



Environmental Impact Assessment Screening

Proposed Strategic Housing Development at
Cartronroy, Kilnafaddoge, Lissywollen and Ardnaglug
(townlands), Athlone, Co. Westmeath

Avenir Homes Limited

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Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Statement

This Environmental Impact Assessment Screening has been prepared by HW Planning on behalf of Avenir Homes Limited to determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) is required for a Strategic Housing Development (SHD) at Lissywollen, Athlone.

This statement should be read in conjunction with other application documents including the Statement of Consistency, Appropriate Assessment Screening, Ecological Impact Assessment Report, Landscape Design Statement, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Noise Impact Assessment, Daylight and Shadow Impact Assessment, Traffic and Transport Assessment, and Construction Environmental Management Plan.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a procedure under the terms of European Directives on the assessment of the impacts of certain public and private projects on the environment. In accordance with the provisions of Part X of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), an EIA shall be carried out in respect of an application for development which is specified in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) [the Regulations]. A mandatory EIA is required for developments which fall within the remit of Schedule 5.

In addition, a 'sub-threshold' EIA may be required, if the Planning Authority determines that the development would be likely to have significant impacts on the environment. Schedule 7 of the Regulations details the criteria for determining whether a development would or would not be likely to have significant impacts on the environment considering the characteristics of the proposed development, its location and characteristics of potential impacts.

Having regard to the above, the first step in the EIA process is to undertake a screening exercise to determine whether or not EIA is required for a particular project. This report considers same relative to European best practice guidance on such matters.

Article 4(4) of the Directive 2014/52/EU introduces a new Annex IIA to be used in the case of screening determinations. Annex IIA of Directive 2014/52/EU requires that the following information be provided by a developer in respect of projects listed in Annex II:

"1. A description of the project, including in particular:

a) a description of the physical characteristics of the whole project and, where relevant, of demolition works.

b) a description of the location of the project, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected.

2. A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the project.

3. A description of any likely significant effects, to the extent of the information available on such effects, of the project on the environment resulting from:

a) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant.

b) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity.

4. The criteria of Annex III shall be taken into account, where relevant, when compiling the information in accordance with points 1 to 3."

Schedule 7 of the Regulations details the criteria the planning authority must consider in determining whether a sub-threshold EIA should be undertaken. This schedule is a direct transposition of Annex III of EU Directive 2011/92/EU. EU Directive 2014/52/EU provides a revised Annex III and its transposition into national legislation is mandatory. Accordingly, the pro-forma included as Appendix A in this report provides a screening statement of the proposed development against the Annex III criteria of 2014/52/EU.

1.2 Background to the EIA Screening

The EIA Screening is being prepared having regard to article 299B (1)(b)(ii)(II) and article 299B(1)(c) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2018.

Article 299B (1)(b)(ii)(II) states the following:

(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 satisfy itself that the applicant has provided to the Board

(A) the information specified in Schedule 7A,

(B) any further relevant information on the characteristics of the proposed development and its likely significant effects on the environment, and

(C) a statement indicating how the available results of other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment carried out pursuant to European Union legislation other than the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive have been taken into account.

Article 299B(1)(c)

The information referred to in paragraph (b)(ii)(II) may be accompanied by a description of the features, if any, of the proposed development and the measures, if any, envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment of the development.

Project Details

2.1 Description & Characteristics of the Proposed Development

Avenir Homes Limited intend to apply to An Bord Pleanála for permission for a strategic housing development at Cartrontroty, Kilnafaddoge, Lissywollen and Ardnaglug (townlands), Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

The proposed development is for the construction of a mixed-use residential and student accommodation development comprising:

The construction of a mixed use residential development of 122 no. residential units with ancillary creche, 46 no. student apartments consisting of 283 bed spaces, and all associated site development works. The proposed development makes provision for 60 no. dwelling houses comprising 38 no. 2-storey 3-bed townhouses, 7 no. 2-storey 4-bed townhouses, 7 no. 3-storey 4-bed townhouses, 6 no. 2 storey 4-bed semi-detached and 2 no. 2 storey 4-bed detached. The proposed development includes 62 no. apartments / duplexes to be provided as follows: Block R1 containing 38 no. apartments (16 no. 1 bed units and 22 no. 2 bed units) in a 3-6 storey building, and Block R2 containing 20 no. duplex units (10 no. 2 bed units and 10 no. 3 bed units) over 4 storeys with 4 no. apartments (4 no. 2 bed units) in one 5th storey feature area. The proposed student accommodation makes provision for 283 no. bed spaces in 3 no. blocks to be provided as follows: Block S1 containing 18 apartments with 117 bed spaces over 5-6 storeys, Block S2 containing 16 apartments with 107 bed spaces over 6-7 storeys, and Block S3 containing 12 apartments with 59 bed spaces over 4-5 storeys.

The proposed development will provide for two new vehicular accesses as well as pedestrian entrances onto Lissywollen Avenue east-west access road (as permitted under An Bord Pleanála Reference ABP-309513-21). Minor modifications to ABP-309513-21 are proposed to cater for these access points, alterations to cycle/pedestrian paths, the removal of a central island to facilitate the south-eastern entrance, and provision of bus stop infrastructure. Ancillary site works include public and communal open spaces, hard and soft landscaping, pedestrian / cycleways, car parking, cycle parking, bin storage, public lighting, roof mounted solar panels, ESB substation and supporting distribution kiosks, and all other ancillary works above and below ground. The proposal includes pedestrian and cycle linkages onto the Old Rail Trail Greenway to the south and Blackberry Lane (L40061) to the west.

In addition to the above specified works within the red-line boundary, Westmeath County Council are facilitating some offsite works to support the project for which the applicant has confirmed written consent. These include:

- Resurfacing Blackberry lane along the western extent of the site. A special development contribution has been agreed with the applicant for such purposes.
- Facilitating works to complete connections to the Old Rail Trail Greenway, including

- » Completion of pedestrian/cycle path between Blocks R1 and S1 to the surfaced area of the greenway to the south, and;
- » Replacement of existing gated access between the greenway and Blackberry Lane (southwest of the site) with a revised arrangement with dedicated cycle/pedestrian access. Final works to be agreed with Westmeath County Council.

Avenir Homes Limited, are the majority owners¹ of the subject site, which is c. 4.1 hectares in area and located c. 3 km east of Athlone Town Centre, south of the N6 and accessed via Junction 9 from the R916 at Garrycastle. The site comprises parts of three separate fields with the collective lands bounded to the south by the Old Rail Trail Greenway, the east by zoned residential/mixed use lands, a local Spar, and an ESB Depot. Blackberry Lane abuts the site to the west, north and east. This will be replaced to the north and east by a new east-west distributor road (Lissywollen Avenue), which has planning permission as well as secured funding under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). The wider lands to the north and east are zoned for development and form part of the Lissywollen South Framework Development Area. The site is located a short distance from a significant amount of social and community infrastructure including schools, sports clubs and facilities, as well as Athlone Institute of Technology, and some large employment areas to the west and north of the N6.

2.2 Environmental Sensitivities

LANDSCAPE

The submission includes a Landscape Strategy Report and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) by Forestbird Design. The subject lands occupy a low lying and generally level ground site bounded by the N6 to the north and the Old Rail Trail Greenway to the south. The site is not within a defined area of landscape sensitivity and all 9 no. Architectural Conservations Areas in Athlone are either fully or substantially obscured in terms of possible intervisibility. However, the Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-20 does identify Blackberry Lane, which runs along the western boundary, as an historic road dating from 1837 and in general advocates for the retention of key landscape features. It is proposed to respect the historic character of Blackberry Lane which it is envisaged will function as a public foraging route with attendant biodiversity enhancements. Based on a hedgerow survey the scheme retains the most beneficial trees and hedgerow segments, including along the Greenway to the south, with compensatory planting of new trees and native transplants proposed.

In line with Objective P2-KS06 of the Lissywollen South Framework Plan 2018-20 the proposal includes the provision of urban public parkland. In view of the diverse range of users and the proximity to the Regional Sports Centre the Landscape Strategy proposes the provision of a series of linked spaces each tailored to suit different cohorts of the future intended residents and users including: a student quarter, a multi-functional green space and an urban adventure play area.

While the LVIA considers this a site of low sensitivity with little or no impact on statutorily designated receptors, it notes that it has a potential landscape and visual impact locally as an eastern gateway to the town. It confirms that with structures up to 7 storeys in height,

¹The southwestern corner of the site is in the ownership of The Housing Agency, with parts of the site boundary that extend onto Lissywollen Avenue in the ownership of Westmeath County Council.

the proposals will inevitably be visible from a number of locations, however this will not necessarily be negative. A number of receptors received a positive impact reflecting placemaking and contemporary design considerations. When viewed in the context of the adjacent permitted development many negative impacts become neutral – positive. With the planned retention of the Greenway hedgerow and Lissywollen Avenue hedgerows, the proposals create a dynamic experience not only for residents but for the general public, which contributes to the concept of the Lissywollen development corridor.

AMENITY

As with any new development within an urban area, there is the potential for overlooking and overshadowing arising from and within the proposed scheme. To address this potential issue a suite of technical reports in relation to the daylight and sunlight reception of the existing and proposed habitable rooms and amenity areas has been undertaken by DK Partnership. Based on this analysis, the design of the proposed development has been rigorously tested against a number of key assessments and the proposal will provide future occupants with high quality amenity while protecting the amenities of existing residents in the area.

BIODIVERSITY & EUROPEAN SITES

The accompanying Ecology Impact Assessment prepared by Ecology Ireland Environmental Consultants classifies the habitats occurring within the subject site as: Agricultural grassland (Semi-improved) (GA1S), Neutral grassland (GS1N), Dry calcareous and neutral grassland (GS1), Dry meadows and grassy verges (GS2), Recolonising bare ground/Semi-natural grassland (ED3/GS), Hedgerows (WL1) and Scrub (WS1). These are all considered to be of local (lower value) ecological value, with the exception of a small area of GS1 and WL1 comprising the field boundaries, which are both of local (higher value). A total of 29 bird species were recorded near or on-site, 3 of which were red-list species and 5 were amber-list species. However, the EclA concludes that the subject site contains limited foraging, commuting, breeding and resting habitats for any of the listed bird species and is of low local importance for the local avian community. Similarly, in relation to terrestrial mammals and invertebrates the EclA considers that the subject site contains extremely limited habitats for these species in general, with the mammal species recorded being listed amongst the species of 'Least Concern' in the Irish Red Data Book of Mammals (Marnell et al., 2019) and the subject site being considered of low local importance for mammal (non-volant) species. The habitats are also considered of lower local value for most other taxa species at present. See separate Bat Section below. While the EclA considers that the permanent loss of the grassland and hedgerow habitats as a result of the proposed development will result in a moderate, negative effect (Section 4), it concludes that the habitats in the subject site are of low local importance overall in relation to biodiversity and given the measures included in the Landscape Management Plan, in conjunction with the implementation of standard best practice ecological measures the impact on habitats, flora and fauna will be imperceptible neutral overall (Section 6).

Potentially invasive plant species were recorded within the proposed development site, notably 'risk of medium impact' Traveller's Joy as well as Snowberry and Montbretia. It is recommended that a suitably experienced contractor is employed to undertake an invasive species eradication programme.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has also been prepared by Ecology Ireland Environmental Consultants. This examined the likelihood of significant effects on European sites arising from the proposed development.

It notes that there is a total of ten Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), three Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (ref Table 2.1) and fourteen Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) located within 15km of the study site.

Natura 2000 sites	Code
Crosswood Bog SAC	002337
Middle Shannon Callows SPA	004096
River Shannon Callows SAC	000216
Lough Ree SAC	000440
Lough Ree SPA	004064
Carn Park Bog SAC	002336
Pilgrim's Rd. Esker SAC	001776
Mongan Bog SAC	000580
Mongan Bog SPA	004017
Castlesampson Esker SAC	001625
Ballynamona Bog & Corkip Lough SAC	002339
Fin Lough SAC	000576
Lough Funshinagh SAC	000611

Table 2.1 - List of Natura 2000 sites within 15km of subject site

- There are no watercourses within the proposed site and in view of the drainage and SuDS proposals there are no concern in relation to hydrologically mediated effects on any of the other nationally or European designated conservation sites in the wider hinterland area.
- Given the nature, scale and location of the proposed development there is no likelihood of significant disturbance or displacement impacts on species in the surrounding area.
- The AA Screening considers there will be no direct or indirect habitat loss of relevance to the Natura 2000 sites in the wider area as a result of the proposed development.

The AA Screening concludes that there will be no impacts on the key relationships that define the local Natura 2000 sites.

BAT ASSESSMENT

The accompanying EclA Report prepared by Ecology Ireland Environmental Consultants includes a focused section on bats. A field boundary visual inspection was undertaken which assessed the site to have low potential for roosting bats with no potential roost features noted. Bat detectors were deployed which recorded relatively limited activity for foraging and commuting bat, with recorded species being widespread and common and largely considered to be of least concern in terms of conservation status. The EclA concludes that while the subject site does not currently support roosting opportunities, there are some commuting/feeding opportunities through the presence of linear/edge hedgerow habitat features on the southern boundary of the site. The study site is therefore considered to be of low-moderate local value for bats overall. With the adoption of the measures included in the Landscape Management Plan, in conjunction with the implementation of standard best practice ecological measures it is predicted that the impact on all fauna including bats will be imperceptible neutral overall (Section 6).

TRAFFIC IMPACT

The proposed development includes two new vehicular entrances onto the permitted Lissywollen Avenue alongside pedestrian, cycle and bus stop infrastructure and pedestrian and cycle linkages onto the Old Rail Trail Greenway to the south and Blackberry Lane to the west. The accompanying Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) prepared by ORS Engineers notes that following consultation with Westmeath County Council, it was agreed that the TTA would focus mainly on the junction between R916/Moydrum Road, due to its proximity to the proposed development. Existing traffic data, predicted traffic arising from the adjacent permitted development (ABP 309513-21) and the projected traffic arising from the proposed development were modelled and capacity assessments have been carried. From this analysis it is considered that the operation phase of the proposed Green Quarter SHD will not adversely affect the functionality of the R916/Moydrum Road roundabout, as the Green Quarter SHD will be constructed subsequent to the Lissywollen Avenue and associated road improvement measures are constructed. The site is well-served by public transport and it is proposed to introduce two no. additional bus stops adjacent to the scheme on the existing A2 bus route to Athlone Town. It also enjoys excellent connectivity for walking and cycling to the nearby schools, employment areas and the Athlone Institute of Technology. It is therefore considered that sustainable transport modes will be widely adopted by the future residents of the scheme.

The construction phase has the potential to increase traffic congestion and/or public safety hazard, without appropriate measures. Please refer to the Outline Traffic Management Plan (Section 7.3) contained within the Construction and Environmental Management Plan prepared by ORS Engineers.

FLOOD RISK

An initial desktop review of flood risk was carried out by ORS Engineers, as part of the Civil Engineering Report. This determines that the subject site is not within an area identified as being at risk of flooding. Furthermore, the proposed development will present no significant increase in risk of flooding either within the site or downstream of the site. This view is supported in Section 3.12 of the Council's opinion (dated 02/09/2021).

NOISE

In the Council's opinion (dated 02/09/2021) it was suggested that a noise assessment report should be prepared as the site may be subject to environmental noise arising from the proximity of the N6 as identified in the Westmeath County Council Noise Action Plan 2018-2023. It is noted generally that permitted reference ABP-309513-21 includes dwelling houses and amenity areas in closer proximity to the N6 than the subject site. A noise impact assessment has been undertaken by DK Partnership. Based on this analysis, the design of the proposed development has been rigorously tested against a number of key assessments and the proposal will provide future occupants with high quality amenity, with the noise exposure both internally within the residential units and student apartment block and externally in the dedicated amenity spaces being within the guidelines as set out under the WHO/CIBSE/BS8233/EPA. As noted in the report, provision is made in the design for a berm with vegetative planting at the northernmost open space area to assist with external noise mitigation in this area.

HERITAGE

The application is supported by an Archaeological Assessment by John Cronin & Associates. The subject lands do not contain any recorded monuments listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP). The nearest recorded archaeological sites to the subject lands are located south of the old Railway line (i.e. WSM029-023 ringfort; burial ground and WM029-022 military camp). It was established under the adjoining Alannah Roadridge development that the subject area is not a landscape of historic heritage value. Field walking and archaeological testing was undertaken on these adjoining lands. No features or finds indicative of archaeological remains were recorded. Following consultation of the available and relevant datasets and historic documentary and cartographic sources, the submitted assessment has concluded that the proposed scheme will have no impact on recorded archaeological heritage resource. The proposed development area is located within an undeveloped parcel of good quality agricultural land and the site does not appear to have been subject to significant past ground disturbance. The assessment has also concluded the subject site possesses moderate archaeological potential. It is recommended that a programme of archaeological monitoring during topsoil stripping is conducted across the entire development site. Please refer to Section 5 of the submitted Archaeological Assessment.

SOIL

The GSI database shows the bedrock geology underlying the site is dominated by Waulsortian Limestone laid down during the Tournaisian period, with a lithology of gravels derived from limestone across the site. There are no karst landforms or rock outcrops indicated on the site. Potential impacts on land, soil and geology in the absence of appropriate construction phase measures include the following:

- Soils have the potential to become polluted by spillages during construction.
- Soils have the potential to be compacted by plant and machinery during construction.

- Soils (inert and/or contaminated soils) require excavation and subsequent offsite recovery and/or disposal.
- Potential exposure of workers to contaminated soil.

No potential impacts on land, soils, geology, surface water or groundwater during the operational phase of the proposed development, are envisaged.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

This screening assessment has also considered potential cumulative impacts that could arise from the proposed development in combination with other known projects in the area. Of significance is the adjacent permitted SHD (ABP-309513-21- Alanna Roadbridge Developments Ltd.) comprising 576 no. residential units, 2 no. creches, community hub building and east-west access road through the development site, extending from the Ballymahon roundabout (on the R915 to the west), to the Garrycastle roundabout (when constructed, will abut the subject lands to the north and east) and all associated road development works². The phasing of the development provides for the upfront delivery of the above referenced Lissywollen Avenue road through the Lissywollen South Framework Area. Clarity on the timing of the delivery of this route was sought from Westmeath County Council as part of the preparation of the application. The Council have confirmed the road will commence in 2022 and its entirety will be constructed at the start of the overall development. Given the timelines involved with the subject application, it is fully envisaged that the road will be in place prior to construction of proposed development.

The proposed amendment works to the permitted Lissywollen Avenue are very minor in nature and comprise the omission of a traffic island, signing and lining for provision of two bus stops, tie-ins to pedestrian and cycle infrastructure and a footpath extension. These works have been agreed with Westmeath County Council. They relate to the subject proposal only and will be delivered commensurate with construction works for The Green Quarter SHD. They do not prejudice the construction of the road as originally permitted under ABP-309513-21.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) identifies the development of the strategic landbank at Lissywollen South, also offers the opportunity to develop a new urban quarter extending from the town centre. Consideration of the potential cumulative impacts of this development in combination with the adjoining permitted development and the development of the wider Framework area has been key in arriving at the appropriate design solution for the site. The potential for the construction of the proposal to coincide with other phases of the Framework will be considered in full as part of the Construction and Environmental Management Plan and the potential for such unforeseen impacts will be addressed accordingly as part of focused response measures.

Given the site's key location within the Lissywollen South Framework Plan area it is considered that it will represent a key entry point for the wider area. This is reflected in the emphasis on pedestrian and cyclist permeability through routed desire lines to key locations. It also opens up the opportunity for the future development of the adjoining site to the immediate east by way of offering appropriate road and boundary conditions.

² With a site area of 17.64 hectares and 576 residential units, a mandatory EIAR was prepared for this project. This has been reviewed to appropriately inform the subject EIA screening exercise.

The development of the subject site and the overall Lisseywollen South Framework Plan area is supported by adopted plans and policy objectives which have been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. The environmental effect of the proposed development has already been adjudicated on and it has been determined that the types of intended development would be appropriate relative to the subject site and adjacent areas. It is anticipated that the subject proposal will provide for important synergistic and cumulative benefits in the wider area.

2.3 Description of Aspects of the Environment likely to be affected by the project.

The most significant possible negative impacts on the environment, without appropriate mitigation measures in place, are likely to be:

- Construction traffic contributing to traffic congestion and road safety hazards on the local road network.
- Additional traffic on local road network once scheme is operational.
- Adverse health and amenity impacts arising from noise and air quality pollution during the construction phase.
- Disturbance and habitat loss of fauna.
- Possible residential amenity and visual impacts.
- Increased demand on recreation and amenity services in the vicinity.
- Possible impacts include a risk of inadequacy or malfunction of the sewage system resulting in contamination, odour and potential human health impacts. A lack of capacity in the water or sewer network, could result in a lack of supply to residential units.

These matters have been considered in full as part of the design and assessment of the subject proposal, with a range of positive measures produced in response, including:

- Provision of a detailed Landscape Design Strategy and Landscaping Proposals.
- Preparation of Daylight Reception and Sunlight Reception Reports.
- Preparation of a Noise Impact Assessment Report.
- Provision of an AA Screening, Ecological Impact Assessment Report.
- Provision of a Traffic and Transport Assessment.
- Preparation of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan.
- Preparation of a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment.

2.4 Expected Residues / Emissions / Production of Waste

It is expected that there will be some normal residues/emissions during the construction stage. Standard dust and noise prevention reduction measures as per the majority of planning applications of all scales will be employed and monitored. As such, pollution and nuisances are not considered likely to have the potential to cause significant impacts on the environment. Construction will be guided by a Construction and Environmental Management Plan. There will be some waste produced in the construction of the proposed scheme, but this will be subject to normal controls. This will be disposed of using licensed waste disposal facilities and contractors.. The scale of the waste production in

conjunction with the use of licensed waste disposal facilities and contractors does not cause concern for likely significant impacts on the environment.

During the operational phase, everyday waste and recycling from residential dwellings will be disposed of by approved licensed waste disposal contractors. There are no significant mitigations measures or methods to be undertaken in order to reduce likely significant impacts on the environment in order to complete the proposed scheme. Any measures to manage noise, dust and/or pollution during the construction and operational phases are subject to standard policies and practices.

2.5 Use of Natural Resources – Soil / Land / Water / Biodiversity

There will be no significant likely impacts on the environment in relation to natural resources in the area. The main use of natural resources will be land. However, the land is a greenfield site in an urban context. The scale of natural resources used both in construction and operation is not such that would cause concern in terms of significant likely impacts on the environment. The development will not result in high demand for water use.

As outlined in the prepared Appropriate Assessment screening, there is no likelihood of significant impacts on the nearest European sites.

Assessment of EIA Requirement

3.1 Schedule 5 Criteria

Article 93 and Schedule 5 of the 2001 Planning and Development Regulations sets out the classes of development for which a planning application must be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR).

Part 1 and Part 2 Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 defines the categories and thresholds of developments requiring EIA. The subject proposal does not come under any of the stipulated categories contained in Part 1.

The proposed development for a residential and employment scheme and ancillary works falls within the category of an 'Infrastructure Project' under Schedule 5 (10) (b) of the Planning and Development Regulations, which provides that a mandatory EIAR must be carried out for the following projects:

"b)

(i) Construction of more than 500 dwellings

(ii) Construction of a car-park providing more than 400 spaces, other than a car-park provided as part of, and incidental to the primary purpose of, a development.

(iii) Construction of a shopping centre with a gross floor space exceeding 10,000 square metres.

(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 proposed development does not trigger a requirement for mandatory EIA because:

- At 4.1 ha, the site area is below the 10 hectare threshold for urban development other than a business district that would trigger a mandatory EIA.
- At 264, the number of housing units falls well below the threshold of 500 dwellings³.

³ Based on 122 conventional housing units and 142 (no. rounded up) student accommodation units, whereby 2 no bed spaces are considered to equate to 1 unit for the purposes of EIA, as per established practice.

3.2 Schedule 7 Criteria

Schedule 7 of the Regulations details the criteria the planning authority must consider in determining whether a sub-threshold EIA should be undertaken. This schedule is a direct transposition of Annex III of EU Directive 2011/92/EU. EU Directive 2014/52/EU provides a revised Annex III and its transposition into national legislation is mandatory. Accordingly, the following provides a screening statement of the proposed development against the Annex III criteria of 2014/52/EU.

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Appendix A – Schedule 7 Screening Summary

Construction Phase

Criteria for assessment of EIA sub-threshold	Impacts during Construction Phase
<p>1. Characteristics of proposed development The characteristics of the proposed development, in particular</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The size of the proposed development 	<p>The site area is 4.1 ha. It will be constructed as a two phases over a period of 24 - 36 months. The construction works themselves will be confined to the site and will be informed by a Construction and Environmental Management Plan to mitigate potential impacts.</p> <p>The proposed development also includes the minor modifications to works permitted under ABP-309513-21 including alterations to cycle/pedestrian paths, the removal of a central island to facilitate the south-eastern entrance, and provision of bus stop infrastructure. The proposed works also includes pedestrian and cycle linkages onto the Old Rail Trail Greenway to the south and Blackberry Lane (L40061) to the west. These works will be guided by appropriate construction, environmental and health and safety measures to ensure no impact to the existing population or future population of the adjoining permitted development.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cumulation with other proposed development 	<p>This screening assessment has also considered potential cumulative impacts that could arise from the proposed development in combination with other known projects in the area.</p> <p>Given the site's key location within the Lissywollen South Framework Plan area it is considered that other as yet unknow development is likely at a future stage.</p> <p>The one significant known proposed development is the adjoining permitted SHD development (ABP-309513-21) comprising 576 no. residential units, 2 no. creches, community hub building and east-west access road through the Lissywollen South Framework Area. This road</p>

	<p>is government funded and will be completed in 2022 prior to any works on the subject site</p> <p>In a scenario that follow on phases of permitted reference ABP-309513-21 or other as yet unknown development are under construction at the same time as the proposed scheme, the prepared Construction and Environmental Management plan will provide for appropriate traffic management and other procedures in such a scenario. This will be agreed with Westmeath County Council prior to commencement of any development.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>- The Nature of any demolition works</p>	<p>The proposed development does not include any demolition works.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>- the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity</p>	<p>Energy, including electricity and fuels, will be required during construction phase. Rock and soil resources to be excavated. Construction will use various raw materials typical of the construction of residential and employment developments. The proposal has been designed to allow for the retention of significant areas of existing vegetation along the southern and eastern boundaries. Alongside this 19.7% of the developable area will form a modern urban public parkland comprising a series of linked spaces. In addition, in the project landscape strategy the exiting historic Blackberry Lane is conceived as a public foraging laneway and reinstated as a biodiversity corridor.</p> <p>It is also proposed to remove impactive invasive species. Considerable numbers of new trees and hedges will be planted as part of the landscaping plan for the new development, this will include significant re-enforcement planting along boundary areas as well as within the site's interior. This new planting will result in a net gain in tree and hedge numbers across the site. Overall the development will impact on low value habitats. While the loss of habitat may lead to a localised and short-term disturbance impacts during construction, no significant impacts on fauna, including birds, are envisaged. In the long term there will be a net gain in terms of biodiversity as there has been a strong emphasis placed on it in the selected planting palette and function of space, as outlined in the accompanying Landscape Strategy.</p>

	<p>No out of the ordinary use of natural resources is likely during the construction process.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
- the production of waste	<p>Waste will be generated during the construction phase and these will be typical of development of this nature. The Construction and Environmental Management Plan includes provisions for handling waste in full accordance with statutory legislation and associated guidance. This includes a suite of focused management measures related to the removal of asbestos containing material.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
- pollution and nuisances	<p>Development of site will increase traffic in the area for the duration of the construction phase. Temporary noise, dust and vibration impacts, as well as any potential for water pollution, will be addressed as part of standard best practice controls.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
- 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	<p>No significant risks on the proposed development site are foreseen, subject to strict compliance with standard environmental controls.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
- the risk to human health (for example due to water contamination or air pollution)	<p>Additional noise and dust from temporary construction works may be experienced by residents and other property users in the vicinity. This can be effectively managed, having regard to the nature of the project and measures proposed in the Construction and Environmental Management Plan. On completion of works, noise and dust levels will return to background levels. Standard water control measures will ensure that run-off of sediment or other pollutants will not enter the watercourse therefore the proposed project will not have any impact on water quality.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>2. Location of proposed development The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by proposed development, having regard to:</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the existing land use 	<p>The site is presently in agricultural use, however it is zoned for residential use as part of the Lissywollen South Framework Plan. Its proposed development is consistent with the land use objective.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area 	<p>The site is not located within or in proximity to a designated area, with the closest being the Crosswood Bog SAC 1.6km from the site. There are 13 no. Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the subject site.</p> <p>An Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report has been prepared to actively consider the potential for adverse impacts on qualifying interests, arising from the construction phase. It concludes that the proposed development either alone or in-combination with other plans and/or projects, will no impact on the key relationships that define the local Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying attention to the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) wetlands, (b) coastal zones, (c) mountain and forest areas, (d) nature reserves and parks, (e) areas classified or protected under legislation, including special protection areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC, (f) areas in which the environmental quality standards laid down in legislation of the EU have already been exceeded, (g) densely populated areas, (h) landscapes of historical, cultural or archaeological significance 	<p>The site is not located within or in the vicinity of a statutory designated area. The nearest being the Crosswood Bog SAC 1.6km from the site, with 12 no. others within 15km of the site. An Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report has been prepared to actively consider the potential for adverse impacts on qualifying interests, arising from the construction phase. The findings of the report have determined that construction of the proposed development will not adversely impact on natural resources.</p> <p>The construction phase will not interfere with any of the areas listed opposite, with the exception of (g) densely populated areas. The accompanying Ecological Impact Assessment prepared by Ecology Ireland Environmental Consultants classifies the habitats occurring within the subject site to comprise mainly Agricultural grassland (Semi-improved) (GA1S), Neutral grassland (GS1N), Dry calcareous and neutral grassland (GS1), Dry meadows and grassy verges (GS2), Recolonising bare ground/Semi-natural grassland (ED3/GS), Hedgerows (WL1) and Scrub (WS1). These are all considered to be of local (lower value) ecological value, with the exception of a small area of GS1 and WL1 comprising the field boundaries, which are both of local (higher value).</p>

	<p>There are no Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) in the vicinity of the vicinity of the subject site.</p> <p>Best practice standards, environmental guidelines measures will be adhered to during the construction phase in order to avoid potential impacts on natural resources and likely significant impacts are not anticipated.</p> <p>The site is presently in agricultural use however, it is in the general vicinity of an existing populated area of Athlone town - a densely populated area. Any interaction with the existing population can be effectively managed, having regard to the nature of the project and measures proposed in the Construction and Environmental Management Plan. On completion of works, noise and dust levels will return to background levels.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>3. Types and Characteristics of potential impacts The potential significant effects of proposed development in relation to criteria set out under paragraphs 1 and 2 above, and having regard in</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected) 	<p>The site is located in proximity to the junction between the R916/Moydrum Road, urban road junction. A Construction Traffic Management Plan will be put in place prior to commencement of development at the site to mitigate any potential negative impacts on traffic flow.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the nature of the impact 	<p>Potential for the environment to be impacted negatively during the construction phase by way of traffic disruption, noise and dust issues etc. Any impacts will be localised and temporary in nature and are not deemed to be significant. These will be proactively managed via standard environmental protection measures.</p> <p>No significant impacts are likely.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the transboundary nature of the impact 	<p>No significant impacts arising from construction of the development.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the intensity and complexity of the impact 	<p>The intensity and complexity of the construction phase is in keeping with modern construction projects.</p>

	No significant negative impacts are likely.
- the probability of the impact	Some level of construction impacts is highly probable, but these will be mitigated by standard best practice techniques identified in the Construction and Environmental Management Plan. No significant negative impact likely.
- the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact.	The construction phase of the development is expected to commence within approximately 6-12 months of any grant of permission and extend for a duration of 24 - 36 months. Any impacts will be short-term and restricted by planning conditions in terms of the hours of operation. No permanent negative impacts are anticipated as a result of the construction phase of the project. No significant negative impact likely.
- 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.	There is potential for impacts caused by the permitted adjacent SHD (ABP-309513-21) and other as yet unknown projects to combine with the subject proposal to give rise to a cumulative effect. This will be considered in full as part of the final pre-commencement Construction and Environmental Management Plan and the potential for such unforeseen impacts will be mitigated accordingly as part of focused response measures. No significant negative impact likely.
- The possibility of effectively reducing the impact	There is a strong possibility of reducing potential impacts arising from the construction phase through appropriate project management and the application of identified best practice construction and environmental protection methods. No significant negative impact likely.

Operational Phase

Criteria for assessment of EIA sub-threshold	Impacts during Operational Phase
<p>1. Characteristics of proposed development</p> <p>The characteristics of the proposed development, in particular</p>	
<p>The size of the proposed development</p>	<p>The site area is 4.1 ha. The development will change the use of the land from agricultural to residential, including student accommodation, and creche use which is consistent with the zoning of the site. The developed design has been tested relative to key policy and guidelines, as well as landscape and visual considerations. Collectively, the size and design of the project will deliver significant positive benefits relative to the 'do-nothing' scenario including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of Housing. • Delivery of Childcare. • Improved Connectivity. • Road safety enhancements. • Biodiversity enhancements through bolstering of existing and new hedge and tree planting. <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>the cumulation with other proposed development</p>	<p>This screening assessment has also considered potential cumulative impacts that could arise from the proposed development in combination with other known projects in the area. A desktop review of other local projects in the vicinity was undertaken and only 1 no. recent significant application in the vicinity was identified - the permitted SHD proposal on adjacent lands (ABP-309513-21) comprising 576 no. residential units, 2 no. creches, community hub building and east-west access road through the development site. There is in addition potential for future development of other Lissywollen South Framework Area lands.</p> <p>The proposed uses are consistent with the residential land use zoning of the site as set out in the Lissywollen</p>

	<p>South Framework Plan and compatible with adjacent permitted land-uses, as enshrined in adopted planning policy. The development will positively integrate with other plans and projects once operational.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity</p>	<p>Water, consumption of electricity, energy related to the proposed residential and creche uses. No out of the ordinary use of natural resources is likely during the operational phase.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>the production of waste</p>	<p>An Operational Waste Management Plan will put in place measures to avoid and / or reduce pollution from operational waste. With these measures in place no significant negative impacts are likely. Domestic and commercial waste will be generated from the development, the disposal of which will be informed by a waste/refuse management strategy for the site. Related practices are unlikely to cause unusual, significant or adverse impacts.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>pollution and nuisances</p>	<p>The site is currently in agricultural use. The proposal will give rise to an increase in traffic and visitor numbers to/from the site. Suitable provision has been made for pedestrian and cycle infrastructure, to connect the site to nearby local centres, to offset vehicular trips.</p> <p>An Operational Waste Management Plan will be put in place prior to the occupation of the development with measures to avoid and / or mitigate pollution from operational waste.</p> <p>Surface water management proposals for the site have been designed in accordance with best practice measures including SuDS measures.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>None foreseen, subject to compliance with building and fire regulations.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>

<p>the risk to human health (for example due to water contamination or air pollution)</p>	<p>None. The development will not involve the use, storage, transport, handling or production of substances or materials which could be harmful to people and the environment. It is considered that this proposal has the potential to have a long-term beneficial impact on human health as a consequence of facilitating sustainable urban development incorporating communal and private open space areas on lands zoned for residential development.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>2. Location of proposed development</p> <p>The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by proposed development, having regard to:</p>	
<p>the existing land use</p>	<p>The site is currently in agricultural use, however, the proposed use is consistent with existing residential use in the vicinity of the site, located as it is within the Athlone Town development boundary and with the site zoning as outlined in the Lissywollen South Framework Plan. The proposal will develop an important strategic site, consistent with the zoning and act as an enabler for future development of other lands in the Framework area.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>the relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area</p>	<p>The proposed operational phase will not have any out of the ordinary impact on natural resources.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying attention to the following areas:</p> <p>wetlands, coastal zones, mountain and forest areas, nature reserves and parks, areas classified or protected under legislation, including special protection areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC,</p>	<p>Proposed use is compatible with the geographical area and zoning, as well as other policy intentions for the area.</p> <p>The high-quality architectural design will contribute to the urban landscape. The retention of much of the existing hedgerow along the southern and eastern boundaries in addition to the further provision of trees and landscaping planting will assimilate the development in its local context and contribute towards an attractive environment.</p> <p>None of the listed areas are in the vicinity of the site with the exception of 'densely populated areas'. Once developed the site will become an integrated part of the</p>

<p>areas in which the environmental quality standards laid down in legislation of the EU have already been exceeded,</p> <p>densely populated areas,</p> <p>landscapes of historical, cultural or archaeological significance</p>	<p>urban area consistent with the zoning objectives for the site.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>3. Characteristics of potential impacts</p> <p>The potential significant effects of proposed development in relation to criteria set out under paragraphs 1 and 2 above, and having regard in</p>	
<p>the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)</p>	<p>The site area is 4.1 ha., and is sub-threshold for the purposes of EIA [Schedule 5, Part 2, Section 10 (b)(iv) of 2001 Planning and Development Regulations]. Development will be compatible with its urban context and consistent with zoning objectives.</p> <p>A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for the project has been undertaken by Forestbird Design Landscape Architects which concludes that the proposed development is an appropriate contribution to both the existing and likely future built fabric of this urban area contributing to the concept of Lisswollen development corridor by the inclusion of positive placemaking and contemporary design considerations.</p> <p>The existing population likely to be impacted will be residents of the existing residential developments in the vicinity of the site. However, this site is zoned for residential use and located within the Lissywollen South Framework area and within the development boundary of Athlone Town where residential and student accommodation is promoted. As such the proposed land use is appropriate and will be compatible with the existing surrounding uses. Increased permeability and enhanced amenity spaces will benefit the existing population.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
<p>the nature of the impact</p>	<p>Expected benefits to physical, micro and macro environments fostering the envisaged growth in the Lissywoolen area. The site is located within an area identified the the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) as a strategic landbank at Lissywollen South, offering the opportunity to develop a new urban</p>

	<p>quarter extending from the town centre. The proposal is in line with regional and local policy ambition for this area and will contribute towards the achievement of the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 overall growth target of 3,310 household units and impacts will be generally positive in nature.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
the transboundary nature of the impact	<p>Given the scale and nature of the proposed development and the remoteness from the nearest E.U. Member state, no transboundary impacts are expected.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
the intensity and complexity of the impact	<p>The proposed development, by its nature will be of low intensity and complexity and the impact of the development will be moderate and will actively managed.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
the probability of the impact	<p>The operational phase will inevitably change the local environment. Measures will be in place to avoid, reduce, or mitigate any likely negative impacts.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact.	<p>Once constructed, the proposal will result in landscape and visual impacts that will be permanent and non-reversible. These have been assessed as part of a Landscape Visual Impact assessment and have been deemed acceptable.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved projects.	<p>The development of the subject site is supported by adopted Development Plans and policy objectives which have been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. The environmental effect of the proposed development has already been adjudicated on and it has been determined that the types of intended development would be appropriate relative to the subject site and adjacent areas. It is anticipated that the subject proposal will provide for important synergistic and cumulative benefits in the wider area.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>

<p>The possibility of effectively reducing the impact</p>	<p>The proposal is being shaped by a number of proactive design measures to reduce the potential for any negative impacts. This includes the promotion of sustainable travel patterns and the inclusion of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems. The proposal also includes extensive planting to improve the amenity and enhance biodiversity in the area.</p> <p>It has been objectively concluded that the proposal will provide for long-term beneficial impacts of varying degrees.</p> <p>No significant negative impact likely.</p>
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Based on the information provided in accordance with Annex IIA and Annex III of the 2014 Directive, it is considered that a sub-threshold EIA is not required for the proposed development, as adequate measures are in place to avoid, reduce or mitigate likely impacts, such that neither the construction nor operational phase of the overall development will have a significant negative impact on the environment.

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