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# Monksland Public Realm Improvement Works

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## Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report has been prepared by Building Design Partnership (BDP) for Roscommon County Council ('the Applicant') to consider the need for Environmental Impact Assessment ('EIA') for the proposed public realm improvement works ('Proposed Development') on the edge of Monksland town centre. This report provides an overview of the relevant EIA process and screening considerations.
- 1.2 The screening report follows the framework set by the EU Directive 2011/92/EU (as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU), which is carried down into Irish legislation in the form of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). Further guidance documents published by the European Commission, Government of Ireland and Environmental Protection Agency have informed the assessment and are referenced in section 4 of this report.
- 1.3 Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) stipulates the required information for inclusion in an EIA Screening Report. Table 1.1 identifies where the specified information can be found.

Table 1.1 Location of Information		
Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations		Location of information
1)	a description of the development, including in particular—	
(i)	a description of the physical characteristics of the whole proposed development and, where relevant, of demolition works;	Section 3 and Table 5.1
(ii)	a description of the location of the proposed development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;	Section 2 and Table 5.1
2)	a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;	Table 5.1
3)	A description of any likely significant effects, to the extent of the information available on such effects of the proposed development on the environment resulting from -	Table 5.1
(i)	the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant; and	Table 5.1
(ii)	the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and	Table 5.1
4)	The compilation of the information at paragraphs 1-3 shall take into account where relevant, the criteria set out in Schedule 7.	Sections 2, 3 and Table 5.1

- 1.4 The remainder of this report has the following structure:
- **Section 2: Existing Site** – provides a description of the site and the surrounding area.
  - **Section 3: Proposed Development** – provides description of the proposed development.
  - **Section 4: EIA thresholds and criteria** – provides an overview of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations that have been considered in this screening report.
  - **Section 5: Screening Review** – assesses the impacts of the proposed development concerning the criteria set out in Section 4.
  - **Section 6: Conclusion** – summarises the EIA Screening Assessment of the proposed development.

## 2. Existing Site

### Site Context

- 2.1 The Site comprises some 7,275 sqm of brownfield land to the west of the Monksland Business Park (as shown in Figure 2.1). Though classified as brownfield land for the purpose of this assessment, the land has been used in part of the disposal of overburden and waste from the adjacent disused limestone quarry and has naturally regenerated to mixed scrub and rough grassland. The town of Monksland is a settlement with a significant amount of industrial and employment development adjacent to the M6 motorway and a short distance to the west of Athlone and the River Shannon. Monksland is a small commercial centre with a population of approximately 3,500 people.
- 2.2 The town is identified in the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028 as part of the Regional Growth Area of Athlone (Policy 2.5). The proposed development is consistent with focussed growth in Monksland and the surrounding area as a significant new public amenity.
- 2.3 There are no national environmental designations or Natura 2000 sites within 1km of the site boundary. The nearest Natura 2000 sites are the Lough Ree SAC and SPA which are 2.3km from the site boundary, to the north of Athlone.

### Site Description

- 2.4 The site is an area of naturally regenerated scrub land to the west of the Monksland Business Park. The site is bounded to the south by the Monksland Business Park 2 and to the north by residential gardens on Ceathru na Gloch. There are a number of mature trees to the north of the site. The site topography is varied, with a number of vegetated mounds across the site. These are assumed to be a result of the former quarry operations. Soil testing and site investigation is ongoing. For the purpose of this assessment, the site is assumed to comprise uncontaminated material from the winning and working of limestone.



Figure 2.1 Site Location Plan

### **Surrounding Area**

- 2.5 Monksland forms part of the wider Athlone Growth Area. There are a number of significant industrial and pharmaceutical sites around the town. Monksland is a mixed town with a number of small residential districts and employment areas spread around the local road network. Monksland is served by both the M6 motorway and the R362 main road. None of the nearby industrial development or proposed housing allocations are considered to have a cumulative impact with the proposed development.

## **3. Proposed Development**

### **Background**

- 3.1 The proposal is to develop the land identified on Figure 2.1 as a new park. The total area of the development will be some 7,275sqm. The proposed park will comprise a number of elements including an outdoor stage and amphitheatre seating, pavilions and informal seating, skatepark, flexible games area and outdoor play equipment. Planting will comprise a mixture of parkland and managed lawn as well as a biodiversity garden. The proposals include the planting of over 50 trees as well as a shrub and ornamental planting. There will be 6 car parking spaces provided which will be accessed from the Monksland Business Park.
- 3.2 A General Arrangement Plan of the proposed development is appended to the screening report.

## **4. EIA Thresholds and Criteria**

### **Legislation and Guidance**

- 4.1 The thresholds and criteria for developments that may require EIA Screening are set out in EU and Irish Legislation. The EU legislation is comprised of the original EIA Directive and two further amendment Directives which complete the EIA Directive:
- Council Directive 85/337/EEC of 27 June 1985
  - Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011
  - Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014.
- 4.2 The EIA Directive is subsequently carried through to Irish Legislation in the form of:
- Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)
  - Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)
  - The Roads Act 1993 (as amended)
- 4.3 Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) ('the 2001 Regulations') identifies the requirements for EIA, with Schedule 5 Parts 1 & 2, respectively aligned with Annexes I & II of the EIA Directive, providing the relevant criteria and thresholds for potential EIA development in Ireland.
- 4.4 Section 50 of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended) sets out the types of road projects that may require the road authority to prepare an EIS. These are large-scale projects such as new or realigned roads of four lanes or more, new bridges or tunnels that are likely to have significant effects on the environment.
- 4.5 The EIA Screening report also references the following documents from relevant bodies:

#### European Commission

- 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.
- Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) Practice Note PN02: Environmental Impact Assessment Screening, 2021.

Environmental Protection Agency

- Draft Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, 2017.

**Project Type**

- 4.6 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 Statement (EIS) is mandatory. This includes major infrastructure projects such as airports, motorways or power stations, for which the proposed public realm improvements scheme at Monksland does not meet the criteria.
- 4.7 Schedule 5 Part 2 is aligned with Annex II of the EIA Directive, and lists the type of development that may require an EIA depending on whether the site area and quantum of development exceeds certain thresholds and criteria and subsequently if there is potential for likely significant environmental effects. The only potential relevant category for the proposed public realm improvements at Monksland would be urban development (Schedule 5 Part 2, 10b, iv). Guidance published by the European Commission on *Interpretation of definitions of project categories of annex I and II of the EIA Directive* (2015), details potential project types that would meet the definition of 'urban development' and includes the following:
- i. Projects with similar characteristics to shopping centres and car parks, such as bus garages, train depots;
  - ii. Construction projects such as housing development; concert halls; cultural venues;
  - iii. Projects to which the term 'urban' and 'infrastructure' may relate such as construction of sewerage and water supply networks.
- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 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. As identified in the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028 as part of the Regional Growth Area of Athlone (Policy 2.5), the area surrounding the Site includes some commercial use, but it comprises a mixed settlement of residential and employment uses and is therefore not considered a 'business district' for the purposes of EIA. Therefore, in addition to not corresponding to the 'urban development' project definition set by the European Commission, at approximately 0.7 hectares, the Site area does not meet the thresholds for EIA in this project category.
- 4.10 With reference to the criteria for EIA development set out in Section 50 of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended), given the scale and nature of the proposed works, which comprises the creation of a new park, the Proposed Development does not meet the criteria for EIA.
- 4.11 Therefore, given the scale and nature of the Proposed Development, the creation of a new park at Monksland 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 relevant legislation and guidance.

- 4.12 As such, as defined in Article 92 of the 2001 Regulations, the proposals would not be identified as 'sub-threshold' development. Therefore, the proposals are not required to be assessed against the Schedule 7 criteria of the 2001 Regulations and do not require EIA.
- 4.13 Nonetheless, for the avoidance of doubt Section 5 (Assessment) provides a brief assessment of the Proposed Development against the Schedule 7 criteria to which sub-threshold development is required to be assessed.

## 5. Screening Review

### Schedule 7 Criteria: Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)

- 5.1 Schedule 7 of the 2001 Regulations sets out the considerations for determining whether development that is within the criteria listed in Schedule 5 Part 2 should be subject to an EIA. Considerations relate to the characteristics of the development, the location of the development and the types and characteristics of the potential impacts.
- 5.2 Schedule 7A of the Regulations sets out the information to be provided by the applicant for the purposes of screening sub-threshold development for EIA. The following tables assess the Proposed Development against the criteria set out in Schedule 7.

**Table 5.1 Review of Proposed Development against Schedule 7 Criteria**

Schedule 7 Criteria	Review
<b>1. Characteristics of Proposed Development</b>	
The characteristics of proposed development, in particular:	
(a) the size and design of the whole of the proposed development	The Proposed Development covers public realm and resurfacing of three sections of carriageway across an area of 0.7 ha.
(b) cumulation with other existing development and/or development the subject of a consent for proposed development for the purposes of section 172(1A)(b) of the Act and/or development the subject of any development consent for the purposes of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive by or under any other enactment	The Proposed Development will interact with the wider tourism and local pedestrian network and environment, creating beneficial impacts for community, heritage, local wildlife and local economy. With regard to particular forthcoming developments, the proposals have been designed such that they will not prejudice the future development of Monksland in line with the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028 as part of the Regional Growth Area of Athlone (Policy 2.5). The Proposed Development design has been informed by the initial plans for both schemes, and the proposals will complement each other by providing a safe town centre environment.
(c) the nature of any associated demolition works	There will be no demolition of buildings.
(d) the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity	The proposed development comprises brownfield land and therefore no significant natural resources will be used as a result of the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development proposal has the potential to enhance the biodiversity value and quality of the natural resources present on Site.
(e) the production of waste,	No significant waste streams will be generated by the Proposed Development in its construction or operation phase. Best practise measures will be employed during construction for safe and effective site waste management.
(f) pollution and nuisances	The Proposed Development will not result in significant pollution or nuisances in the operation phase. During the construction phase, appropriate management technical will be applied to reduce the risk of pollution and nuisances.



(g) 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	There is no significant potential for the Proposed Development to give rise to significant adverse effects on the environment due to accidents and/or disasters.
<b>2. Location of proposed development</b>	
The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by the proposed development, with particular regard to:	
(a) the existing and approved land use	The Proposed Development is for the redevelopment of former quarry land. The land has some biodiversity value, but the proposal includes significant potential benefits for biodiversity planting and new trees.
(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 Site is located some 2 km from the River Shannon which is a Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area. The Proposed Development does not encroach on this designated area. The majority of the Site itself is of limited ecological and biodiversity value.
c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas:	
(i) wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths	There are no watercourses or wetlands on or adjacent to the site.
(ii) coastal zones and the marine environment	The site is a considerable distance from coastal and marine zones and over 2km from the River Shannon SAC/SPA
(iii) mountain and forest areas	N/A
(iv) nature reserves and parks	N/A
(v) areas classified or protected under legislation, including Natura 2000 areas designated pursuant to the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive	As above, the Site is located some 2km from the River Shannon which forms part of the River Shannon Callows SAC and the Middle Shannon SPA. Some 4km to the west is the Castlesampson Esker SAC. There is no functional link between the site and the identified Natura 2000 sites
(vi) areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards laid down in legislation of the European Union and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure	None relevant to the characteristics of the scheme.
(vii) densely populated areas	The total population of the wider town of Monksland is approximately 3,500 people, and there are no densely populated areas within the Site itself.
(viii) landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance	N/A
<b>3. Types and characteristics of potential impacts</b>	
The likely significant effects on the environment of proposed development in relation to criteria set out under paragraphs 1 and 2, with regard to the impact of the project on the factors specified in paragraph (b)(i)(I) to (V) of the definition of 'environmental impact assessment report' in section 171A of the Act, 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)	The Proposed Development will affect an area of 0.7ha of restored quarry land.
(b) the nature of the impact	<p>The Proposed Development comprises the redevelopment and improvement of brownfield land formerly used for the extraction of limestone. The nature of potential impacts is limited to any effects related to the re-provision of hard and soft landscaping proposals. All works are identified as small scale and are expected to provide long term moderate operational phase effects due to the below features which are discussed in further detail in Section 3 of this report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cultural Heritage &amp; Townscape:</b> Positive impacts on the setting of the townscape.</li> <li>• <b>Archaeology:</b> The former use of the site for the extraction of limestone is assumed to have destroyed any archaeological deposits.</li> <li>• <b>Landscape and Views:</b> The proposal will enhance the local landscape and townscape through the re-profiling of the site and the provision of new, bespoke landscaping.</li> <li>• <b>Ecology &amp; Biodiversity:</b> Beneficial ecological and biodiversity measures will be provided as part of the proposals , and as confirmed in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report submitted with the planning application, there is no potential for significant effects to occur in relation to the River Shannon SAC/SPA</li> <li>• <b>Transport &amp; Access:</b> Enhanced pedestrian environment, extension to footpaths, creation of new desire lines and access points;</li> <li>• <b>Population &amp; Socio-Economic:</b> Enhanced open space provision with a range of uses including the open air stage, skatepark, multi-use games area and the outdoor play equipment;</li> <li>• <b>Water:</b> There are no watercourses or wetlands on the site and no new ones will be provided. As stated above, there is no encroachment on the River Shannon Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation;</li> </ul> <p>There is the potential for temporary adverse effects on human health and population, water, ecology and biodiversity during construction phase as a result of the emission dust, noise and air pollution. The construction works will be carried out with best practise measures including effective site waste management, dust mitigation and limited construction hours, in order to safeguard the amenity of the surrounding population and the health of the River Shannon SPA and SAC. There is also the potential for temporary adverse effects on transport and access during the proposed road works. Due to the limited scale and temporary nature of the works, the construction effects are not significant and would not warrant EIA.</p> <p>Therefore, the nature of the potential impacts are not considered to be significant within the meaning of the EIA Directive.</p>
(c) the transboundary nature of the impact	N/A
(d) the intensity and complexity of the impact	Impacts will be of low intensity and complexity.

(e) the probability of the impact	All above effects can reasonably be expected to occur with all mitigation measures to be properly implemented. The impacts are not considered to be significant within the meaning of the EIA Directive.
(f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact	There would be temporary and long term effects as described in 3(b) above.
(g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or development the subject of a consent for proposed development for the purposes of section 172(1A)(b) of the Act and/or development the subject of any development consent for the purposes of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive by or under any other enactment	As described in Section 2 of this report and 1 (b) of this table, the site forms part of the Regional Growth Area of Athlone (Policy 2.5). No specific planning applications relevant for assessment of cumulative effects have been identified. However, it is of note that there is significant planned growth of Monksland and surrounding areas over the period up to 2028 and beyond. The proposal is a community facility which will support the local population and provide facilities for future residents and is in line with Roscommon County Development Plan (Policy 2.5).  As such, whilst there is the potential for some cumulative effects, these would be mitigated through site monitoring and coordination. These effects are not considered to be significant within the meaning of the EIA Directive.
(h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact	Construction impacts can be reasonably anticipated to be within the normal range of effects that would be expected during public realm works. No significant effects are anticipated therefore no mitigation measures in addition to those noted above are proposed.

- 5.3 Following the review of the Proposed Development against the Schedule 7 criteria, construction works are anticipated to be temporary adverse, whilst operational effects are anticipated to be long term moderate positive. All anticipated effects are not likely to be significant within the meaning of the EIA Directive.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1 As established in Section 4 of this report (EIA Thresholds and Criteria), given the nature and scale of the proposed development at Monksland, 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.
- 6.2 Notwithstanding this, the EIA Screening Report has provided an overview assessment of the Proposed Development against the Schedule 7 criteria of 2011 Regulations. Section 5 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 adverse effects, whilst the operational phase is anticipated to result in long term moderate positive effects.
- 6.3 The Proposed Development does not have the potential to cause significant environmental effects and an Environmental Impact Assessment will not be required to support a planning application.

## Appendix 1: EIA Reports Draft Guidelines: Description of Effects (EPA, 2017)

<b>Quality of Effects</b>  It is important to inform the non-specialist reader whether an effect is positive, negative or neutral	<b>Positive Effects</b>  A change which improves the quality of the environment (for example, by increasing species diversity; or the improving reproductive capacity of an ecosystem, or by removing nuisances or improving amenities).
	<b>Neutral Effects</b>  No effects or effects that are imperceptible, within normal bounds of variation or within the margin of forecasting error.
	<b>Negative/adverse Effects</b>  A change which reduces the quality of the environment (for example, lessening species diversity or diminishing the reproductive capacity of an ecosystem; or damaging health or property or by causing nuisance).
<b>Describing the Significance of Effects</b>  ‘Significance’ is a concept that can have different meanings for different topics – in the absence of specific definitions for different topics the following definitions may be useful (also see Determining Significance below.).	<b>Imperceptible</b>  An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences.
	<b>Not significant</b>  An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.
	<b>Slight Effects</b>  An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities.
	<b>Moderate Effects</b>  An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends.
	<b>Significant Effects</b>  An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity alters a sensitive aspect of the environment.
	<b>Very Significant</b>  An effect which, by its character, magnitude, duration or intensity significantly alters most of a sensitive aspect of the environment.
	<b>Profound Effects</b>  An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics
<b>Describing the Extent and Context of Effects</b>  Context can affect the perception of significance. It is important to establish if the effect is unique or, perhaps, commonly or increasingly experienced.	<b>Extent</b>  Describe the size of the area, the number of sites, and the proportion of a population affected by an effect.
	<b>Context</b>

	Describe whether the extent, duration, or frequency will conform or contrast with established (baseline) conditions (is it the biggest, longest effect ever?)
<b>Describing the Probability of Effects</b>  Descriptions of effects should establish how likely it is that the predicted effects will occur – so that the CA can take a view of the balance of risk over advantage when making a decision.	<b>Likely Effects</b>  The effects that can reasonably be expected to occur because of the planned project if all mitigation measures are properly implemented.
	<b>Unlikely Effects</b>  The effects that can reasonably be expected not to occur because of the planned project if all mitigation measures are properly implemented.
<b>Describing the Duration and Frequency of Effects</b>  'Duration' is a concept that can have different meanings for different topics – in the absence of specific definitions for different topics the following definitions may be useful.	<b>Momentary Effects</b>  Effects lasting from seconds to minutes
	<b>Brief Effects</b>  Effects lasting less than a day
	<b>Temporary Effects</b>  Effects lasting less than a year
	<b>Short-term Effects</b>  Effects lasting one to seven years.
	<b>Medium-term Effects</b>  Effects lasting seven to fifteen years.
	<b>Long-term Effects</b>  Effects lasting fifteen to sixty years.
	<b>Permanent Effects</b>  Effects lasting over sixty years
	<b>Reversible Effects</b>  Effects that can be undone, for example through remediation or restoration
	<b>Frequency of Effects</b>  Describe how often the effect will occur. (once, rarely, occasionally, frequently, constantly – or hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, annually)
<b>Describing the Types of Effects</b>	<b>Indirect Effects (a.k.a. Secondary Effects)</b>  Impacts on the environment, which are not a direct result of the project, often produced away from the project site or because of a complex pathway.

	<b>Cumulative Effects</b>  The addition of many minor or significant effects, including effects of other projects, to create larger, more significant effects.
	<b>'Do-Nothing Effects'</b>  The environment as it would be in the future should the subject project not be carried out.
	<b>'Worst case' Effects</b>  The effects arising from a project in the case where mitigation measures substantially fail.
	<b>Indeterminable Effects</b>  When the full consequences of a change in the environment cannot be described.
	<b>Irreversible Effects</b>  When the character, distinctiveness, diversity or reproductive capacity of an environment is permanently lost.
	<b>Residual Effects</b>  The degree of environmental change that will occur after the proposed mitigation measures have taken effect.
	<b>Synergistic Effects</b>  Where the resultant effect is of greater significance than the sum of its constituents, (e.g. combination of SOx and NOx to produce smog).