



27 March 2020

Part 8 Achill Sound

Director of Services,
Planning and Development Section,
Mayo County Council,
Áras an Chontae,
Castlebar,
Co. Mayo.

PART 8 Proposed Achill Sound - Bunacurry Greenway and enhancement works

A Chara,

I refer to the Council notification in relation to the above proposed development. Outlined below are the archaeological observations of the National Monuments Service (NMS) and the nature conservation recommendations of the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), both of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Archaeology

Due to the scale of the proposed development, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht recommends that:

- The effect of the development shall be assessed by a suitably qualified archaeologist by means of a desk study and a site visit.
- A report of the assessment should be compiled, in order to enable the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the Planning Authority to formulate appropriate archaeological mitigation, which might include any or all of the following: test excavations, avoidance of known archaeological features, archaeological monitoring of groundworks.

Nature Conversation

The following observations are made by the Department in its role as a prescribed body under planning legislation.

The proposed Part 8 project is for the development of the following;

- 10.6km of road segregated walking and cycle paths (greenways) with tie-ins to existing greenways/walking trails and local roads. The path width will vary between 2.6m to 4m in width
- Construction of 413 m of raised boardwalk
- Boundary fencing, wall construction and services relocation

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- Trail heads
- Drainage, fencing and farm crossings
- Demolition of house at Achill Sound for public realm enhancements
- Construction of plaza and promenade
- Car-parking bays
- Traffic calming and all ancillary works
- Temporary construction compound

Existing public roads and surfaced paths comprise approximately 7.1km of the 10.6 km of the proposed greenway and will involve minor works in the form of signage and road markings.

It is recommended that the requirement for this development is assessed in the context of existing policies and objectives relating to nature conservation, in addition to those relating to tourism, recreation and amenity, in Mayo County Development Plan, and in any other relevant plans or strategies, noting also any plan level mitigation that may be applicable to this type of development in the settings or locations in question.

It is also recommended to refer to the NPWS website <https://www.npws.ie/development-consultations>, notably section 8 which outlines key considerations for biodiversity, flora and fauna.

European Sites – Screening for AA

The report concludes that the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 sites identified in the report will be met and habitats and species will be maintained at a favourable conservation status. This Department notes and accepts this conclusion.

Other ecological Receptors – Screening for EIA

The proposed greenway development does not fall into any of the development classes which require a mandatory EIA / EIAR as set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as Amended) and has been assessed as a sub-threshold EIA development.

Section 50 of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended) outlines the requirements for EIA for ‘proposed road developments’. The screening report has assessed the potential for the project to result in significant negative environmental effects and has used the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) assessment guidelines as it represents best practice guidance for road schemes in Ireland.

The screening report has concluded that no significant environmental impacts will occur and the implementation of best practice measures outlined in the report will further reduce the potential for impacts to arise.

This Department however has the view that the screening report has not adequately assessed the full impacts of the whole development and the implications for sensitive ecological receptors. The report has only looked at the greenway track element and has not addressed other elements of the proposed project. Screening for EIA must consider the whole development which includes likely significant effects arising from any demolition works that must be carried out in order to facilitate



the development. Screening must consider nature, size and location of project in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations as amended¹.

The screening assessment of the potential characteristics of the project (Table 3.3) has set out that there will not be any demolition works associated with the project. Analysis of the characteristics appears to be entirely of the greenway path and no consideration of the works proposed at Achill Sound which includes demolition of buildings, trail-head, car parking and cantilevered promenade have been set out and screened as characteristics of the project. These elements of the project are set out in 19DWG-103.

With regard to site description and environmental sensitivities of the location of the project, it is appropriate to assess if the peatland habitats that are located in Saula West and Cashel South potentially correspond to Annex I habitats. These habitats are described in the report as two sections of peatland with peat depths in excess of 2m. Habitats include lowland blanket bog (PB3), cutover bog (PB4) and wet heath (HH3) which will be traversed by 450m of constructed boardwalk. There will be a 5m working corridor using a mini-digger which would be restricted to periods of dry weather. The boardwalk will be raised to 300mm above the blanket bog surface. Permanent and temporary loss of possible Annex I habitat and wetland sites should be considered as well as the potential impact of on-going disturbance or protected species due to use of the greenway in a new location. The screening report has not considered the potential for breeding birds in this habitat (e.g Snipe, which is amber listed BOCCI). This should be considered for the CMP and there should be a breeding bird survey prior to any works during the bird nesting season.

The development also includes a proposal for a paved area cantilevered over the sea and extended car parking; these works will require the demolition of two buildings. None of these works have been assessed in the screening report and therefore have not been described or assessed for environmental sensitivity. The potential of the buildings that are due to be demolished for bat roosts must be assessed. Large old buildings with associated outbuildings provide ideal habitat for roosting bats. All species of bat in Ireland and their roosts are protected under Sec 23 of the Wildlife Act 1976 to 2018 and they are protected as an Annex IV species under the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Planning authorities are required to take account of the presence of protected species, including bats, when considering development applications.

It should be noted that the National Biodiversity Action Plan sets out Government policy on nature conservation and includes as Objective 1 to “mainstream biodiversity into decision making”, including for all public authorities to move towards no net loss of biodiversity. It also requires Local Authorities to develop policies and objectives for the protection and restoration of biodiversity. Cognisance should also be made as to whether there are any related Local Biodiversity Plans for Achill.

Any losses of biodiversity habitat associated with this proposed should be mitigated for (e.g. timing of works). A Conservation Management Plan should be presented as part of the initial development in order to provide a biodiversity gain as a consequence of the proposed development. This should

¹ Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2019 (Unofficial Consolidation) p. 547



include habitat enhancement works with clear details on timing and provide details on monitoring and control of invasive species

Nature Conversation Conclusion

Given the ecological concerns set out above, the Department has the view that, without further information, it cannot be excluded that the proposed development will not have a significant environmental effect. This Department would welcome further consultation with the Council in relation to such. The EIA screening checklist (Table 6.1) needs to be reviewed, particularly in relation to points 12 and 13 (re sensitive habitats and species) and considered further. Following this then the conclusion of the EIA screening assessment should then be reviewed.

Kindly forward to this office any additional documentation received or in the event of a final decision being made please forward a copy of same to the following address as soon as it issues:

*The Manager,
Development Application Unit
Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht,
Newtown Road, Wexford **Y35 AP90***

In addition, please acknowledge receipt of this letter (as required under the Planning & Development Regulations) and forward the relevant receipt to the address above.

Is mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Murphy', with a stylized, cursive script.

Michael Murphy,
Development Applications Unit
053 – 89117516.