



## **Development of Car Park at Mahon Bridge**

# **Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report**

### **1.Introduction**

The EIA Directive 85/337/EEC, as amended aims to determine the likely significant effects of a project on the environment. EIA Screening determines whether an EIA is required for a specified project. Projects requiring mandatory EIA are listed in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. In the case of development which is under these thresholds, planning authorities are required under Article 103 of the 2001 Regulations, (as amended) to request an EIAR where it considers that the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

Under Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), the proposed development is sub-threshold for EIA. The proposed development is being screened as per Schedule 7 of the regulations to determine if there is likely to be significant effects on the environment. Screening involves appraisal of impacts from the proposed development according to three main criteria:-

1. Characteristics of the proposed development
2. Location of proposed development
3. Characteristics of potential impacts.

Schedule 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended), outlines the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by a proposed development. These are: human beings, flora and fauna, soil and geology, water, air& climate, landscape, material assets, cultural heritage and the inter-relationships between the range of environmental criteria. EIA screening involves assessment of these criteria to determine if the proposed development is likely to significantly affect the environment.

## 2. Screening Assessment

**Table 1. Characteristics of proposed development**

Is the size and design of the proposed works significant ?	No, .5 ha.
Use of natural resources in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity ?	Proposed works involve surfacing of a .5ha field comprising semi-improved/wet grassland bounded by a stonewall with vegetation.
Will the works produce waste ?	Demolition and construction waste during development works.
Will the works create a significant amount of pollution or nuisance ?	Traffic management will cause small scale and temporary inconvenience for road users during development works.
Risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the project including those caused by Climate Change in accordance with scientific knowledge ?	Works will be governed by a health and safety statement. Providing best practice is followed the risk of accidents which are significant in scale is considered low.
Risks to human health (water contamination , air pollution)	Works will be governed by a health and safety statement. Providing best practice is followed the risk to human health is considered low.
Potential for cumulative impacts with other existing and/or approved projects?	Extension of existing car park and laybys on ring road to Mahon Falls currently under consideration by An Bord Pleanála. The area was subject to increased year round visitor usage in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic.
Potential for combination of above factors to have significant effects	It is not considered the proposed car park will give rise to additional footfall in the Comeragh Mountains SAC to a level that is significantly increased beyond current user levels as there are several other access points to the Comeragh Mountains north of the proposed car park site towards Mahon Falls. Car parking at Mahon Bridge currently takes place along the roadsides around the site and due to increased traffic to both the cafe and Mahon Bridge to Crough Wood Walk a dedicated car park is required to service this demand.

**Table 2. Location of Proposed Development**

Environmental sensitivity of project in relation to existing and approved land use.	The site is 1.2km south of the nearest SAC- Comeragh Mountains and is outside the flood zone of the River Mahon.
Relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources	Proposed works involve surfacing of a .5ha field comprising semi-improved/wet

(including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground.	grassland bounded by a stonewall.
Absorption capacity of the natural environment including wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths, coastal zones and the marine environment, mountain and forest area.	The development will incur loss of .5ha of semi-improved/wet grassland. The proposed design will incorporate a wetland soakway and tree planting .
Potential of works to impact directly or indirectly on sites designated for nature conservation (NHA/SAC/SPA)	The site is 1.2km south of the nearest SAC- Comeragh Mountains. AA screening has been carried out and has concluded no potential for significant effects.
Potential for impacts directly or indirectly on Habitats or Species listed on Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive	AA screening has been carried out and has concluded no potential for significant effects. The works will not cause loss of habitat from the ecological footprint of the Comeragh Mountains SAC.
Potential for impacts directly or indirectly on Species listed on Annex IV of the Habitats Directive	No
Potential for impacts on breeding places of any species protected under the Wildlife Act ?	No
Potential to impact directly or indirectly on any listed ACA in the County Development Plan ?	No
Potential to impact directly or indirectly on any protected structure or recorded monuments and places of Archaeological Interest	There are two features of built heritage interest in the site a water pump and a stone depot.
Potential to impact directly or indirectly on Listed or scenic views or protected landscape in the County Development Plan ?	Mahonbridge is an area classified as a scenic route in the Waterford Scenic Landscape Evaluation. Scenic routes indicate public roads and viewing points from which views and prospects of areas of natural beauty and interest can be enjoyed. Sightseeing visitors are more likely to be concentrated along these routes. Development in the environs of a scenic route should demonstrate that there will be no obstruction or degradation of the views towards visually vulnerable features nor significant alterations to the appearance or character of sensitive areas. The works will incur loss of .5ha of semi-improved/wet grassland bounded by a stone wall. The proposed design will incorporate a wetland soakway and tree planting to screen the car park.
Potential to impact on areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards and relevant	A walking trail exists between Mahon Bridge and Crough Wood leading northwards towards a Coillte plantation site.

<p>to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure.</p>	<p>The pandemic year saw increased user numbers to the trail with associated need for car parking facilities at Mahon Bridge. The majority of walkers confine their walk to this route but some walkers continue along the River Mahon within the Comeragh Mountains site. This unofficial trail is the subject of a remediation plan being implemented by Waterford City and County Council under the guidance of NPWS. It is not considered the proposed car park will give rise to additional footfall in the Comeragh Mountains SAC to a level that is significantly increased beyond current user levels as there are several other access points to the Comeragh Mountains north of the proposed car park site towards Mahon Falls. Car parking at Mahon Bridge currently takes place along the roadsides around the site and due to increased traffic to both the cafe and Mahon Bridge to Crough Wood Walk a dedicated car park is required to service this demand. The car park in itself will not cause loss of ecological footprint from the Comeragh Mountains SAC.</p>
<p>Potential to impact on densely populated areas.</p>	<p>The site is located in a rural area and will cause temporary inconvenience for road users during development works.</p>

**Table 3. Characteristics of Potential Impacts**

<p>Human Beings</p>	<p>Noise and traffic disruption will cause a small scale temporary impact for local residents.</p>
<p>Flora and Fauna</p>	<p>The development will incur loss of .5ha of semi-improved/wet grassland. The proposed design will incorporate a wetland soakway and tree planting .</p>
<p>Soils and Geology</p>	<p>No protected geological heritage sites will be affected.</p>
<p>Water</p>	<p>The nearest watercourse to the site is the River Mahon. The site is outside the flood zone of the river and a wetland soakway is being incorporated as part of the design.</p>
<p>Air &amp; Climate</p>	<p>The nearest air quality monitoring stations are in Waterford and Clonmel. EPA monitoring demonstrate compliance with the Air Quality Standards limit values for all pollutants with air quality classed as “good”.</p>

Noise & Vibration	Works will cause a temporary impact for local residents with noise but will be temporary and short term in nature.
Landscape	Mahonbridge is an area classified as a scenic route in the Waterford Scenic Landscape Evaluation. The surfaced car park will be screened by tree planting.
Material Assets	Works will be subject to and regulated by a waste management plan.
Cultural Heritage	<p>There are two features of built heritage interest in the site a water pump and a stone depot.</p> <p>Recessed stone depots found alongside the former National Primary and Secondary routes are a part of County Waterford's heritage which appears to be unique to the county but which most people seem to be unfamiliar with are the. These 19<sup>th</sup>-century stone depots are a prominent feature of the county's landscape. The main roads built during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century had the depots placed along the road with a distance of one furlong (one eighth of a mile), to accommodate the stonebreakers who manually crushed rocks into rubble to be used in the construction of the roads. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the army was responsible for the planning of these roads while the building of the roads was then undertaken by the Grand Jury, the forerunner for the local authority by whom they were replaced in 1899. The landowners on whose lands the roads were built were commissioned by the Grand Jury to supply the road builders with stones. Each depot would have two stonebreakers, one working with a sledgehammer and the other with a lump hammer. The overseer would then check the stones for size with a ring. If a stone was too big to pass through the ring it then would be crushed again. The rubble was then shovelled onto the road. The road between Leamybrien and Carrick-on-Suir took 5 years to build, beginning c.1840. The stonebreakers along the roads were phased out at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century with the introduction of the steampowered stonebreakers.</p>
Interaction of Foregoing	The main effects identified are change from semi-natural grassland to built surface and loss of stone wall boundary.

**Table 4. Discussion of Potential Impacts**

Will a large geographical area be impacted as a result of the proposed works ?	No, .5 ha.
Will a large population be impacted as a result of the proposed works ?	No, site is in a low population area. Works will cause a temporary impact for road users but will be temporary in nature.
Are any trans-frontier impacts likely to arise from proposed works?	No
Is the magnitude of impacts associated with the proposed works considered significant ?	No
Is the intensity and complexity of impacts associated with the proposed works considered significant ?	No
Is there a high probability that the effects will occur ?	Yes
Will the effects continue for a long time ?	Yes permanent but change from grassland to hard surface can be addressed by biodiversity mitigation measures.
Will the effects be permanent rather than temporary ?	Yes permanent but can be addressed by biodiversity mitigation measures.
Will the impacts be irreversible?	The development will sustain and regenerate two features of built heritage interest- water pump and stone depot.
Will it be difficult to avoid, or reduce or repair or compensate for the effects ?	The works will incur loss of .5ha of semi-improved/wet grassland bounded by a stone wall. The proposed design will incorporate a wetland soakway and tree planting to screen the car park. The design shall incorporate retention of the water pump and stone depot.

### **3..Conclusion**

The DoEHLG Guidance Document “Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-Threshold Development” notes that *“The greater the number of different aspects of the environment which are likely to be affected and the greater the links between the effects, the more likely it is that an EIS should be carried out. Where complexity of impacts is deemed to apply in the case of a specific sub-threshold development proposal, there should be a predisposition towards the preparation of an EIS”*.

In consideration of the above involving appraisal of characteristics and location of proposed development and characteristics of potential impacts it is noted that the key environmental receptors to be affected are built heritage and landscape. The proposed design will incorporate a wetland soakway and tree planting to screen the car park and also retention of

the water pump and stone depot.. It is concluded that an EIAR is not required for the proposed development.



**Image 1.** Stone Depot to be retained



**Image 2.** Water Pump to be retained