

Laois COUNTY COUNCIL
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

EIA Screening Determination

1) Introduction

This report has been informed by:

- Schedules 5, 7 and 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended);
- 'Guidelines for Planning Authorities and an An Bord Pleanala on carrying out Environment Impact Assessment', issued by the DHPLG (2018); and,
- Part VIII planning documents

2) Proposed Development

Laois County Council is proposing to develop the following:

1. Refurbishment works to the existing former courthouse building (a Protected Structure, RPS number 319) to provide office spaces and meeting rooms (c.332sqm) pursuant to Part XI, Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended and Part VIII of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)

The development will consist of:

1. Refurbishment works to the existing former courthouse building (a Protected Structure, RPS number 319) to provide office spaces and meeting rooms (c.332sqm).
2. The construction of a single-storey extension structure at first floor level to link the north and south wings of the former courthouse building (c.13sqm).
3. The construction of a two-storey extension structure to provide w.c. facilities and a passenger lift (c.56sqm).
4. The construction of a single-storey extension structure to provide a multi-purpose space and associated service spaces (c.99sqm).
5. The construction of a single-storey detached structure to provide a plant room (c.21sqm).

6. Landscaping works throughout the site including the provision of a public park to the west of the site, a public terrace to the south east of the site and a car park to the north east of the site.

All associated site development works.

3) Legislative Basis for EIA

EIA is a process by which information about the environmental effects of projects is collected, evaluated and presented in a form that provides a basis for consultation. Decision makers can then take account of these effects when determining whether or not a project should proceed. EIA in Ireland must be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) regulations 1989 (as amended) (the EIA Regulations).

This legislation sets down the types of projects that may require an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). Part 1 in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (amended) defines mandatory projects that require an EIAR and Part 2 of the same schedule defines projects that are assessed on the basis of set mandatory thresholds for each of the project classes.

In addition to Part 1 and Part 2 projects as referred to above, there are also sub-threshold projects. These projects may require the submission of an EIAR depending on individual assessments in accordance with certain criteria. They can be categorised by thresholds or can be assessed individually. The guiding principle is that *projects likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue, inter alia, of their nature, size or location* should be subject to EIA. Significant effects may arise by virtue of the type of development, the scale or extent of the development and the location of the development in relation to sensitive environments.

4) EIA Screening

EIA screening can be defined as the process of assessing the requirement of a project to be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment based on the project type and scale and on the significance of the receiving environment.

Mandatory EIA

In the case of the proposed development, it is evident that it would fall under a category of development which would automatically require an EIAR as per Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, outlines the categories of development for the purposes of Part 10 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended – that is development that requires EIAR.

The following categories are relevant:

Schedule 5, Part 2

10. Infrastructure projects:

(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.)

The site is designated village centre in the Laois County development Plan 2017-2023. However, the site could not be considered as a business district based on the meaning outlined above. Consequently, the threshold of 2 hectares is not applicable in this instance. The relevant threshold is 10 hectares. However, with a site area of 0.3 ha approx the proposed development is sub-threshold and does not automatically require EIAR.

Sub-threshold EIA

The key issue with regard to the possible need for EIA of sub-threshold development is whether the development would or would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Article 120 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended states the following
120. (1) (a) Where a local authority proposes to carry out a sub threshold development, the authority shall carry out a preliminary examination of, at the least, the nature, size or location of the development.

(b) Where the local authority concludes, based on such preliminary examination, that—

(i) there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development, it shall conclude that an EIA is not required,

(ii) there is significant and realistic doubt in regard to the likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development, it shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, the information specified in Schedule 7A for the purposes of a screening determination, or
(iii) there is a real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development, it shall—

- (I) conclude that the development would be likely to have such effects, and
- (II) prepare, or cause to be prepared, an EIAR in respect of the development.

(1A) (a) Where the local authority prepares, or causes to be prepared, the information specified in Schedule 7A,

For sub-threshold developments listed in Schedule 5 Part 2, 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.

Schedule 7

The proposed development is considered against the criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. This is based on the existence of realistic doubt in regard to the likelihood of significant effects on the environment and considering the nature, size and location of the proposed development in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations,

The competent authority must proceed to a further examination to determine whether EIA is required pursuant to Schedule 7A to the 2001 Regulations in order to facilitate a formal screening determination.

Characteristics of the proposed development

Size of the proposed development

The area of the application site is given as 0.3ha.

The cumulation with other proposed development

Impacts caused by one project, which may be considered minor and insignificant, can combine with other environmental impacts from existing or planned development. When taken in combination, these impacts could be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Existing development in the surrounding area predominantly comprises institutional and residential uses with a church to the south and a housing scheme to the south and east and dispersed housing to the north.

The adjoining land uses are of a small-medium scale which are in themselves sub threshold developments.

Subject to appropriate restrictions on the proposed development in relation to traffic movements, noise and dust emissions, mostly during the construction phase, it is considered that the potential for significant impacts on the environment from cumulative effects will not arise.

Nature of any associated demolition works

On the basis of the information provided with the Part VIII, the proposed development will not involve significant demolition of any structures as it is proposed to refurbish an existing courthouse building. Consequently, this criteria is not relevant.

The Use of Natural Resources

The proposed development involves the refurbishment of an existing vacant courthouse. Natural resources on the site and in the surrounding area include:

- River Nore SPA – 0.7km to the north west

Given the distance involved in connecting to the SPA and the lack of a hydrological link it is considered that there will be no likely significant effect on the European Site. Also, as the proposed development has no discharges of note it is considered that there will be no potential for significant impacts on watercourses.

Production of Waste

The proposal will not generate significant quantities of waste. Waste produced during the construction phase will be managed by a site-specific construction and demolition waste management plan.

During the operational phase there will be non-hazardous waste and packaging waste, WEEE, empty containers and landscaping waste.

Pollution and Nuisances

The proposed development has the potential to result in pollution and nuisances in the area during the construction phase due to dust and noise. Mitigation measures are proposed to deal with these issues including proper construction methodology.

It is considered that soil and water pollution impacts are insignificant and will not result in pollution or nuisance.

Subject to the implementation of the best practice measures identified as part of the proposed development, it is considered that these impacts would not be significant.

Risk of Accidents, having regard to substances or technologies used

None identified

Risks to Human Health

Risks to human health from the proposed development can principally arise from noise and dust emissions during construction.

Subject to the implementation of the mitigation and best practice measures identified as part of the proposed development, it is considered that these impacts would not be significant.

The characteristics of the development do not require EIAR to be carried out.

6) Location of the proposed development

The application site, given as 0.3 hectares approx, is situated on a serviced and zoned site within the town boundaries of Borris in Ossory. The site is immediately adjacent to the R445 Strategic Regional Road which runs through the village. The site is brownfield. The site is bounded by a church and housing.

The relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area and its underground

The proposed development is not likely to have significant effect on any Natura 2000 site owing to the separation distance, the lack of discharges and the existing connection to the public sewer network.

The absorption capacity of the natural environment

The site is not located in any upland or wetland area.

On the basis of the information available from a site walkover and from the Planning Authority's GIS in relation to archaeological heritage, there are no landscapes and sites of archaeological significance on or in the vicinity of the application site.

The design proposals will have a minimum impact the important aspects of the early 19th century building. A design statement and Architectural Impact Assessment has been prepared with a view to minimising the impact on the protected structure and the streetscape. The design will provide for the sympathetic redesign and refurbishment of an important and prominent building within the village.

7) Types and Characteristics of the Potential Impacts

Potential impacts can arise in relation to:

- Operational noise, vibration, dust and related nuisances for lands and adjoining properties the site mainly during the construction phase.
- Pollution of groundwater and surface water from during construction.
- There is no archaeological or architectural heritage on or in the vicinity of the site which could be impacted on by the proposed development.

Transfrontier nature of impact

The proposed development will be localised and will take place fully within the administrative area of Laois County Council.

Magnitude and complexity of impact

It is not considered that impacts from the proposed development would have the potential to affect a large range of receptors over a wide geographical area. The spatial extent of impacts would be more localised and the size of the population likely to effected would not be significant.

Probability of impacts

Impacts from the proposed development can arise over the duration of the construction works, particularly with respect to noise and dust emissions, potential pollution of groundwater and surface water, and traffic impacts on the local road network. Subject to the implementation of the mitigation and best practice measures, it is considered that these impacts would not be significant.

Expected Onset, Duration, frequency and reversibility of impact

The development consists of refurbishment works to the existing former courthouse building (a Protected Structure, RPS number 319) to provide office spaces and meeting rooms (c.332sqm), extensions and associated site development works on a zoned and serviced site in the town of Borris in Ossory. It is considered that the duration of any impacts will be during the construction phase of the development which may extend to a 12 -24 month time period.

8) Conclusion

I consider that the proposed development does not require an Environmental Impact Assessment as it is not likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue, inter alia, of its nature, size or location.

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