



**CARLIN**  
Planning Limited

Westmeath County Council  
**Athlone Town Centre: Public Realm  
Enhancement Scheme**  
EIA Screening Report

Ref. 038-01

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# 1 Introduction

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This Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report has been prepared by Carlin Planning Limited on behalf of Westmeath County Council (WCC), for the proposed Public Realm Enhancement Works (“proposed development”) in Athlone Town Centre.

The Screening Assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) which transposes the requirements of European Directives 2011/92/EU and 2014/52/EU (EIA Directive).

The purpose of the Screening Assessment is to determine whether or not an EIA is required for the proposed development. Screening is part of the EIA Directives overall aim to determine if a project is likely to have significant effects on the environment. Screening will also ensure that EIA is only carried out for those projects for which it is thought that a significant impact on the environment is possible, therefore ensuring a more efficient use of both public and private resources.

The Screening Report follows the structure set out in Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening (Stage 1: ‘Test of Likely Significance’) has also been undertaken (available as a separate report – Ref. 234/2020-02). The AA screening assessment determines that the proposal will not have any significant effects, either alone or in combination, on any Natura 2000 sites. It concludes that no further assessment is required.

# 2 Environmental Impact Assessment

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## 2.1 Legislation

The EIA Directive has been transposed into domestic legislation by the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

Annex 1 and 2 of the EIA Directive have been transposed into Schedule 5 (Part 1 and 2) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

## 2.2 Screening for EIA

Schedule 5 (Part 1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) lists types of development and relevant thresholds that inform when a mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) <sup>1</sup> is required. Generally, these developments consist of intensive industrial, waste management and transport projects. The proposed development does not fall within any of the types of development listed therefore does not require a mandatory EIAR.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 172 of the Planning and Development Regulations (as amended)

Schedule 5 (Part 2) lists various types of development and associated thresholds. Where a proposed development falls within the type of development and meets or exceeds the relevant threshold, a screening assessment is required, taking into account the information set out within Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). The term “sub-threshold development” means development of a type set out in Part 2 of Schedule 5 which does not equal or exceed, as the case may be, a quantity, area or other limit specified in that Schedule in respect of the relevant class of development<sup>2</sup>. Sub-threshold development should be screened with regard to the requirements set out in Schedule 7A of the Regulations.

The most relevant class of development within Part 2 (Schedule 5) is “urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares (ha) in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20ha elsewhere” (Schedule 5, Part 2, 10 (iv)).

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 location of the proposed development is within a business district therefore the relevant threshold is 2 ha. The development site at 0.56 ha is well below the 2ha threshold.

## 2.3 Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)

Schedule 7A requires:

1. a description of the proposed development, including in particular:
  - (a) a description of the physical characteristics of the whole proposed development and, where relevant, of demolition works, and
  - (b) a description of the location of the proposed development, 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 proposed development.
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:
  - (a) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant, and
  - (b) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity.
4. The compilation of the information at paragraphs 1 to 3 shall take into account, where relevant, the criteria set out in Schedule 7.

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<sup>2</sup> Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations (as amended)

## 3 EIA Screening Assessment

### 3.1 Description of the Development

#### 3.1.1 Overview

The proposed development consists of enhancements to the public realm (i.e. public streets and spaces).

The flagship Church Street Enhancement project was completed in April 2019. WCC now wish to unify the disparate commercial areas along Dublin Gate Street, diverging along Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street and along Pump Lane completing the triangular enclosure (see Figure 1). WCC seek to remedy the disconnect between the west and east bank by providing a strong aesthetic definition to the streets of the town core, using natural stone pavements, creating a pedestrian friendly core that invites exploration by everyone.

WCC has secured Category B funding from the National Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF) to deliver this scheme. A separate scheme for Market Square on the west bank of the River Shannon has also secured funding.

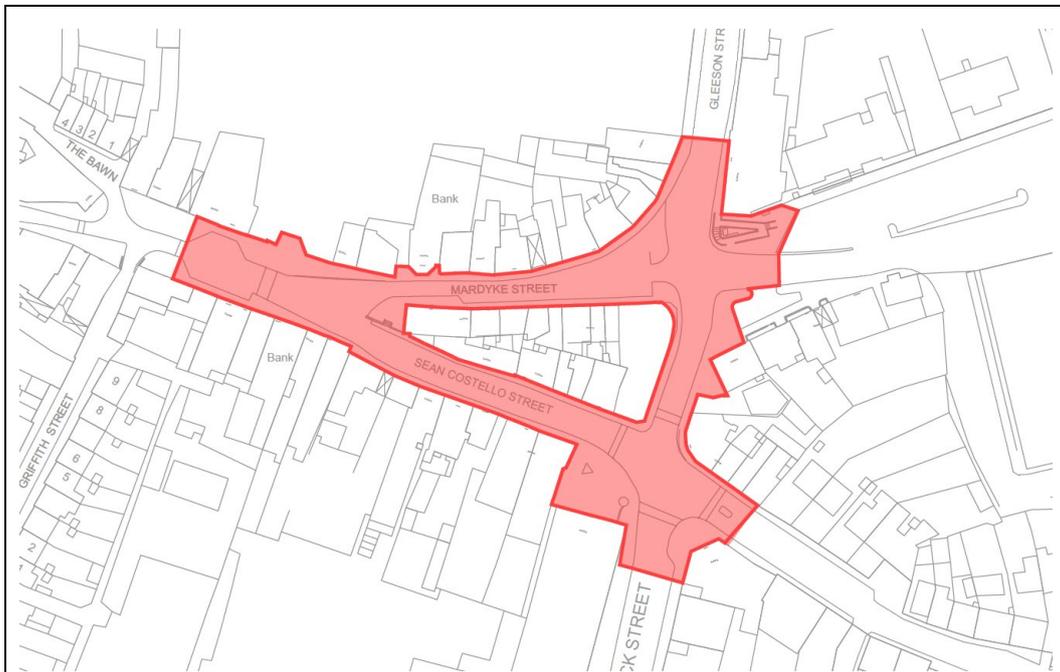


Figure 1: Site Location

#### 3.1.2 Key Design Principles

The scheme has been developed around a number of key design principles as follows:

**Wayfinding:** The implementation of intuitive wayfinding that could work with a wider Town Centre strategy using routes, junctions and landmarks to help orientate people.

**Layout:** Street layout and selection of materials is to consider and follow the principles of the 'Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets' avoiding clutter, complicated layouts and over design. The objective is a 'de-cluttered' streetscape that reduces street furniture and signage and promotes a simplified and legible environment.

**Sustainability:** Proposals that show a move towards a low carbon, climate resilient sustainable environment, considering and complying with the Westmeath County Council Climate Adaption Strategy 2019 – 2024.

**Pedestrians / Accessible:** The creation of a legible environment that is accessible and appealing for all and applies the guidance of documents such as 'Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach'. The design approach must place the pedestrian at the highest level of consideration with essential vehicle movements being layered in around the requirements of people. This approach is consistent with the 'de-cluttering' of streets, providing legible pedestrian environments further enhanced through improved crossings, junctions and public lighting.

**Details and Materials:** Specific objectives in the use and implementation of materials and detailing have been defined for the project, including the height and materiality of kerbs; the requirement for high quality, aesthetically appropriate and robust surfacing; and consideration of durability, life-cycle cost and sustainable maintenance of proposed materials.

**Soft Landscape:** The consideration of soft landscape including tree planting. Placement of these should consider climate, durability, sightlines and space within the streets.

Any tree planting is to be semi-mature, and placement of individual trees is to be considered as they form points of interest within the streetscape.

**Lighting:** Lighting is to be used to provide visual interest but must not detract from the fabric of Athlone's Town Centre. LED luminaires are to be used and reduction of clutter is to be supported through the use of building mounted luminaires wherever feasible. Feature lighting is to be carefully considered, including the lighting of key buildings, artwork or monuments.

**Street Furniture:** The approach to street furniture is to integrate wherever possible, and to coordinate with the rest of the proposals. Issues such as durability and maintenance are to be fully considered, and locations within the public realm must not impede pedestrian flow.

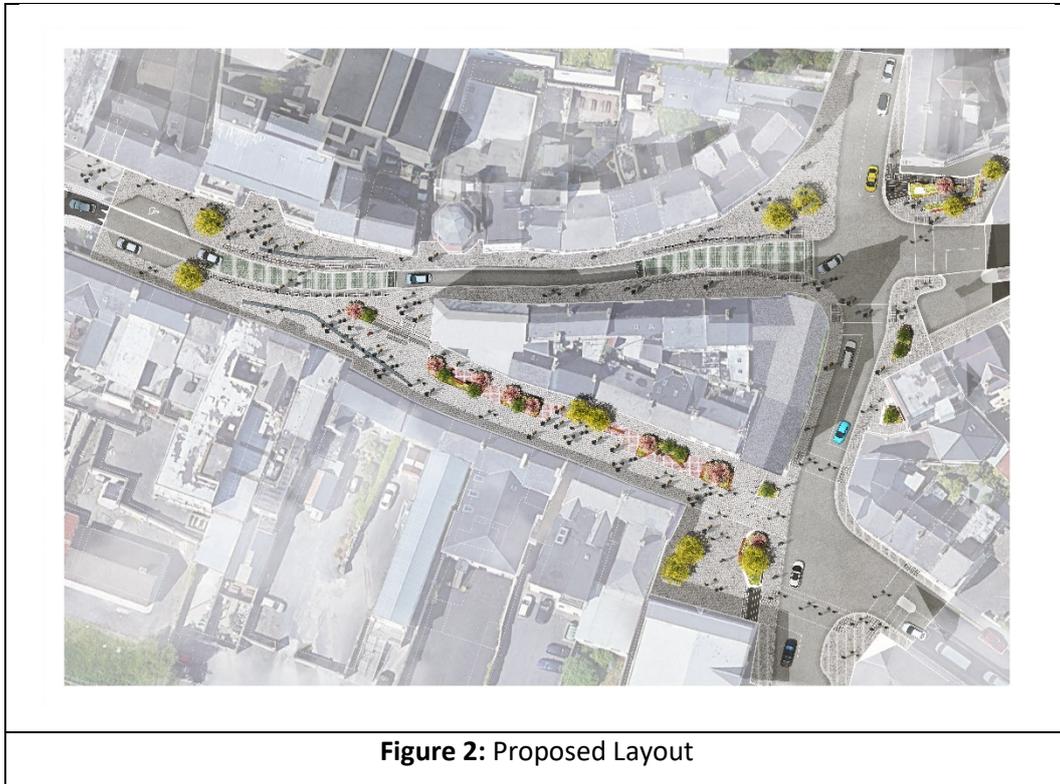
### 3.1.3 Physical description of the works

The Development of Public Realm Enhancement Works, encompassing approximately 0.6HA at Mardyke St, Pump Lane and Sean Costello St, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, including the following public realm improvements:

- Provision of upgraded footpaths and realignment of existing carriage way along Mardyke Street, including 120m of a shared surface and pedestrianisation of 90m of Sean Costello Street, from its junction with Pump Lane to its junction with Mardyke Street, to take account of the access needs of pedestrians, mobility impaired persons and service vehicles.
- Provision of an enhanced public realm and landscape improvements, including street furniture, incidental play equipment, cycle parking, trees, and soft landscaping to enhance biodiversity.

- Provision of a priority signalised junction, including enhanced pedestrian facilities, at the junction of Mardyke Street, Gleeson Street, Pump Lane, and St Mary's Square.
- Upgrade to public lighting, including focal lighting to Sean Costello Street.

And all necessary accommodation works, including utility provision, drainage, signage, and other ancillary works.



### 3.1.4 Demolition Works / Waste Produced

No significant demolition is required for the proposed development. Existing paving materials and furniture will be replaced, and any waste generated will be inert construction and demolition waste that will be utilised on site wherever possible. Waste that cannot be reused (for example, street furniture) will be transferred to an appropriate waste management facility. No significant environmental impacts will result.

### 3.1.5 Changes to traffic movements and circulation

Several design options have focused on the movement of traffic on Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street. The preferred option is the pedestrianisation of Sean Costello Street which unlocks a large area and opportunity to address Dunnes Store entrance and the southern end of the derelict site to create a 'Gateway'.

A traffic 'Forecasting Report' (Ref: 300706) was prepared by Systra Ltd which sought to assess the traffic impacts of the proposed public realm enhancements. The Forecasting Report concluded that *"the proposed Option 3 scheme has no significant impact on traffic conditions and operates at a very similar level to the Do Minimum Scenario. This option is the recommended option for this public realm scheme from a traffic modelling perspective. The minor journey time impacts are not likely to instigate any re-routing from the area so*

*it is considered that this would not impact upon the wider Athlone network in any way”*  
(p17).

### **3.1.6 Cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development**

The proposed development will complement the flagship Church Street Enhancement project completed in April 2019. A search of planning applications in the area has not identified any relevant approved or pending projects.

### **3.1.7 The use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity**

Natural resources required for the project mainly consist of the paving materials. This is in modest quantities given that the site is 0.56 ha.

### **3.1.8 Pollution and nuisances**

There will be no residues or emissions generated from the proposed development during operation due to the fact that it is a public realm enhancement scheme.

The pedestrianisation of Sean Costello Street will mean that more traffic will be diverted to Mardyke Street (particularly the stretch of the street between 18-38 Mardyke Street). This is a relatively short stretch of the street (c. 100m) and is predominantly commercial properties.

There may be emissions from vehicles during the construction phase, however this is normal for any construction project and will be managed through the Construction Environmental Management Plan.

### **3.1.9 The risk of major accidents and/or disasters**

There is no risk of major accidents or disasters due to the proposed development.

### **3.1.10 The risks to human health (for example, due to water contamination or air pollution)**

The proposed development will not present any risks to human health.

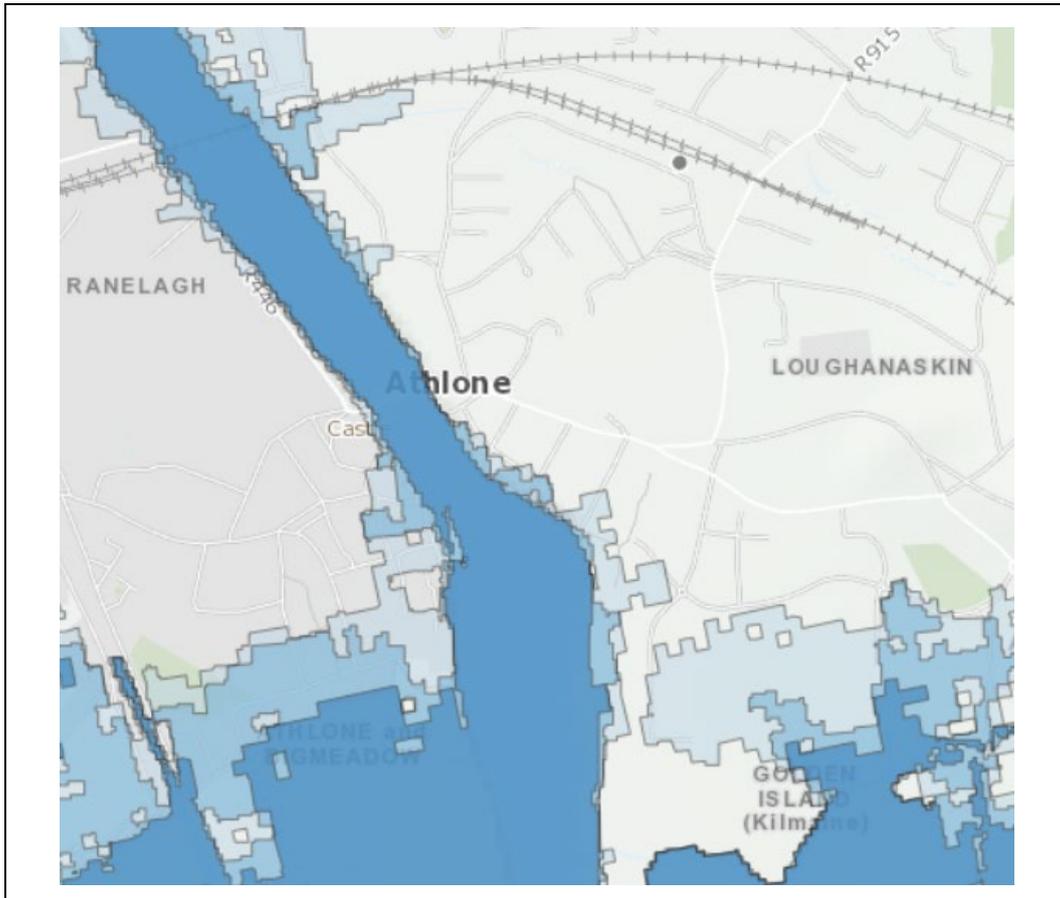
## **3.2 Location and environmental sensitivity**

The site extends east along Dublin Gate Street, diverging along Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street and along Pump Lane completing the triangular enclosure. Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street are the primary approaches to the town from the east.

The extent of the site is characterised by narrow footpaths, with varying levels and a multitude of paving materials. The environment is not currently welcoming or aesthetically pleasing. All streets are dominated by vehicles, with a prevalence of car parking along Mardyke Street and a predominance of bollards along Sean Costello Street to channel vehicular traffic.

### 3.2.1 Flood Risk

The site is not within or adjacent to an area at risk of flooding (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Flood Maps (source, Floodinfo.ie.)

### 3.2.2 Historic Environment

#### Protected structures

There are no protected structures recorded in the Records of Protected Structures or National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) within the redline boundary for the development. There are however seven recorded protected structures fronting onto the development area (Figure 4). Table 1 provides a summary of these structures.

<b>Table 1:</b> Protected structures fronting onto the development area.		
<b>NIAH/RPS No.</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Summary</b>
15009142/ 162	Dublin Gate Street	Moran's Bar
15009143/ 163	Dublin Gate Street	Moran's Bar
15009364/ 213	30 Mardyke Street	House
15009365/ 214	32 Mardyke Street	House
15009366/ 215	34 Mardyke Street	Carey's Public House
15009392/220	Mardyke Street	Wall mounted post box

15009390	Mardyke Street	O'Neill's Bar <sup>3</sup>
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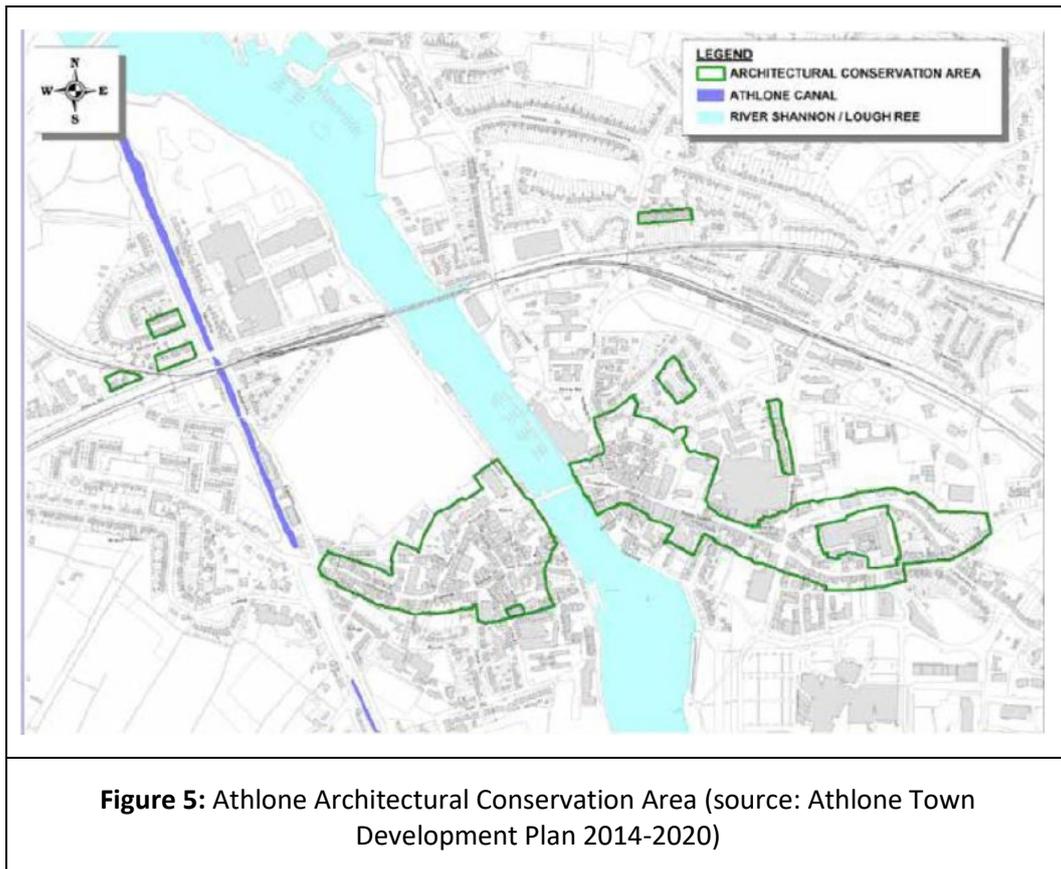
**Figure 4:** Protected structures in the area

### Architectural Conservation Area

The entirety of the site is located within the designated Architectural Conservation Area as outlined in the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020.

An Architectural and Heritage Impact Assessment has assessed the potential impacts of the proposed development on both the setting of Protected Structures and also the Architectural Conservation Area. The findings have been discussed below at Section 3.4.4

<sup>3</sup> Destroyed by fire – December 2010



### Archaeological and Cultural Heritage

The proposed development is located within the Zone of Archaeological Potential for Athlone as identified within the Urban Archaeological Survey for Westmeath. This area corresponds with the Zone of Notification as shown on the National Monuments Service map-viewer. A detailed Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Assessment has been prepared as a separate report. The findings of this report have been referenced below at Section 3.4.4

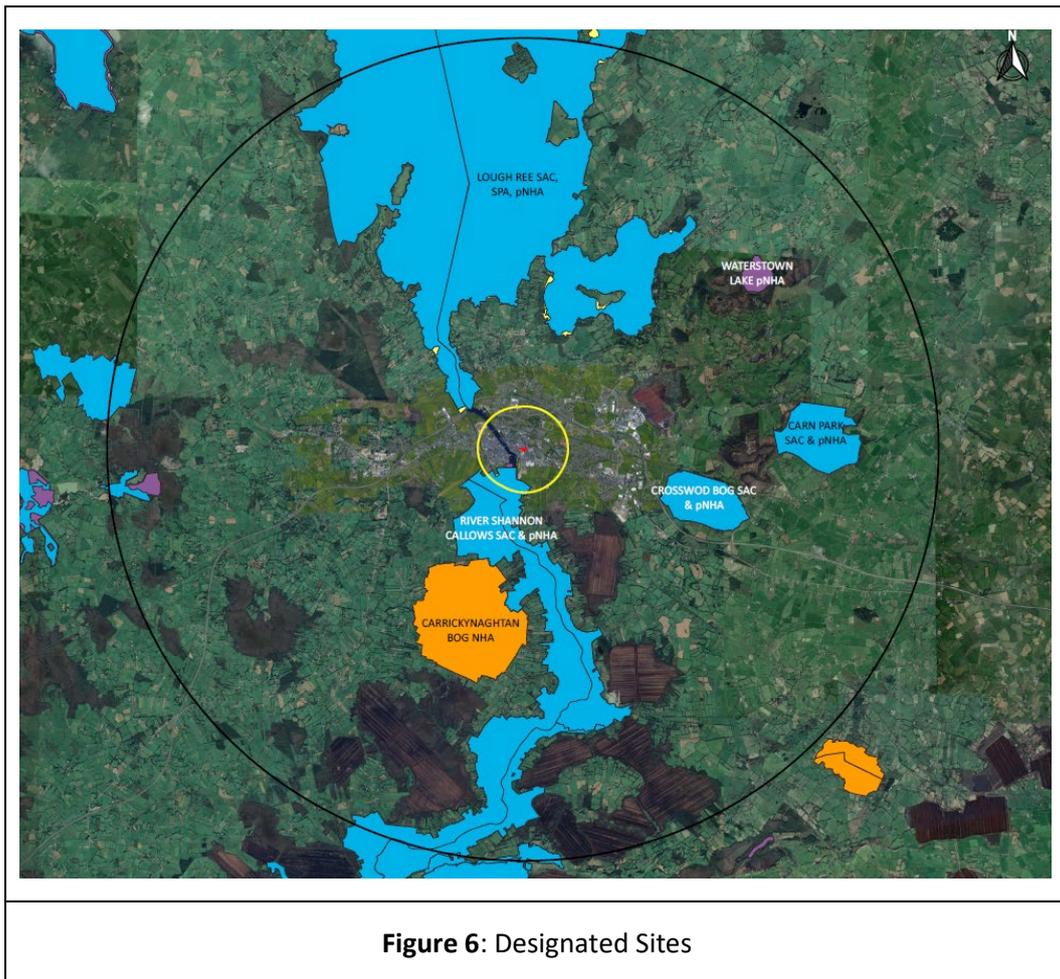
### 3.2.3 Natural Environment

#### Designated Sites

The Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken identifies designated sites within a radius of 15 kilometres of the proposed development. Sites beyond 15km were also considered but no potential for significant effects was identified on such sites. The designated sites considered are listed in Table 2. The location of EU and Nationally Designated Sites in relation to the site are displayed in Figure 6. The proposed development lies 393m north east of River Shannon Callows pNHA, and 440m north east of Middle Shannon Callows SPA and River Shannon Callows SAC. Further designated sites in the vicinity include Lough Ree SAC and pNHA 1.5km to the north west, and Lough Ree SPA situated 1.6km to the north west.

<b>Table 2</b>		
<b>Designated Site</b>	<b>Distance from proposed development</b>	<b>Reason for designation</b>
<b>Special Area of Conservation (SAC)</b>		
River Shannon Callows	0.44km	[6410] Molinia Meadows [6510] Lowland Hay Meadows [8240] Limestone Pavement [91E0] Alluvial Forests [1355] Otter ( <i>Lutra lutra</i> )
Lough Ree	1.52km	[3150] Natural Eutrophic Lakes [6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland [7110] Active Raised Bog [7120] Degraded Raised Bog [7230] Alkaline Fens [8240] Limestone Pavement [91D0] Bog Woodland [91E0] Alluvial Forests [1355] Otter ( <i>Lutra lutra</i> )
Crosswood Bog	3.4km	[7110] Raised Bog (Active) [7120] Degraded Raised Bog
Carn Park Bog	6.0km	[7110] Raised Bog (Active) [7120] Degraded Raised Bog
Castlesampson Esker	9.0km	[3180] Turloughs [6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland
Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough	9.5km	[3180] Turloughs [7110] Raised Bog (Active) [7120] Degraded Raised Bog [7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation [91D0] Bog Woodland
Pilgrim's Road Esker	9.6km	[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland
Mongan Bog	9.9km	[7110] Raised Bog (Active) [7120] Degraded Raised Bog [7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation
Fin Lough	11.5km	[1013] Geyer's Whorl Snail <i>Vertigo geyeri</i> [7230] Alkaline fens
Lough Funshinagh	12.9km	[3180] Turloughs [3270] Rivers with muddy banks with <i>Chenopodium rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidention</i> p.p. vegetation
<b>Special Protection Area (SPA)</b>		
Middle Shannon Callows	0.28km	[A038] Whooper Swan ( <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> ) [A050] Wigeon ( <i>Anas penelope</i> ) [A122] Corncrake ( <i>Crex crex</i> ) [A140] Golden Plover ( <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> ) [A142] Lapwing ( <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> ) [A156] Black-tailed Godwit ( <i>Limosa limosa</i> ) [A179] Black-headed Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> ) [A999] Wetland and Waterbirds

Lough Ree	0.72km	[A004] Little Grebe ( <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> ) [A038] Whooper Swan ( <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> ) [A050] Wigeon ( <i>Anas penelope</i> ) [A052] Teal ( <i>Anas crecca</i> ) [A053] Mallard ( <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> ) [A056] Shoveler ( <i>Anas clypeata</i> ) [A061] Tufted Duck ( <i>Aythya fuligula</i> ) [A065] Common Scoter ( <i>Melanitta nigra</i> ) [A067] Goldeneye ( <i>Bucephala clangula</i> ) [A125] Coot ( <i>Fulica atra</i> ) [A140] Golden plover ( <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> ) [A142] Lapwing ( <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> ) [A193] Common Tern ( <i>Sterna hirundo</i> ) [A999] Wetland and Waterbirds
<b>Natural Heritage Area (NHA)</b>		
Carrickynaghtan Bog	2.8km	[4] Peatlands
Clonnydonnin Bog	10.2km	[7110] Raised Bog
<b>Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA)</b>		
River Shannon Callows	0.28km	
Lough Ree	0.72km	
Crosswood Bog	4.2km	
Carn Park Bog	6.4km	
Waterstown Lake	6.6km	
Castlesampson Esker	7.0km	
Mongan Bog	10.3km	
Doon Esker Wood	11.1km	
Clonfinlough Esker	11.4km	
Fin Lough	11.5km	
Lough Nanang Esker	12.6km	
Lough Funshinagh	12.9km	
Feacle Turlough	12.9km	
Ballynagarbry	13.1km	
Clonlyon Glebe Bog	13.3km	
Cranberry Lough	14.9km	



### Habitats

As part of the EclIA, a desk survey of the proposed development site was conducted to identify the habitat types present, due to the entirely urban character of the site. Habitats were identified in accordance with the Heritage Council's 'Guide to Habitats in Ireland'. A Site Visit could not be undertaken due to the previous and current Covid-19 restrictions both north and south of Ireland. Restrictions in the north of Ireland restrict travel to within 10m from your home and in the south of Ireland travel is restricted to within 5km of your home. However, effective desk-based surveys have been carried out as an alternative.

The surveyed development site comprises of several streets, predominantly Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street, and small parts of Dublin Gate Street, Gleeson Street, St Mary's Square, Pump Lane, John Broderick Street, and Griffith Street. Paved areas and a small area of off-street parking are also present. These were readily identifiable using Google Maps aerial imagery and Street View, and it is considered that a comprehensive and accurate assessment of the habitats was achieved.

The principle habitat type in this urban setting is Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3) and covers 0.492ha accounting for 94% of the total area.

### Species

A desk-based survey of the site assessed that the species present would be those able to live in urban areas, including various bird species, such as rock dove (*Columba livia*), starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), and mammals

including fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and rat (*Rattus norvegicus*). The plant species present are likely to be ruderal weeds, and grasses such as annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*).

*Species of conservation concern*

A search of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) records for the relevant hectad, N04, provided details on a number of fauna species of conservation concern. These are provided in Table 2 of the EclA. Bird species reported in the following section are not included in this table.

Table 3 below provides a summary of the findings from the EclA. Please refer to the EclA for the detailed ecological baseline conditions.

Species	Summary of findings (source: EclA, October 2020)
Amphibians	The hectad contains numerous records of common frog and smooth newt, however there is only a single record of a newt within the 1km grid of the proposed site, dating back to 1976, and there is no suitable habitat within the development site that could support either species.
Badgers	The hectad contains numerous records of badger, however there are none within the 1km grid of the proposed site, and there is no suitable habitat within the development site that could support badgers.
Bats	Poor foraging opportunities and high levels of light pollution in the proposed site make it unlikely for bats to be present in the site, and there are no records of bats in the 1km grid enveloping the site.
Birds	<p>A number of sources were assessed to determine the likely usage of the site by both breeding and wintering bird species, including The Bird Atlas 2007-2011, National Biodiversity DataCentre (NBDC), and BirdWatch Ireland. The Bird Atlas 2007-2011 Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland (Balmer et al., 2013) provides the most up-to-date information regarding the distribution and relative abundance of bird species in the British Isles, based on surveys conducted between 2007 and 2011. The NBDC shows records from an extensive range of surveys conducted in Ireland, while BirdWatch Ireland provided the list of Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2014-2019 (BoCCI).</p> <p>The Bird Atlas shows data for breeding and wintering birds respectively in individual 10km x 10km squares (hectads). Table 3 (of the EclA) lists those species found in the relevant hectad (N04), which are recorded as breeding and/or wintering in the most recent atlas. It also notes species that have been recorded within the relevant hectad on National Biodiversity Data Centre datasets as well as those listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive and the BoCCI Red and Amber Lists.</p> <p>Birds listed under Annex I are offered special protection by the EU Birds Directive.</p>
Bryophytes	A search of the Flora Protection Order Map Viewer for Bryophytes was also undertaken. No protected bryophytes have been recorded within or adjacent to the proposed development site.

Species	Summary of findings (source: EclA, October 2020)
Fish	<p>The Inland Fisheries Ireland Water Framework Directive map was consulted on 21/10/2020.</p> <p>The closest survey location was Bunaribba on the River Shannon approximately 2km downstream of the proposed development. This section of the river was surveyed in 2010 and received a species richness score of 4 having recorded European eel, perch, pike, and roach. Another site, on the Cross river, approximately 300m away, was surveyed in 2008 and recorded 5 species, namely brown trout, gudgeon, perch, pike and roach. Both sites were assigned an ecological status of moderate.</p> <p>Lough Ree was surveyed in 2010 and assigned an ecological status of poor despite recording 8 species of fish including: bream, brown trout, European eel, perch, pike, pollan, roach, roach x bream hybrid, and tench.</p>
Invertebrates	<p>There are records of several protected butterfly species in the hectad, including marsh fritillary and small blue; however, these are located outside the site, which does not support habitat suitable for these species.</p>
Otters	<p>There are three records of otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) in hectad OtterN04, with several more records of spraint. The closest records of live sightings are 840m and 1.3km from the site, and the closest record of spraint is 340m from the site. It is likely therefore, that otters use this stretch of the river for foraging and commuting and may even have holts in the vicinity of the site.</p>
Vascular Plants	<p>A search was made of the NBDC records of vascular plants to investigate whether any rare or unusual plant species listed under Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, The Irish Red Data Book: 1 Vascular Plants (Curtis &amp; McGough, 1988) or the Flora (Protection) Order (1999, as amended 2015) had been recorded in hectad N04. Only the Narrow-leaved helleborine (<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>) was recorded in the hectad, and this species of open woodland is therefore unlikely to be present in the urban site.</p>
Other taxa	<p>Other species, including pine marten, hedgehog (<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>) and Eurasian pygmy shrew (<i>Sorex minutus</i>) are present in the wider area based on the results of the NBDC data search, but are unlikely to be present on the site.</p>
Invasive species	<p>There are eleven records of Japanese knotweed (<i>Fallopia japonica</i>) in Athlone town, with the closest approximately 375m away. The derelict area with colonizing vegetation may support this invasive species.</p>

### 3.2.4 Existing and Approved Land Uses

The site is within Athlone Town Centre and is dominated by retail and commercial properties. A search of planning applications in the area has not identified any relevant approved or pending projects.

### 3.2.5 Air Quality

Athlone currently has an air quality rating of 'good' within the Air Quality Index for Health published by the Environmental Protection Agency<sup>4</sup>.

The site is within an urban area therefore air quality is mainly impacted by vehicular traffic.

### 3.2.6 Densely populated areas

Athlone has a population of 20,153<sup>5</sup>. The proposed development is located in Athlone Town Centre, which has a relatively modest residential population. Land use around the site is primarily retail, commercial and leisure, which attracts most of the footfall.

## 3.3 Aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected

This section considers the likely significant effects on the environment of the proposed development, having regard to the impact of the project on the factors specified in paragraph (b)(i)(I) to (V) in section 171A of the Planning and Development Act (as amended), 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),
- B. the nature of the impact,
- C. the transboundary nature of the impact,
- D. the intensity and complexity of the impact,
- E. the probability of the impact,
- F. the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact,

This section also considers any likely significant effects generated by:

- the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant; and
- the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity.

### 3.3.1 Population and human health

It is considered that the proposed development will have beneficial impacts on the local population, creating positive health outcomes. For example, improvements to the public realm are known to improve levels of satisfaction within the local neighbourhood which in turn encourages active transport (walking and cycling), benefiting both physical and mental health<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://airquality.ie/> - accessed 10.02.2021

<sup>5</sup> Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 (p14)

<sup>6</sup> RTPI, Enabling Healthy Placemaking - Overcoming Barriers and Learning from Best Practices (July 2020)

Public realm enhancements also seek to create shared spaces, places where local people can meet and interact. Developments such as this are known to improve mental health outcomes for the local population. This also improves perceptions of safety which reduces anxiety (particularly for more vulnerable groups) and encourages walking and cycling.

The only negative impacts will be during the construction phase, whereby nuisance may be caused by noise and dust. These impacts are not considered to be significant and will be adequately controlled through the Construction Environmental Management Plan.

### 3.3.2 Biodiversity, with particular attention to species and habitats protected under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive

The EclA concludes that the majority of the site consists of artificial surfaces, namely tarmac and concrete of roads and pavements. A small area of recolonizing bare ground with some ruderal weeds and shrubs is also present. These have low value for nature conservation, and the development will have a neutral effect through upgrading the site with no net loss of biodiversity.

No significant residual effects are anticipated on any faunal population following measures to avoid and mitigate against adverse effects on sensitive ecological receptors, including birds, fish, and otter.

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening (Stage 1: 'Test of Likely Significance') has also been undertaken (available as a separate report - Ref. 234/2020 -02). The AA screening assessment determines that the proposal will not have any significant effects, either alone or in combination, on any Natura 2000 sites. It concludes that no further assessment is required.

### 3.3.3 Land, soil, water, air and climate

With consideration to the nature and location of the proposed development it is unlikely that there will be any significant environmental impacts on land, soil, water, air and climate.

### 3.3.4 Material assets, cultural heritage and the landscape

An Archaeological and Cultural Impact Assessment has been undertaken and this has not identified any potential significant environmental impacts. The report notes that the site is located in an Area of Archaeological Potential, therefore monitoring has been recommended during the construction phase with a final report detailing any findings.

An Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment has also been undertaken by Consarc Conservation. This detailed appraisal of the study area identified architectural features that should be incorporated into the proposed public realm enhancements. This was prepared at an early stage of the design process to ensure that the proposed development fully considered the architectural heritage including opportunities for enhancements. The report also assesses the impact of the proposed development on the architectural heritage and concludes that the proposed works will not cause any harm to the Architectural Conservation Area and will in fact serve to enhance it, and that the proposed works will not have an adverse effect on any of the Protected Structures and will improve their overall setting and ongoing viability.

### 3.3.5 The interaction between the factors mentioned above

Taking into consideration the interaction between the above factors it is considered that there will be no significant environmental impacts due to the proposed development.

### 3.3.6 The expected residues and emissions and the production of waste

There will be no residues or emissions generate from the proposed development during operation due to the fact that it is a public realm enhancement scheme.

The pedestrianisation of Sean Costello Street will mean that more traffic will be diverted to Mardyke Street (particularly the stretch of the street between 18-38 Mardyke Street). This is a relatively short stretch of the street (c. 100m) and is predominantly commercial properties therefore it is considered that there will be no significant environmental impact.

There may be emissions from vehicles during the construction phase, however this is normal for any construction project and will be managed through the Construction Environmental Management Plan.

Any waste generated will be inert construction and demolition waste and will be utilised on site wherever possible. Otherwise, it will be transferred to an appropriate waste management facility. No significant environmental impacts will result.

### 3.3.7 Use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity

The scheme will not significantly impact upon natural resource including soil, land, water or biodiversity.

## 4 Conclusion

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This EIA Screening Report has determined that the proposed development does not exceed the thresholds that trigger the mandatory requirement for EIA. It is also below the 2 ha threshold set out for urban development projects in Part 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations, therefore has been screened in accordance with Schedule 7A.

During construction there may be localised, not significant and short-term impacts which are common to any construction project and will be managed as part of the Construction Environmental Management Plan.

The conclusion is that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development, therefore an EIA is not required, and the application can proceed in accordance with Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).