

PROJECT NO. 34.03.2022



Site Context Report

Mixed Use Development at Pa Healy Road, LIMERICK

DATE: FEBRUARY 2022

ON BEHALF OF: Revington
Developments Limited

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report sets out a detailed response to the Opinion by An Bord Pleanála requiring ...*"a report that specifically addresses: site context, the locational attributes of the area, boundary treatments, open / gated / controlled linkages through the site, pedestrian and cycle connections to the wider area, in particular, along the canal, Park Road and Pa Healey Road cognisance being had to national and local planning policy."*¹

2.0 SITE CONTEXT AND LOCATIONAL ATTRIBUTES

2.1.1 The site location is characterised by the close proximity to Limerick city centre and to the availability of public open space facilities, together with available shopping opportunities in close proximity. The locational attributes are therefore of a well serviced brownfield site. To the north the site is adjacent to the canal and adjoining the towpath pedestrian walkway. To the south west, the site is adjoined by a public park and, the Grove Island Shopping Centre is located ca. 200 metres to the north west. With the exception of a commercial premises near the eastern site boundary, the site is currently vacant and is in an overgrown state.

2.1.2 The locational attributes of the site are well summarised in the Planning Authority's Opinion statement on the proposed planning application where it states the following: ...*"The site is located approx. 800 m from the City Centre, 170 m to Grove Island Shopping Centre, 200 m to a secondary school, less than 400 m from the Limerick School of Art & Design (LSAD) Campus and the National Technology Park (NTP) and walking distance to a high frequency bus corridor along the Dublin Road."*²

2.1.2 The site boundary to the north is formed by the Canal and associated walkway/cycle path. This boundary is formed by a combination of walls and mature trees that stand between the site and the adjoining towpath. The site boundary to the south west is formed by generally open fencing allowing full

¹ *Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 Notice of Pre-Application Consultation Opinion – Case Reference ABP-307956-20, An Bord Pleanála, December 2020.*

² Planning Authority Opinion ref. 307956-20, 10/9/20.

public view of the overgrown nature of the site from the adjoining Pa Healy road. There is a footpath and cycle way between the site boundary and the public road. A turning lane is provided at the location of the existing vehicular entrance to the site. Near the north western corner of the site, the road rises to a bridge across the canal. At this point the site boundary is formed by closed fencing but still allowing full view across the site. The site boundary to the east is formed by a high boundary wall. A footpath is provided between the site boundary and the public road. A vehicular entrance is present to serve the existing commercial use on this part of the site. The proposed development will result in a dramatic positive change in the site boundaries on all sides.

2.1.3 The adjoining land use to the north is formed by the linear infrastructure of canal and towpath. To the north there is undeveloped open land between the canal and further residential development to the north. To the east the site is adjoined by a mixture of commercial development and single storey dwelling houses with access from Park Road. To the south west, the site is adjoined by an area of public open space 'O'Brien's Park' which is accessible from the site via an underpass under the Pa Healy Road.

2.1.4 The site is adjoined by two public roads: Pa Healy Road to the south west and Park Road to the east. Park Road is a local access road with footpaths on both sides. There are no cycle lanes at present along this road. At the northern end the road crosses the canal via a narrow bridge with cycling priority. This bridge is due to be reconstructed. Pa Healy Road is a wide distributor road with a median reservation for several turning lanes to provide access to adjoining lands incl. the subject site. The road has a footpath and cycle lane on each side of the road.

3.0 SITE LEVELS

3.1.1 The site is relatively level. An existing vehicular entrance is located in the south-western boundary from Pa Healy Road. There are informal walkways running through the site from the towpath to the north. While the proposed development provides for finished floor levels determined by the flood risk assessment report, along the Pa Healy Road frontage development is proposed at a level below the

recommended 5.75m AOD finished floor levels ("FFLs"). This is in order to achieve universal access and accessibility to the proposed development.

3.1.2 A site specific Flood Risk Assessment ("FRA") has been completed by JBA Consulting. The site is predominately within Flood Zone C. FFLs have been set in accordance with the findings and recommendations of the FRA. For all Habitable Accommodation within the development, a minimum FFL of 5.75m AOD has been adopted. All dwellings are proposed at 6.00m AOD; Apartment Blocks are at a minimum of 6.0m, with the Student Accommodation Block at 5.75m. The level of 5.75m includes a 0.5m Freeboard plus 0.5m Climate Change allowance above the 0.5 Annual Exceedance Probability or 'AEP' (1:200 year) Tidal Level event.

3.1.3 The proposed Retail Units are set at 4.8m AOD in order to provide comfortable access from the existing footpath levels on Pa Healy Road without the need for obtrusive ramps, steps and guards. This is considered acceptable given the less vulnerable retail nature of these units. As per the FRA, it is proposed to include flood resilient building finishes within these units in line with Technical Appendix B of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines.

3.1.4 FFL alignments have been designed to allow for ease of access from FFLs to driveways/carparks in line with Building Regulation TGD M – Access and Use 2010 with level access at Main Entrance locations. Private driveways shall be limited to a maximum gradient of 8% (1/12.5). Each dwelling shall have a parking area that is at a gradient of not greater than 5% (1/20) in order to provide a relatively level area in order to alight from a vehicle.

4.0 BOUNDARY TREATMENTS

4.1.1 The treatment of the south western boundary to Pa Healy Road is in two parts. The section west of the proposed vehicular entrance to the development will consist of a 1.8 m high fence with hedging. This boundary fence will provide a privacy protection to the dwelling units in blocks 2 and 3 of the proposed development. To the south of the entrance the boundary is open and there will be high quality paving provided between the public footpath and the retail units. This paving can incorporate the existing public

footpath and will link the public footpath adjoining the bus bay with the public realm that will be formed as part of the proposed development.

4.1.2 The treatment of the eastern boundary to Park Road will be by providing a 1.8 m height wall or fence separating the housing units from the public road and footpath. Provision is made for a cycle lane along this site boundary.

4.1.3 Along the northern site boundary the public open space that forms part of the proposed development will be accessible to the general public during daylight hours. This will provide significant planning gain in the form of a high quality green corridor that is integrated with the canal tow path. A new 1.8 m high fence will be provided along the site boundary immediately adjoining the public path/cycle route along the canal and two gate points will be provided in this fence in accordance with desire lines for pedestrian flow through the site. The gated access is necessary in order to adequately protect biodiversity by minimising human activity in this part of the site, close to the public towpath. It is also necessary given the privately managed nature of the open space areas within the development. Please refer to the **Landscape Design report**³ for further details.

5.0 SITE PERMEABILITY

5.1.1 There are strong desire lines for pedestrian flows across the site. These desire lines are linked to the development itself, having regard to the significant resident population incl. students that will be present. In addition, there are desire lines through the site, once developed. The main reason for these desire lines is the presence of the towpath pedestrian and cycle route that exists along the northern site boundary. This towpath is already heavily used by linking the city centre to the university facilities further east, and increased usage is likely. The proposed development provides full permeability by providing two pedestrian/cycle routes through the development site. The main route is formed by the central route which follows the direct line between the vehicular entrance to the site from Pa Healy Road in the southern boundary with the towpath walkway along the northern boundary. This route is overlooked

³ Landscape Report, PC Roche & Associates, 2021.

from Block 4 and provides access to the community facilities building. This new pedestrian route is therefore likely to be a busy and attractive route within the overall development. The route follows the desire line between Pa Healy Road and the towpath. A secondary pedestrian/cycle route is accessed from the bridge near the north western corner of the site. It passes through the green corridor of open space that will be created along the northern boundary of the site. It follows a strong desire line of pedestrians and cyclists to access the towpath from the adjoining road network to the north west incl. the nearby shopping centre.

5.1.2 The network of footpaths throughout the site, and in particular within the green open space corridor along the northern site boundary, will be connected to the towpath public cycle route at two points. These gate points are situated in locations that are based on the desire lines through the site. The gate points will be open to the public during daylight hours and will only be closed at night in order to protect wildlife along the ecological corridor that is formed by the canal.

5.1.3 During pre-application consideration, the issue was raised of a possible additional connection near the north eastern corner of the development site. This was suggested particularly with the proposed works to the bridge in mind. Providing this additional connection has been carefully considered, but is not being proposed for two reasons:

- a) First, such a connection point would add little to pedestrian and cyclist permeability, as the desire line to the Park Road and the Bridge across the canal is already provided for through the central route described above. To follow a route directly across the site to the north eastern corner would not be significantly shorter, while providing two alternative routes would lead to lack of site legibility, reduced overlooking of the route.
- b) Secondly, the additional opening would be located in a part of the site where communal space is provided primarily for residents in the apartment blocks. Creating a public route through this area would diminish the residential amenity value of this communal open space. Excessive diagonal routes would not contribute to the urban character of the residential areas and would be difficult to control in relation to overlooking, division of public/private areas.

5.1.4 The design as envisaged allows ground floor apartments to have a harmonious relationship with the landscape provided. This would become tenuous if the axial routes proposed were diluted through additional access points. It is also relevant to note that the levels of the site in the north eastern corner rise somewhat. It is the design intention to retain the walls here as they are in good condition and part of the character of the area.

5.1.5 A clear hierarchy of roads is provided throughout the proposed development. For vehicular traffic the hierarchy is based on two levels: the primary access road (road 1) and the access roads to the individual blocks (roads 2-8). Short lengths of roads and perpendicular car parking will result in lowering of traffic speeds within the development. For cyclists, the hierarchy is one of the main spine pedestrian/cycle route in the centre of the site with further pathways throughout the areas of open space.

5.1.6 A large portion of the landscaped areas within the site will be accessible to the general public and will be integrated with the adjoining canal green corridor. Additional landscaping along the northern boundary will strengthen the existing green corridor that has formed along the canal. This open space will be gated / controlled at night-time with the exception of the main east west route connection, it will remain open. The two parks to the west and east will be managed and closed at night.

6.0 POLICY CONTEXT NATIONAL

6.1.1 The Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas refer to the need to address linkages between the area to be (re)developed and established neighbourhoods, including the provision of pedestrian and cycle networks.⁴ This has been addressed by creating a strong pedestrian/cycle route between Pa Healy Road and the existing Canal towpath pedestrian/cycle route, thus linking the (proposed) cycle way along Pa Healy Road with the (existing) cycle way along the towpath.⁵ The additional footpath/cycle connections near the north western corner of the site will improve linkages to the city centre and the nearby shopping centre that is located to the north west.

⁴ *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, 2009, p. 8.

⁵ *Limerick City Development Plan 2010-2016 (as extended)*, Map 3B – Cycle Ways.

6.1.2 The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets recommends that in order to achieve permeability and legibility, layouts for new development should provide ...*"highly connected networks which maximise permeability, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists."*⁶ All cul de sac road ends in the proposed development are fully connected for pedestrians and cyclists either to the open space area near the towpath or the Park Road to the east. This will facilitate the 'shortest route' options to be chosen in accordance with desire lines.

6.1.3 The Building Heights Guidelines state that proposals for increased building height should enhance ...*"the urban design context for public spaces and key thoroughfares."*⁷ In the proposed layout this is achieved by the location of the individual building blocks emphasising the high degree of connectivity throughout the site with the new area of public open space along the northern site boundary adjacent to the canal green corridor. The buildings thus help to improve the legibility of the site and the opportunities for pedestrian and cyclists to move throughout the site both from within the site as well as from outside.

7.0 POLICY CONTEXT REGIONAL AND LOCAL

7.1.1 It is policy of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy to deliver ...*"comprehensive cycling and walking networks with an emphasis on Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford metropolitan areas"*.⁸ The proposed development will facilitate the development of the cycle ways along the external boundaries of the site but enhance the quality of these networks by creating significant demand for use of these networks through the provision of a high number of apartment units and houses, as well as strengthen the network by creating a strong linking route through the site linking Pa Healy Road with the cycle way along the canal towpath.

7.1.2 The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan for Limerick-Shannon which forms part of the Regional Strategy, further envisages ...*"the provision of a high-quality cycle network in Limerick City as set out in the Limerick Metropolitan Area Cycle Network Study/ LSMATS."*⁹

⁶ *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets*, p. 41.

⁷ *Urban Development and Building Heights, Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, December 2018, p. 14.

⁸ *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region, Southern Assembly*, p. 173.

⁹ *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region, Southern Assembly*, p. 288.

7.1.3 It is a key objective of the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy ...*”to improve the quality of the pedestrian network and environment to support safer and higher levels of walking and accessibility to services and other forms of transport.”*¹⁰ As part of developing a comprehensive strategic cycling network, it is an objective to: ...*”identify local opportunities for permeability and feeder routes to improve links to the primary, secondary and greenway network and enhance the attractiveness of cycling for short trips.”*¹¹

7.1.4 The Limerick City Development Plan 2010-2016 (as extended) contains a policy of cycle ways both existing and proposed. Map 3B sets out these cycle ways. This includes an existing cycleway along the northern site boundary in the form of the cycleway along the canal. It also includes proposed cycleways along the eastern and southwestern boundaries, i.e. Park Road and Pa Healy Road.¹² The proposed development provides a cycle route on Park Road, contributing significantly to Development Plan policies.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1.1 The locational attributes of the site are those of a well serviced brownfield site. The proposed development will result in a dramatic change in the site conditions which are currently those of an overgrown unused site.

8.1.2 Boundary treatment will vary between creating a public realm frontage along Pa Healy Road through the presence of retail units and the main entrance road to the scheme, well integrated housing development along the eastern boundary and a high quality public open space corridor along the northern boundary. The proposed development will therefore integrate on all sides with adjoining areas.

8.1.3 The proposed development will facilitate pedestrians and cyclists in the area by creating attractive routes that will provide connections along desire lines where these currently are lacking. Gate points will be open to the public during daylight hours and will only be closed at night in order to protect wildlife along the ecological corridor that is formed by the canal. A possible additional

¹⁰ Draft Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040, p. 22.

¹¹ Draft Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040, Objective CC1 p. 45.

connection near the north eastern corner of the development site is considered less desirable in order to concentrate pedestrian and cycle traffic along routes that are overlooked and to protect amenity of communal open space for residents.

8.1.4 The proposed development will create a large landscaped area that will be integrated with the adjoining canal, thus creating a strong green infrastructure corridor which will enhance the existing ecological corridor that is formed by the canal. This will contribute to both biodiversity and public amenity.

8.1.5 The proposed development meets objectives at national and regional level for connectivity, to encourage pedestrian and cycle traffic as preferred modes of transport and to achieve permeability across new development schemes. It also meets the objectives of the Limerick Development Plan to provide cycle ways.

¹² *Limerick City Development Plan 2010-2016 (as extended)*, Map 3B – Cycle Ways.