waterford City and the entire South-East Region, i.e. roads and public transport;*
- *measures to encourage additional operators offering services from this location;*
- *the expansion and development of aviation related industries at the airport.*

In this regard, Development Plans should incorporate policies to protect longer-term flight path public safety zones and to control uses which could adversely impact on the airport's operations or the potential for new runway development and extensions sufficient to handle larger aircraft.

Local Authorities should ensure that consideration of airport-related infrastructure and facilities is informed by an adequate level of environmental assessment including assessment of potential impacts on designated European Sites.

Furthermore, Waterford MASP Policy Objective 15 states that:

It is an objective to support investment in infrastructure, including increased capacity of road, rail, ports and Waterford Airport to maximise the potential of tourism subject to the outcome of environmental assessments and the planning process.

4. Waterford County Development Plan

The principle local authority land-use policies in relation to Waterford Regional Airport are set out at sections 6.6.4, 7.11 and Appendix A6 of the Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017.

In addition, section 2.3.11 of the Development Plan references the Atlantic Gateways Corridor Overview Report which states that “the further development of Waterford Regional Airport by way of better access, terminal/runway expansion and support facilities for passengers and improved infrastructure for the airport, making the South East/N25 Corridor more attractive to potential employers and add value to the employment potential of the area”.

Section 6.6.4 of the County Development Plan reads as follows:

6.6.4 Waterford Regional Airport and Business Park

Waterford Regional Airport plays a critical role in the development of Waterford and the South East, in terms of accessibility, supporting economic development and tourism. Reflecting this, lands have been zoned at this location to facilitate the development and expansion of the Airport as ‘Airport Area’ (To provide for Airport related activities including passenger terminal buildings and services, airside retail, hotel, airport infrastructure, hangerage, storage, maintenance and ancillary facilities, park & ride, transport, depot, training facilities, storage depot, warehouse, offices and light industrial/ enterprise units) and Light Industry. A masterplan for the Airport and this Business Park is attached to Appendix A6.

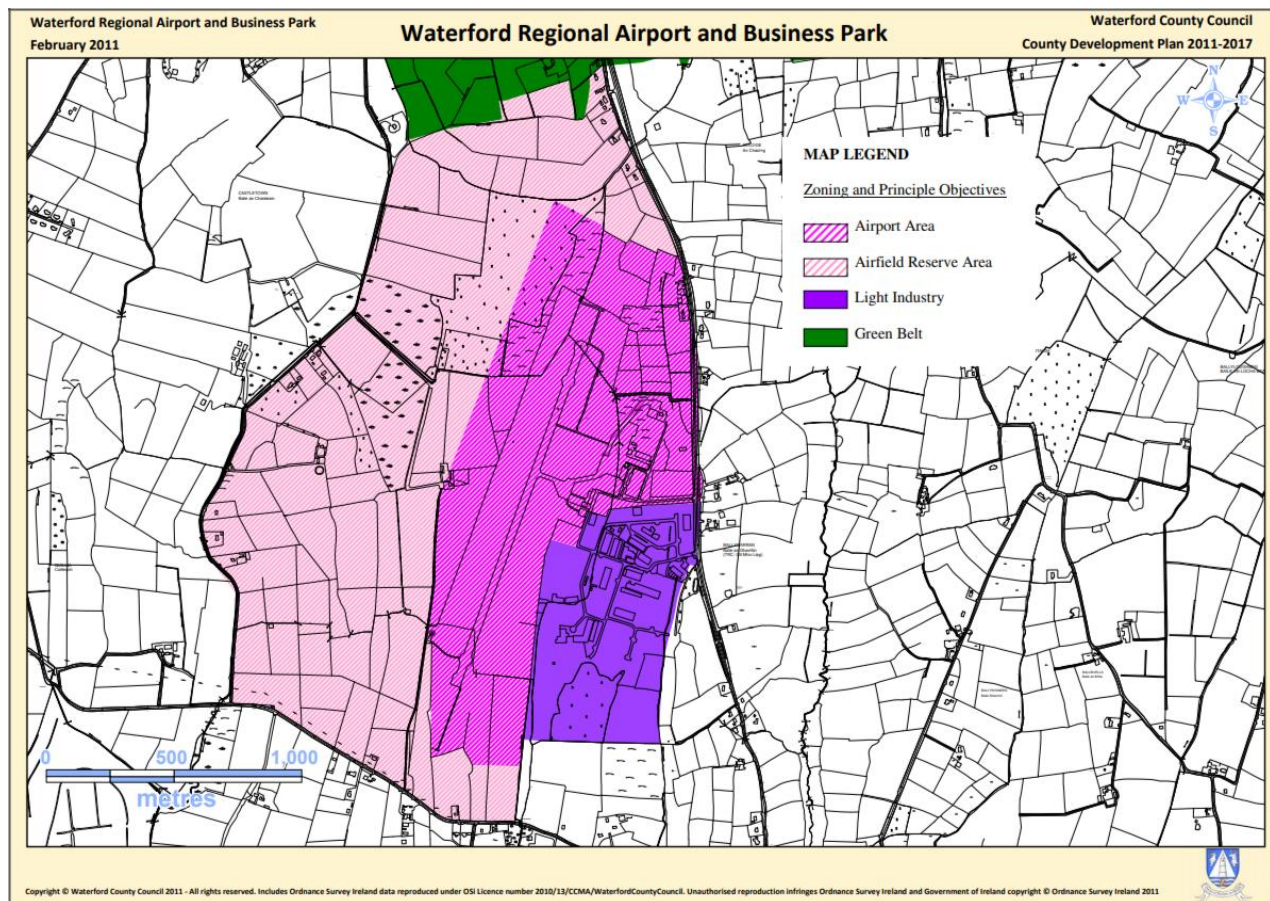
To support these objectives, Policy ECD 10 states that it shall be policy of the planning authority to ensure that the development of the strategic zoned lands at Waterford Regional Airport are carried out in accordance with a Master Plan to be agreed with the Planning Authority and that any such Master Plan shall comply with the relevant policies and development management standards set out in Chapter 10 of the Development Plan and where required will be subject to an Appropriate Assessment in compliance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

Chapter 7 of the Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 sets out the infrastructural policies and objectives of the planning authority. Section 7.11 states that Waterford Airport “is a key gateway to Ireland’s south east and the availability of its convenient and increasingly frequent air services is making a growing contribution to the facilitation of both tourism and business activities in the region”. That section reaffirms the fact that Appendix A6 of the Development Plan sets out a Masterplan for the Airport and adjoining business park.

Objective INF 4 of the Development Plan states that:

To assist the future expansion of services and routes at the Airport, the Council support the lengthening and widening of the runway, subject to compliance with proper planning and sustainable development and in compliance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

The figure below is taken from Volume 2 of the Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 and it illustrates the relevant zoning or land-use policies of the planning authority in relation to Waterford Regional Airport and Business Park.



The land-use zoning objective for the "Airport Area" is:

To provide for Airport related activities including passenger terminal buildings and services, airside retail, hotel, airport infrastructure, hangerage, storage, maintenance and ancillary facilities, park & ride, transport depot, training facilities, storage depot, warehouse, offices and light industrial/ enterprise units.

Regarding the "Airfield Reserve Area" the planning authority's land-use zoning objective is:

To allow for the future extension of the runway facilities and to provide for the possible future realignment of the R685 Road. This area should be reserved free from inappropriate development which may prejudice the future expansion of the airport.

5. Waterford County Development Plan 2011-2017 – Appendix A6 Waterford Regional Airport and Business Park Masterplan

Section 1.1 of Appendix A6 sets out the strategic context for the Regional Airport and Business Park Masterplan and states that Waterford Airport is a key component of the transport infrastructure in the South East Region and is central to the future development of both the County and the Gateway. That section goes on to state that the availability of convenient and increasingly frequent air services increase connectivity and assists in attracting tourists to the Region and that this service and proximity to the Airport Business Park assists in attracting inward investment and harnessing competitive advantage.

The Airport's mission statement is:

To serve local and regional air transport needs in the South East, providing connectivity for citizens, business users and the inbound tourist market in a safe environment, to act as a local hub for air transport activity and to act as an energiser for business activity in the region.

The Council recognises the strategic importance of Waterford Airport to the future development of the County and the South East Region, its central role in increasing the critical mass of the Waterford Gateway, and the improvement to the overall connectivity of the Region.

The development strategy for the airport is set out at section 1.6.1 of the Masterplan document. This section states that:

The Council supports the development objectives of Waterford Regional Airport plc for the future development of the airport which are to:

- *Increase the competitiveness of the South East Region and promote the balanced development of the Region in accordance with the National Spatial Strategy;*
- *Promote the accessibility and attractiveness of the Region for both business and inbound tourism;*
- *Improve transport infrastructure for South East Region; and*
- *Provide and promote cargo facilities to support industry and inward investment in the Region.*

Waterford Regional Airport plc proposes to extend the current runway from 1,433 metres to 1,850 metres and in the longer term to 2,288 metres, and to expand the size to the terminal building to handle increased passenger numbers. All future development works will be designed to ensure full compliance with both the Irish Aviation Authority and international aviation safety standards. The airport also intends to develop facilities for visiting and locally based aircraft.

As the Airport develops and there is a subsequent increase in demand for surface transport facilities, the Council in conjunction with Waterford Regional Airport plc will liaise with bus operators to develop a public transport link between Waterford City and the Airport and Business Park.

Policy Airport 1

The Council will support and co-operate with the relevant authorities, government agencies, businesses and interest groups to improve access to the Airport and to facilitate the appropriate development at the Airport.

Objective Airport 1

To assist the future expansion of services and routes at the Airport, the Council support the lengthening and widening of the runway.

6. Airport Safety Standards and Certification Specifications

The following information has been provided to Waterford City and County Council by the management of Waterford Airport to clarify the legislative and regulatory environment within which the airport is required to operate.

6.1 Runway Safety Strips

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) publish the certification specifications that each licensed aerodrome must comply with. Certification Specification CS ADR-DSN.B.150 stipulates a runway strip must be provided.

The runway strip extends laterally to a specified distance from the runway centre line, longitudinally before the threshold, and beyond the runway end. It provides an area clear of objects that may endanger aeroplanes.

The safety objective of the runway strip is to reduce the risk of damage to an aircraft accidentally running off the runway, to protect aircraft flying over it when taking-off or landing, and to enable safe use by rescue and firefighting (RFF) vehicles.

Runway Strip Dimensions:

Runway Strip Length:

A runway strip should extend before the threshold and beyond the end of the runway for a distance of at least 60 m.

Runway Strip Width:

A strip including a precision approach runway should extend laterally to a distance of at least 140 m on each side of the centre line of the runway and its extended centre line throughout the length of the strip.

6.2 Runway End Safety Areas

EASA Certification Specification CS ADR-DSN.C.210 stipulates a runway end safety area (RESA) must be provided at the end of a runway strip.

The safety objective of the runway end safety area (RESA) is to minimise risks to aircraft and their occupants when an aeroplane overruns or undershoots a runway.

A runway end safety area should provide an area long and wide enough, and suitable to contain aircraft overruns and undershoots resulting from a reasonably probable combination of adverse operational factors.

Dimensions of the Runway End Safety Areas

RESA Length:

A runway end safety area should extend from the end of a runway strip to a distance of 240m.

RESA Width:

The width of a runway end safety area should be at least twice that of the associated runway and, wherever practicable, be equal to that of the graded portion of the associated runway strip

6.3 Obstacle Limitation Surfaces

Under EASA regulations each airport must have in place protections against obstacles. These are called Obstacle Limitation Surfaces (Certification Specification CS ADR-DSN.H.405).

The purpose of the obstacle limitation surfaces is to define the airspace around aerodromes to be maintained free from obstacles so as to permit the intended aeroplane operations at the aerodromes to be conducted safely.

7. The Proposed Development

To achieve the policy objectives set out above, Waterford City and County Council, in partnership with Waterford Regional Airport PLC, propose the development of an extension to, and widening of, the existing runway at Waterford Regional Airport along with associated works including widening of the taxiway, extension to the car parking area, re-alignment of security fencing, new navigation lighting, underground holding tank, demolition of two existing houses to the north of the runway and alterations to site drainage.

The proposed development would comprise the following principal elements:

- a) Extension of the existing 1,433 metre long runway by 491 metres at its northern end and 363 at its southern end, resulting in a total runway length of 2,287metres;
- b) Widening of the existing and extended runway from 30 metres in width to 45 metres in width;
- c) Widening of the existing taxiway connecting the runway to the Airport Apron from 15 metres in width to 23 metres in width;
- d) New landing lights to the north of the R708 at Keiloge;
- e) Associated alterations to runway lighting, drainage and runway shoulders;
- f) Demolition of two detached houses fronting onto the R708 at Ballygarran, at the northern end of the extended runway;
- g) Construction of a new 205 space car park to the east of the existing car park, in front of the terminal building; and
- h) All associated, drainage, landscaping and site works.

Waterford City and County Council carried out screening of the proposed development to assess the likely effects of the project, either alone or in combination with other projects, upon designated Natura 2000 sites in the vicinity (Stage 1 – AA Screening). This screening exercise concluded that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment would be required in this instance and this application is therefore accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement (NIS).

In addition, an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been prepared in respect of the proposed development.

Information regarding the project was uploaded to the EIA Portal on 03/07/2020 under EIA Portal ID number **2020099**.

8. Requirement to Acquire Additional Lands to Facilitate Airport Expansion

As stated at section 1 of this report, the Minister for Transport Tourism and Sport announced a decision, in principle, by Government to support a significant runway extension project at Waterford Airport. This project would see the existing runway extended from its existing length of 1,433 metres to 2,280 metres so as to be capable of safely accommodating larger commercial passenger aircraft such as Boeing 737s and Airbus 320s.

This development would require an extension of runway 21 by approximately 465 metres in a northerly direction towards the R708.

In tandem with this, approach lighting would need to be relocated in a northerly direction across the R708. This would result in approximately 570m of approach lighting being sighted on third party lands to the north of the R708. The safety objective of the approach lighting system is to provide alignment and roll guidance, and limited distance-to-go information to enable safe approach to a runway. All such approach lighting is located in conjunction with the landing threshold of a runway.

As part of the preparation for its master plan the Airport engaged aviation consultants LEAPP services to review performance and obstacle safety requirements for a runway extension. LEAPP utilised survey data compiled by SLC Ltd., a UK based aviation survey company.

In its review LEAPP identified a number of obstacles that would infringe international safety surfaces including two obstacles (2 no. residential dwellings) approximately 800m from the existing landing threshold of the prevailing runway. The location and height of the obstacles has a significant effect on the length of the existing runway that can be safely used. As a result the airport loses 143m of its runway, reducing its operational length from 1,433m to 1,290m. As an integral part of the airports redevelopment proposals, it is intended that the two dwellings to the north of runway 21 will be acquired and demolished to ensure they no longer infringe the safety surfaces required for aircraft using the runway.

The proposed compulsory purchase of land to facilitate the proposed development is the subject of an associated application for approval currently before An Bord Pleanála (Your Ref: PL93.306324).

9. Planning Implications of the Proposed Development

As stated above, the expansion of Waterford Airport to accommodate larger commercial passenger aircraft such as Boeing 737s and Airbus 320s is supported by national, regional and local planning policy.

As is clearly demonstrated by the accompanying Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS), the proposed development would not directly impact any:

- Structures on the Record of Protected Structures;
- Tree Preservation Orders;
- Site of Archaeological Potential;
- European Sites; or
- Any other sites or structures which it is an objective of the planning authority to protect or conserve.

Furthermore, there are no area specific planning policies relevant to this particular location other than those referred to above which might be compromised by the proposed development.

Therefore, it is the contention of Waterford City and County Council that the proposed development would deliver on national, regional and local planning policy for this strategic piece of regional transportation infrastructure and would be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.



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