

17 October 2023

Cathaoirleach and Each Member of Westmeath County Council

Westmeath County Council Local Authority Development - File Ref. LA(M)-138

The works proposed are within the confines of Fore Village, Co Westmeath (extending from the Fore Abbey Car Park at the scheme's southern and eastern extent on the L1633 and extends north along the L5637 where it terminates at the start of the Nancy and Nellie Walkway).

Provision of a paved community space in the centre of Fore, completion of missing section of heritage stone wall, road surfacing and road markings and the provision of public lighting along an existing footpath trail along the L5637. Works will require the upgrade of the existing footpath infrastructure in the village, proposed along the L5637 and the L1163.

Dear Cathaoirleach and Members, please see below,

Planning Report in Accordance with Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

Project Background

Westmeath County Council (WCC) proposes to carry out works in Fore comprising of a paved community space in the centre of Fore, completion of missing section of heritage stone wall and the provision of public lighting along an existing footpath trail along the L5637. Works will require the upgrade of the existing footpath infrastructure in the village, proposed along the L5637 and the L1163. The scheme extends from the Fore Abbey Car Park at the scheme's southern and eastern extent on the L1633 and extends north along the L5637 where it terminates at the start of the Nancy and Nellie Walkway.

Section 1

1.1 Site Overview

The proposed works area is located in the village of Fore Co. Westmeath. Fore Village and its hinterland are designated under the Westmeath County Development Plan as a Special Heritage Area. The richness of the archaeological and historical remains of Fore Village, together with the attractive landscape setting, mark this area out as one of national importance.

In the context of Ireland's Ancient East, Fore is an important site which has attracted a large number of tourists to the area. The development of a local heritage trail has greatly added to this.

Fore village is a Category 1 Village with a population of less than 5,000 people. There are two pubs, a grocery store and two coffee shops operating in the village.

The proposed development of the public lighting to the existing walking trails, together with improvements to the street façade are intended to create a more vibrant community space providing increased footfall for local businesses, tourist attractions and walking trails.

A site location map is provided in Figure 1.

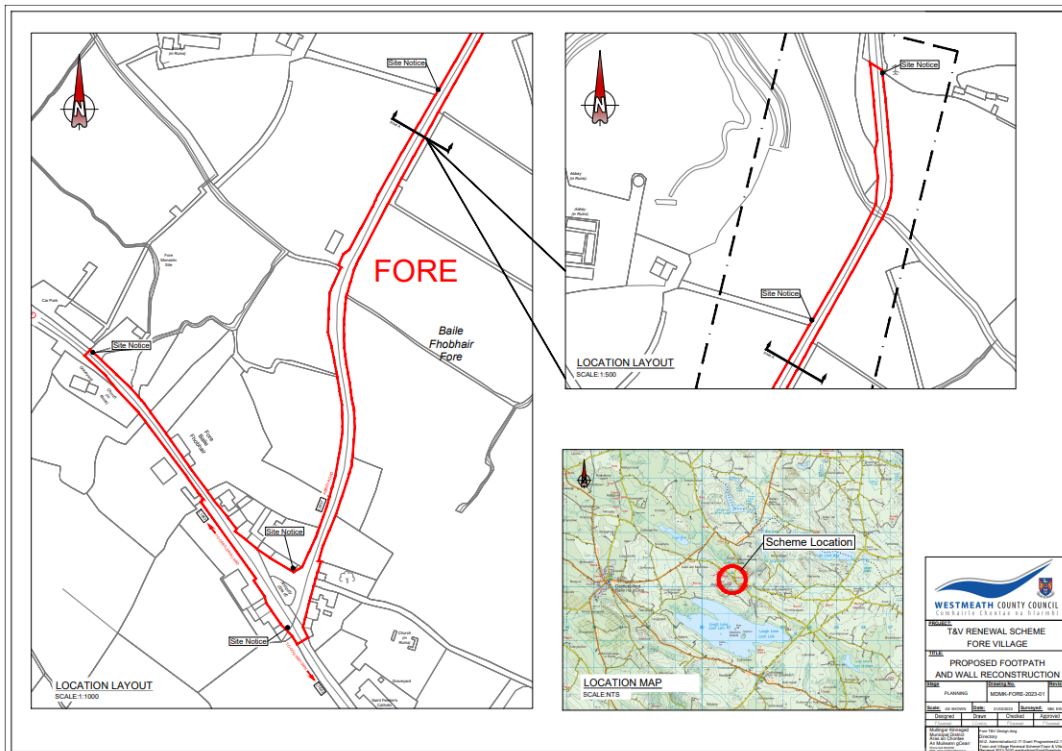


Figure 1: Site Location Map: Overview of the works area, local water courses and the sites local context

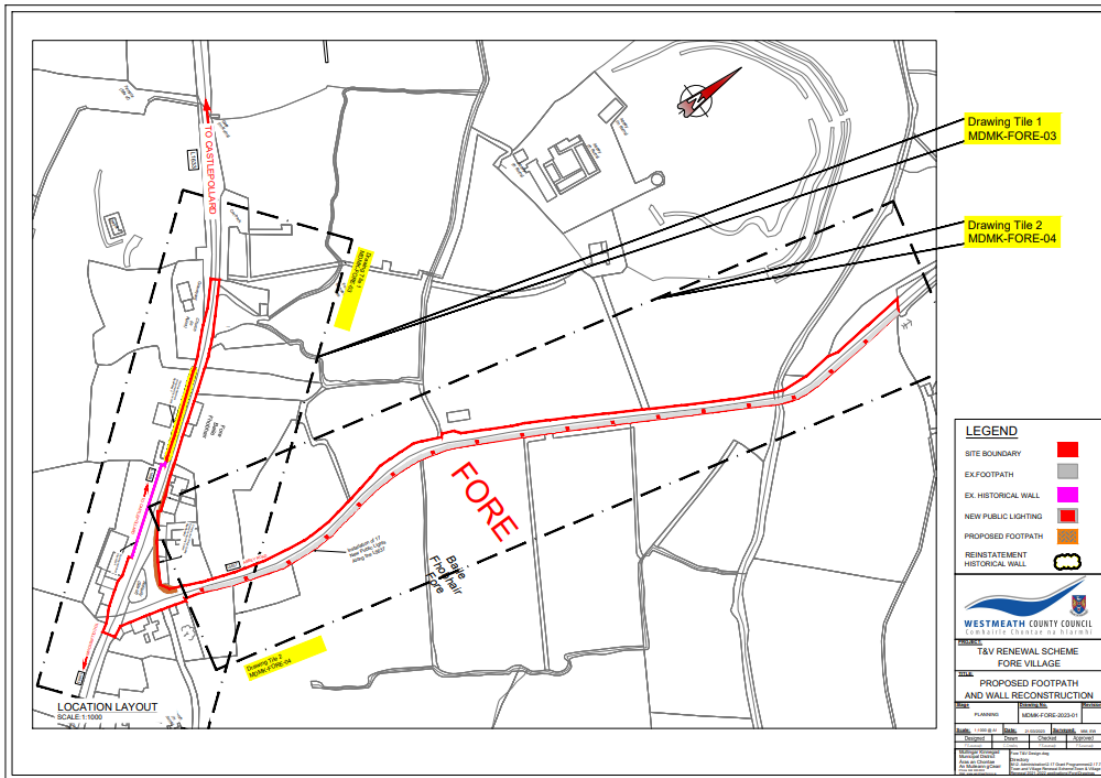


Figure 2: Site Boundary

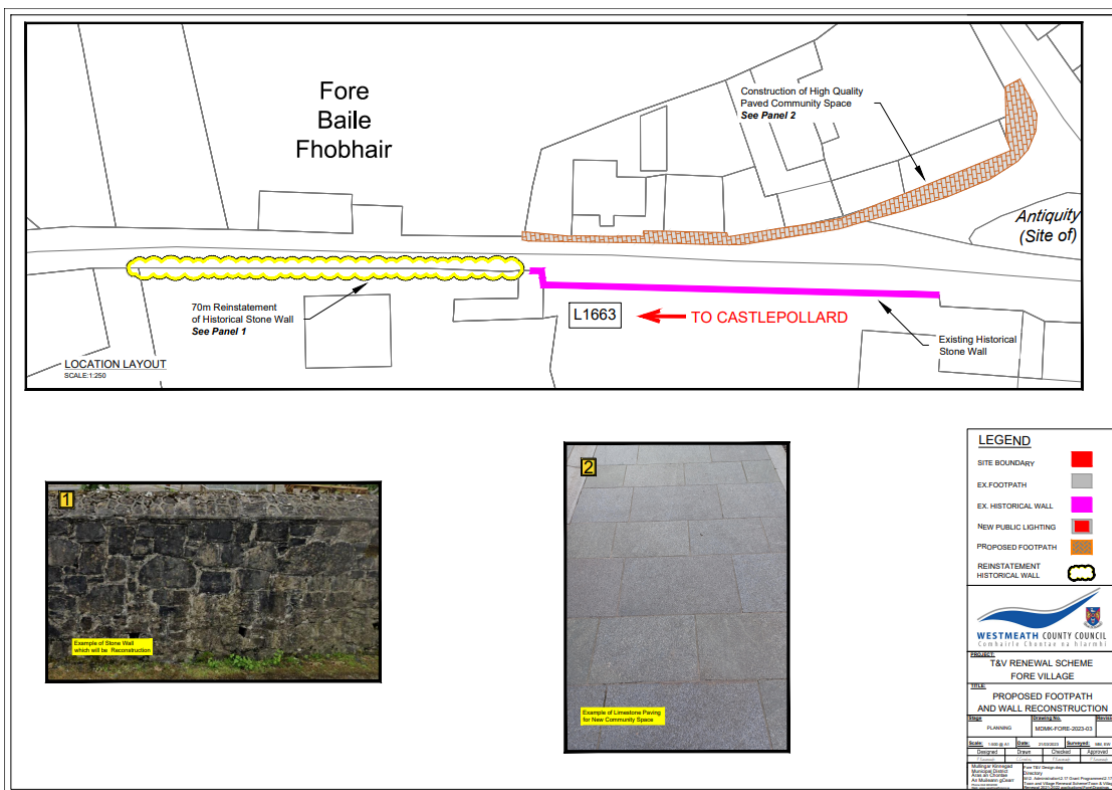


Figure 3: Proposed development works at Fore Village

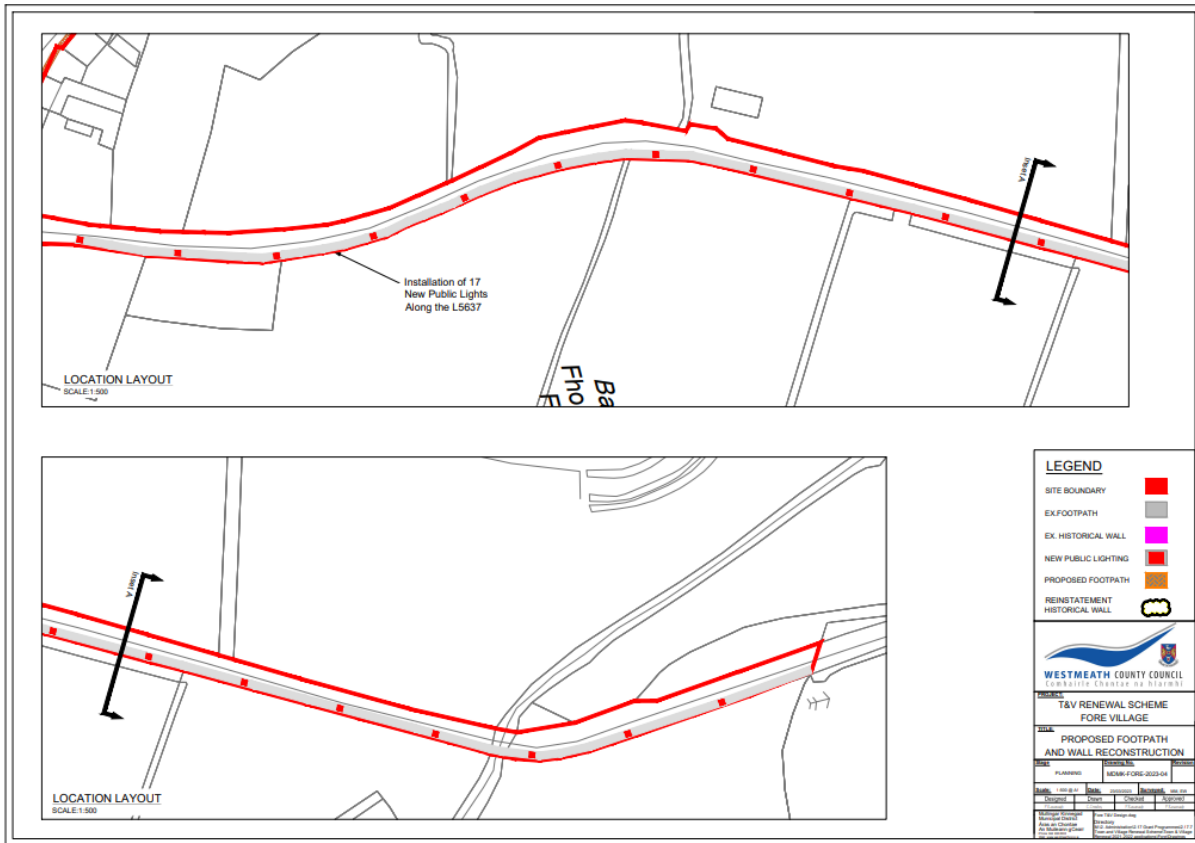


Figure 4: Proposed Public Lighting at Fore Village

1.2 Origins of Proposal

Westmeath County Council (WCC) proposes to carry out works including the provision of public lighting to the walking trail and the creation of a high-quality paved community space in the middle of the village to create a safer and more accessible environment for visitors, tourists and walkers.

Over the past number of years Fore Heritage Group have taken the lead in developing the tourist offering in the Fore Village area. This has included the development of a tourist trail, St Feichin’s Looped Walkway. In 2020, funding was granted under Town and Village Renewal to complete the pedestrian link from St. Feichin’s looped walk back to the village along the L5637 and this was constructed in April 2021 along with provision for future public lighting.

This completed walking loop has already become very popular and it is now proposed to provide the public lights along the newly constructed footpath where ducting and sleeves are already in place along the local road L5637.



Figure 5: Aerial View of Fore Village, Fore Abbey and immediate surrounds

1.3 Advertising and Referrals

A public notice in respect of this Part 8 was placed in the Westmeath Examiner Newspaper (22nd July 2023) and site notices were also erected on the subject lands in accordance with legislative requirements. The application was referred to the following prescribed bodies and internal sections in Westmeath County Council:

Referrals:	Response Received
External Bodies	
Development Applications Unit (Natural & Built Heritage) Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	√
An Taisce	
The Heritage Council	
The Arts Council	
Failte Ireland	

Office of Public Works	
TII	
Internal Sections	
MDMK District Engineer	√
Heritage Officer	√
Transportation Officer	√

1.4 Consultation Process

This Part 8 application was placed on public display during the period **Monday 24th July 2023** up to and including **Monday 21st August 2023** (both dates inclusive) at the following locations:

- Online at <https://consult.westmeathcoco.ie/en> or
- Áras an Chontae, Mount Street, Mullingar, N91 FH4N

Submissions were invited from the public up to and including **Monday 4th September 2023**.

1.5 Description and Extent of the Development Proposed

Westmeath County Council propose to create a high-quality paved community space in the heart of the village of Fore, complete a missing section of a heritage stone wall together with the provision of public lighting along an existing footpath trail along the L5637.

The proposed works will generally consist of the following:

- excavation of soils and subsoils not expected to exceed 450mm
- disposal of surplus soil off-site to an authorised waste facility
- importation, placement, and compaction of hardcore (crushed stone)
- Install of high-quality paving.
- noise and general construction disturbance during daytime hours
- The duration of works is expected to be approximately 3 months.
- The erection of street lighting along the side road (Civil works already complete).
- The completion of the missing section of the heritage stone wall

1.6 Documentation Included with Part 8 Proposal

- Newspaper Notice/Site Notice
- Plans and Particulars (including Site Location Plan; Site Boundary Plan; Village Works Detail and Public Lighting Detail).
- Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report

1.7 Relevant Planning History

- **Planning Application 0051:** A. Healy applied for planning permission for a change of use from living room to post office in Fore. Granted with Conditions on 19/04/2000.
- **Planning Application 042332:** Joseph Gilsenan applied for planning permission to demolish existing - partially demolished shed and to construct 2 no. fully serviced semidetached two storey dwellings and biotec treatment unit (until mains sewerage is available) and ancillary site works at Fore Village, Fore, Co. Westmeath. Application withdrawn.
- **Planning Application 072070:** Joe Gilsenan & Anna Boyhan applied for Planning permission for new two storey house with septic tank, treatment system and percolation area and all ancillary site works to include demolition of existing shed building and conversion of Separate shed building at rear to form part of same new dwelling at Fore, Castlepollard, Co Westmeath. Granted with conditions on 07/06/2007.
- **Planning Application 102075:** Joe Gilsenan applied for Planning permission to construct single storey creche building incorporating sleep areas, activity areas, changing area, kitchen and office area. Install proprietary wastewater treatment unit and percolation area. Construct new entrance layout from existing road. Provide car parking ancillary to creche building and associated landscaping. Complete all ancillary site works and permission is sought to retain revised position of wastewater treatment system and percolation area for dwelling granted under ref 07/2070 at Fore, Castlepollard. Incompleted Application.
- **Planning Application 102089:** Joe Gilsenan applied for planning permission to construct single storey creche building incorporating sleep areas, activity areas, changing area, kitchen & office areas, install proprietary waste water treatment unit & percolation, construct new entrance layout from existing road, provide car parking ancillary to creche building and associated site works and permission is sought to retain revised position of wastewater treatment system & percolation area for dwelling granted under 07/2070 at Fore, Castlepollard. Application Withdrawn.
- **Planning Application 21283:** PJ & Jane O'Reilly applied for planning permission Construct a terrace to provide an outdoor seating area and an outdoor children's play area at Fore Abbey Coffee Shop, Fore, Co Westmeath. Granted with conditions on 01/09/2021.

1.8 Policy Context

1.8.1 National & Regional Policy Context

Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is a strategy set up by the Irish Government to make Ireland better for everyone and to build a more resilient and sustainable future. The strategy ensures the alignment of investment plans with the stated National Strategic Outcomes for 2040 in a considered, cohesive and defined manner. The National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan 2021-2030 combine to form Project Ireland 2040.

National Planning Framework 2018 (NPF)

The National Planning Framework (NPF), part of Project Ireland 2040, is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping future growth and development. It identifies nine strategic outcomes which include inter alia; compact growth, sustainable mobility and transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society.

The NPF seeks to enhance public health by encouraging and facilitating more active lifestyles by creating a more walkable and cycling friendly urban environment.

Get Ireland Active – The National Physical Activity Plan

Healthy Ireland, A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025 (Department of Health, 2013) is the national framework for whole of Government and whole of society to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Ireland. The National Physical Activity Plan contributes to the Framework. The Plan includes actions to develop, promote and support active travel modes and ensure that an active travel network is delivered.

Get Ireland Walking

Get Ireland Walking is a national initiative that aims to maximise the number of people participating in walking - for health, wellbeing and fitness - throughout Ireland.

1.9 Regional Policy Context

1.9.1 Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) (2019-2031)

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future growth and to better manage regional planning and economic development throughout the Region. It identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives.

Throughout the strategy there are 3 cross cutting key principles;

- *Healthy Placemaking* - To promote people's quality of life through the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, visit, invest and study in.
- *Climate Action* - The need to enhance climate resilience and to accelerate a transition to a low carbon society recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in achieving this.
- *Economic Opportunity* - To create the right conditions and opportunities for the Region to realise sustainable economic growth and quality jobs that ensure a good living standard for all.

The RSES promotes healthy placemaking and people's quality of life through the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, visit, and invest in, and focus on placemaking to create attractive and sustainable communities to support active lifestyles including walking and cycling.

The proposed development is consistent with the RSES which contains the following Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSO) and the following Regional Policy Objectives (RPO):

- **RSO 4:** Healthy Communities: Protect and enhance the quality of our built and natural environment to support active lifestyles including walking and cycling, ensure clean air and water for all and quality healthcare and services that support human health. (NSO 10)
- **RSO 6:** Integrated Transport and Land Use: Promote best use of Transport Infrastructure, existing and planned, and promote sustainable and active modes of travel to ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning. (NSO 2, 6, 8,9)
- **RSO 9:** Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy: Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables - focused energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050. (NSO 8, 9)
- **RPO 7.24:** Promote the development of a sustainable Strategic Greenway Network of national and regional routes, with a number of high capacity flagship routes that can be extended and /or linked with local greenways and other cycling and walking infrastructure, notwithstanding that capacity of a greenway is limited to what is ecologically sustainable.
- **RPO 9.14:** Local authorities shall seek to support the planned provision of easily accessible social, community, cultural and recreational facilities and ensure that all communities have access to a range of facilities that meet the needs of the communities they serve.

1.10 Local Policy Context

1.10.1 Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020 (WCDP)

Under the 2.19 Core Strategy Policies and Objectives Council are to 'Promote the integration of land use and transportation policies and to prioritise provision for cycling and walking travel modes and the strengthening of public transport.' (CPO 2.16)

In accordance with section 4.12.5, Recreation, Amenity and Open Space, of the CDP 2021-2027, routes such as Fore Trail can open valuable amenity assets for local communities and visitors to enjoy and appreciate as well as providing opportunities for enhancement of quality of life and health. Such routes also provide important tourism assets and consequential benefits to the local economy. Many opportunities exist for creating new and improved linkages and facilities for walking and cycling so that the enjoyment of the wealth of natural heritage and amenity may be maximised and the potential to exploit these assets for the purposes of tourism can be realised.

Under section 6.6 History, Heritage and Ancient Sites, it is a Council Policy Objective CPO 6.40, to ‘Support the local community, the OPW and local businesses to expand and enhance the visitor offering at Fore, taking account of the archaeological heritage at this location, to animate the stories of this historical site and increase visitor dwell time’.

1.10.1.1 Fore Special Heritage Area

Under Section 14.4 of the CDP 2021-2027, Fore is designated as a Special Heritage Area. In recognition of its exceptional archaeological and historical importance and the significant contribution which it can make to the tourist offering in North Westmeath, a Special Heritage Management Study has been prepared for Fore.

The wealth of the archaeological and historical remains in Fore Village, together with the attractive landscape in which they are set mark this area out as one of national importance. Fore is an important tourist attraction promoted in Westmeath under the Ireland’s Ancient East brand.

The Fore Special Heritage Management Study sets out objectives for the sustainable development of the village which are based upon the principles of protecting the intrinsic value of the historic, archaeological and natural heritage setting. In recent years, a number of looped walks have been developed at Fore, which are indicated in Map 74, Volume 2 of the County Development Plan. It is Council policy to protect the views from these looped walks.

Under the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027, Fore Special Heritage Area has a number of associated policy objectives to support its future protection and enhancement.

Fore Special Heritage Area Policy Objectives	
It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 14.16	Continue to protect and enhance the Fore Special Heritage Area in accordance with the Fore Special Heritage Management Study adopted in 2010, and any update made thereto.
CPO 14.17	Support the development of sustainable tourist initiatives in Fore subject to appropriate archaeological and ecological assessment.
CPO 14.18	Ensure that new development proposals which have the potential to impact on Archaeological Heritage must be accompanied by an Archaeological Assessment in accordance with requirements of the National Monuments Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
CPO 14.19	Ensure that development proposals that would detrimentally impact upon the setting and interpretation of archaeological monuments, historic landscape or buildings of architectural value at Fore will not be permitted.
CPO 14.20	Protect and sustain the established appearance and character of views over the surrounding countryside at Fore, while facilitating the continued development of uses that sustain the activities that give rise to the appearance and character of the landscape.
CPO 14.21	Ensure that development and activities that are immediately adjacent to the scenic off-road walking routes of Fore, sustain the established appearance and character of views, that contribute to the distinctive quality of the landscape.

1.10.2 Fore Special Heritage Management Plan 2010

This Management Plan recognises the complexities of the area in terms of landscape, archaeology, heritage conservation and development. The plan looks at how these will be developed together with specialist input in order to protect, preserve and conserve this significant area and ensuring that there will be a future for a unique heritage through its committed local community and achieving the goal of creative and sustainable development.

Under the Fore Special Heritage Management Plan 2010 reference is made under 3.3 of this plan to marking the Village Centre, The Market Place and the Gaol through streetscape improvements to reduce the amount of road surface and increase areas for pedestrians, noting that prior to undertaking improvement it would be important to ensure as a minimum that the front wall of the Old Gaol should be established

Archaeological Heritage

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 14.5 Seek to ensure the protection and sympathetic enhancement of archaeological heritage, and in this regard, applications will be referred to the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht for comment.

Architectural Heritage and Protected Structures

It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 14.27 Protect and conserve buildings, structures and sites contained in the Record of Protected Structures and to encourage the sympathetic re-use and long-term viability of such structures without detracting from their special interest and character.

CPO 14.30 Seek that the form and structural integrity of Protected Structures is retained as part of any redevelopment proposal and that the relationship between the Protected Structure and any complex of adjoining buildings, designed landscape features, or designed views or vistas from or to the structure is considered.

1.11 Archaeology

The site is located within a Zone of Archaeological Potential. Comments in relation to archaeology were received from the DAU as part of the statutory consultation process and are detailed under the referral section of this report.

1.12 Architectural/ Built Heritage

It is noted that the proposed development is within the historic town of Fore Recorded Monument WM004-035-Class Historic which is subject to statutory protection in the Record of Monuments and Places established under section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment Act) 1994. Comments from the DAU are noted and referenced under the referral section of this

report. It is also noted that proposed works including paving for a new community space is proposed in front of the Old Gaol Monument WM004-035005, located on the corner of local roads L1633 and L5637.

1.13 Natural Heritage

The proposed works are not located within any designated pNHA, NHA, SAC or SPA. It is Council policy 'to protect plant, animal, species and habitats which have been identified by the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Wildlife Act (1976) and (Amendment Act) 2000, and the Flora Protection Order S.I No. 94 of 1999' (policy P-NAT3 WCDP). The closest designated site to the subject site is Lough Bane and Lough Glass SAC (ref code: 2120) which is located a distance of circa 1.2km respectively from the proposed site.

1.14 Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment is a standard legal requirement for all plans and projects likely to have a significant impact on European Natura 2000 sites i.e. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA) but not NHAs. The subject lands are not designated within a European Site. The initial stage (1) of the Appropriate Assessment process is to undertake a screening exercise to determine:

- a. Whether the proposed plan or project is directly connected with or necessary for the management of the European designated site for nature conservation
- b. If it is likely to have a significant adverse effect on the European designated site, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects.

This Stage 1 screening assessment covers Natura 2000 sites within a 15km radius of the development boundary. A screening report for Appropriate Assessment prepared by Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants submitted with the Part 8 plans and particulars.

Sites situated with 15km of the proposed works, are set out at Figure 5 below. The site synopsis' and details of the conservation objectives of these sites are available at: <https://www.npws.ie/protectedsites/sac> and <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa>

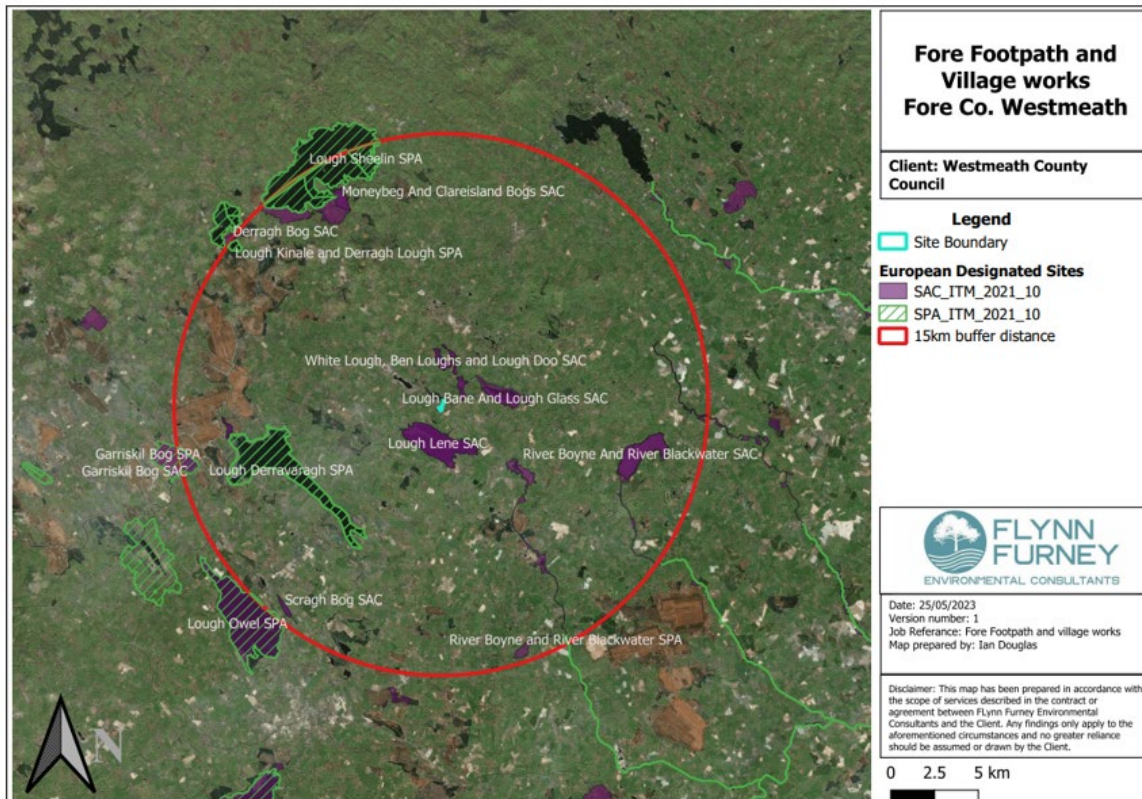


Figure 6: Designated European sites within 15km of the proposed works in Fore Co. Westmeath

The proposed works are centrally located within Fore and lie entirely within and adjacent to existing roadways. An old historic stone wall bounds the route along the L1163. Works are entirely outside any European designated site. The works area will not interact with any watercourses. No supporting habitat areas associated with a designated site will be impacted by the proposed works.

Having considered the siting, nature and scale of the development works proposed within Fore Village and in considering the content of the Stage 1 Screening for Appropriate Assessment prepared by Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants (report dated 26/5/23), it is considered that the proposed development would not give rise to any significant adverse direct, indirect or secondary impacts on the integrity of any nearby Natura 2000 sites.

It is therefore concluded that progression to **Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required** as the development, individually or in combination with another plan or project, is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site.

1.15 Environmental Impact Assessment

The proposed scheme has undergone screening for Environmental Impact Assessment under the EIA Directive 2014/52/EU to identify whether there is a need to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the proposed works.

The Environment Impact Assessment Screening Report, by Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants (report dated 30/5/23) is included with the Part 8 Planning Application and states: *“The overall conclusion of this screening exercise is that there should be no specific requirement for a full Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed works.”*

On the basis of the information received, which I consider adequate in order to issue a screening determination, it is reasonable to conclude that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development at Fore Village and an **Environmental Impact Assessment is not required in this instance.**

Section 2

2.0 Internal Section Reports and Prescribed Bodies Submissions

2.1 Internal Sections Reports Received

- 2.1.1 District Engineer, Mullingar Municipal District:** No objection, on condition that the development shall be carried out in accordance with the submitted plans and details received by the Planning Authority in August 2023.
- 2.1.2 Heritage Officer, Westmeath County Council:** The Heritage Officer has indicated that any proposed works must be cognisant of the heritage significance of the place and only be permitted if it can be determined that they do not negatively impact upon or alter the character of the place.

The Heritage Officer has indicated that consideration should be given to reducing the impact of light glare on biodiversity and has queried the carbon footprint of installing and running additional lighting.

Concerns are raised in relation to the proposed paving in front of Old Gaol Monument (WM004-035005) which has recently undergone conservation works funded by the Community Monuments Fund, noting that it may detract from the setting of the monument. Should National Monuments Service agree to paving being installed at this location then due consideration must be given to the works specification, for example avoiding use of kango hammer or other vibrational tools directly in front of the monument so that works do not cause any damage to the monument.

The Heritage Officer states that clarification should be provided on the type of paving to be installed in the village and how it will be 'in keeping with the historic appearance of the settlement' – as Fore is a Heritage Area and it is imperative that proposed interventions do not detract from the setting or character of the village. The Heritage Officer has indicated that any paving installed will have to use locally appropriate materials such as limestone and the detail of the finish will need to be sensitive to the historical setting of Fore.

Concerns are raised in relation to the proposed wall construction. It is noted that the reference to the 'existing historic wall' annotated in a pink outline is incorrect and as this identifies a much earlier wall construction (1980s). This should be amended to identify the correct historic wall which is located at the southern end of the village adjacent to the graveyard. This is the style of wall which should be used as an exemplar for the section of wall to be reinstated.

A query is raised as to whether any professional opinion has been sought on the existing wall referred to and its historic significance. The heritage officer has concerns in relation to the removal of existing hedge and the construction of a wall which is higher than the original wall and therefore not in keeping with the existing character of this part of the village.

It is submitted that an evidence-based case would need to be made for the 'reconstruction' of such a wall, which would entail the removal the existing hedge line and area of biodiversity. Any removal of hedgerow should be replanted where possible in the village to retain and preserve existing biodiversity. It is also noted there is a stone pier at this location (see photo below) and there may be other such features presently hidden under the vegetation which will need appropriate reinstatement during the proposed works.



Figure 7: *Condition of Historical Wall and potential features to be reinstated.*

2.1.3 *Transportation Department, Westmeath County Council:* WCC Transportation Section submits that any installation of public lighting infrastructure will need to conform to the “Midland Counties Public Lighting Specification – March 2017” In the context of the location, the Village of Fore is designated in the County Development Plan as a Special Heritage Area with a specific architectural, historical, sacred and cultural landscape as well as a richness of habitats and biodiversity. Any public lighting infrastructure design will need to be considered with appropriateness to local and environmental interests, while also conforming to the Midland Counties Public Lighting Specification.

It is indicated that options which may serve this purpose may include low-level lighting or an increased number of installations to meet the required level of lighting. Alternative options include standard octagonal or decorative 6m columns with LED luminaires, incorporating a dimming and trimming profile which will see the lights dim between certain night-time hours, or even turning off when not required, thereby reducing any risk of interference to wildlife patterns which also reducing energy usage.

Following review of the documents submitted with the application, no objection to the proposed Part VIII application, subject to the public lighting designs being completed with consideration to the ecological and cultural sensitivities of the site and in accordance with the options referred.

2.2 Prescribed Bodies Reports Received

2.3.1 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DAU):

Archaeology: The department (DAU) has noted that the proposed development is within the historic town of Fore Recorded Monument WM004-035----Class: Historic which is subject to statutory protection in the Record of Monuments and Places, established under section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994. Given the extent and location of the proposed development it is considered that the proposal could impact on subsurface archaeological remains. In line with national policy, the Department recommends that the archaeological conditions be included in any grant of planning permission that may issue.

Built Heritage: The DAU note the significance of the built heritage in Fore Village and its hinterland and support the development of a high-quality public realm as an integral part of the setting for the archaeological and built heritage village. However, on review of the Part 8 documentation DAU suggest that the proposal has not fully evaluated/referenced the cultural significance of the place and state that Information has not been provided on how the historical significance of the place has informed the proposed works.

The DAU refer to recent works to recover the masonry elements of the ‘Old Gaol’ under the Community Monuments Fund achieved a very high standard and have added to the presentation and understanding of the place.

It is recommended by the DAU that further conservation expertise is drawn upon to inform works in the village, particularly the proposed repairs to the historic boundary wall. Oversight of conservation works by a Grade 1 Conservation Architect along with the coordination of the public realm design and archaeological input, assessment and oversight, is recommended. Where possible the design and installation of new paving should be considered in the context of the historic village character. New paving should reference streetscape features and be constructed using appropriate native materials. The application of Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) to incorporate attenuation is considered an integral part of climate change design and action. New lighting design and layout should be carefully considered, so that it avoids becoming the focal point of the historic village centre and streetscape.

Nature Conservation: The DAU also make reference to Nature Conservation in relation to the proposed installation of street lighting is located in an open countryside location and adjacent to the River Glore which in turn is close to the Lough Glore proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) (site code: 000686).

The DAU indicate that apart from a site layout map, no detail has been provided in regard to the type of street light which is proposed. It is submitted that the grasslands, river, hedgerows and tree lines present along the route and adjacent to the proposed site are likely to be important habitats for foraging/ feeding bats.

The DAU is of the view that the proposed development has the potential to cause an adverse effect on a significant area of the habitat of bats which are listed under Annex IV of the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora) and protected under the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended. This affect would be caused by 'effects of inappropriate lighting and light overspill. If proceeding with street lighting in the locations, as proposed, it is strongly recommended that the Council seek and follow the advice of an expert bat specialist with regard to the final design/ type and location of the street lighting in order to avoid any adverse effects on the local bat population and their habitats.'

It is submitted that appropriate guidance such as Dark Sky Ireland Lighting Recommendations (REF) should also be considered in regard to street lighting.

2.3.2 **Chief Executive Response**

The content of the submissions from the internal departments and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage are acknowledged.

It is considered that the proposed paved community space and heritage stone wall intervention requires further consideration by way of the input of a Grade 1 Conservation Architect to inform any proposed works. Any design proposal should be based on the cultural significance of Fore with particular consideration given to any proposed repairs to the historic boundary wall which should be accompanied by an evidence-based justification for any such works. Accordingly, having regard to the provisions of the current Westmeath County Development Plan and in particular CPO 14.16 which seeks to 'Continue to protect and enhance Fore Special Heritage Area in accordance with the Fore Special Heritage Management Study', it is considered that this element of the proposal, based on the information submitted, has not satisfactorily demonstrated that it would be consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. It is therefore considered that the development, as proposed, should be modified to omit this element of the proposal. Any future proposed development of this nature should be informed by the input of a Grade 1 Conservation Architect.

2.3.3 *Chief Executive Recommendation*

It is recommended that the proposed development be modified to omit the proposed paved community space and heritage stone wall intervention. Any future proposed development of this nature to be informed by the input of a Grade 1 Conservation Architect.

Section 3

3.1 Public Observations/Submissions Received

Two (2) public submissions were received during the statutory public consultation period. A synopsis of the issues raised within these submissions and the Chief Executive's response to same is set out below.

The main topics and themes which were raised included an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), public lighting, the historic stone wall, car parking.

3.2 Submission 1: Peter O'Reilly

3.2.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA): This submission raises concerns in relation to the absence of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the area based on its significance as a Special Heritage Area and notes that it should be standard practice for such an assessment to be carried out.

3.2.2 Proposed Lighting: The main concern highlighted by the submission is in relation to the 'unsightly presence' and 'light pollution' emitted from the 17 no. street lights proposed along the footpath, extending from Fore village to the start of St. Feichins way trail. The submitter outlines that the proposed street lights will increase light pollution by 74%, taking into consideration the existing 23 no. street lights in Fore Village. The submitter also refers to low level lighting¹ used in other places such as Glendalough which he believes should be the approach for Fore village.

3.2.3 Historic Wall: The submitter notes reference in the proposal to a 65-meter stretch of existing historic stone wall that is missing in the village, which it is stated is 'misleading' as the wall is covered in vegetation and bushes and therefore not missing.

3.2.4 It is also submitted that the stone wall is a modern build and should not be replicated, and the style of rebuild should be age appropriate to the wall.

¹ Lights positioned approximately 1 meter (or less) off the ground at regular intervals along a wooden fence etc. providing adequate light on the footpath without illuminating the entire area.

3.2.5 Chief Executive Response (Submission 1)

The content of this submission is noted. It is noted that the location layout plan which identifies the existing historical stone wall in pink outline is incorrect.

The proposed scheme has undergone screening for Environmental Impact Assessment under the EIA Directive 2014/52/EU to identify whether there is a need to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the proposed works and it is reasonable to conclude that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development at Fore Village and an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required in this instance.

Lighting in the project site should consider best practice guidance, such as Dark Sky Ireland Lighting Recommendations (REF).

It is considered that the proposed heritage stone wall intervention (paved community space) requires further consideration by way of the input of a Grade 1 Conservation Architect to inform any proposed works. Any design proposal should be based on the cultural significance of Fore with particular consideration given to any proposed repairs to the historic boundary wall which should be accompanied by an evidence-based justification for any such works. Accordingly, having regard to the provisions of the current Westmeath County Development Plan and in particular CPO 14.16 which seeks to 'Continue to protect and enhance Fore Special Heritage Area in accordance with the Fore Special Heritage Management Study', it is considered that this element of the proposal, based on the information submitted, has not satisfactorily demonstrated that it would be consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. It is therefore considered that the development, as proposed, should be modified to omit this element of the proposal. Any future proposed development of this nature should be informed by the input of a Grade 1 Conservation Architect.

3.2.6 Chief Executive Recommendation (Submission 1)

It is recommended that the proposed development be modified to omit the proposed paved community space and heritage stone wall intervention. Any future proposed development of this nature to be informed by the input of a Grade 1 Conservation Architect. Lighting in the project site should be designed in line with best practice guidance, such as Dark Sky Ireland Lighting Recommendations.

3.3 Submission 2: Ita Halpin

3.3.1 Car Parking: This submitter raises concerns in relation to car parking and wants to clarify any impact the proposed plans may have on parking outside her business for customers.

3.3.2 Copy of Part 8 Plans: The submitter also wishes to avail of a copy of the proposed plans.

3.3.3 Chief Executive Response (Submission 2)

The contents of the submission are acknowledged. It should be noted that the proposed plans are available for viewing on the Westmeath Public Consultation Portal. Alternatively, a copy of all plans and particulars are also available at the offices of Westmeath County Council.

For clarity, it should be noted that the proposed works include public street lighting, the reinstatement of a historic wall and the creation of a community space in front of the Old Gaol building.

The proposal also provides for street enhancements and a footpath together with a paved area to the front of the Old Gaol. It is not considered that any works would have an impact on existing parking in the village.

3.3.4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S RECOMMENDATION

Having regard to the issues raised above, it is not considered that any works would have an impact on parking in the village and no amendment is therefore necessary in this regard.

Section 4

4.1 Conclusion

The works are located within the designated Zone of Archaeological Importance of Fore Village and adjacent protected structures. The works are to provide a paved community space in the centre of Fore, reinstatement of a heritage stone wall, road surfacing and road markings and the provision of public lighting along an existing footpath trail along the L5637. Works will require the upgrade of the existing footpath infrastructure in the village, proposed along the L5637 and the L1163.

It is considered that the proposed heritage stone wall intervention and paved community space requires further consideration by way of the input of a Grade 1 Conservation Architect to inform any proposed design for such works. Any design proposal should be based on the cultural significance of Fore with particular consideration given to any proposed repairs to the historic boundary wall which should be accompanied by an evidence-based justification for any such works.

Regarding the remaining elements of the proposal, having regard to the plans and particulars submitted as part of this Part 8 application and the content of the submissions received, subject to the recommendations set out above, it is considered that the proposed development:

- would not impact negatively on natural or architectural heritage
- would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity
- would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and convenience.

4.2 Chief Executive Recommendation

Having regard to the above, it is considered that the proposed development and works in Fore Village is consistent with the provisions of the County Development Plan, and, as such, is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Accordingly, it is recommended that the proposed development proceeds in accordance with the scheme documentation save for the omission of the proposed paved community space and heritage stone wall intervention with the and as may otherwise be necessary to comply with the following requirement:

1. Public Street Lighting: Design Standards

An updated lighting design proposal shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

The revised design shall be informed by a suitably qualified expert bat specialist, in terms of the design/type and location of the street lighting to avoid any adverse effects on the local bat population and their habitats and having regard to best practice

guidelines as outlined in the 'Bats and Lighting, Guidance notes for planners, engineers, architects and developers, December 2010'.

All lighting should consider best practice guidance, such as 'Dark Sky Ireland Lighting Recommendations' and avoid LED light which peaks in the blue spectrum.

Yours sincerely



Pat Gallagher

Príomh Fheidhmeannach