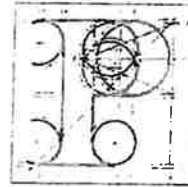


Our Case Number: ABP-318573-23

Planning Authority Reference Number:



**An
Bord
Pleanála**

Bypass Slane Campaign
c/o Conor Brady
42 Ledwidge Hall
Slane
Co. Meath

Date: 19 February 2024

**Re: A proposed Road Development comprising of the N2 Slane By-Pass and Public Realm Enhancement Scheme
Within the Townlands of Slane, County Meath**

Dear Sir / Madam,

An Bord Pleanála has received your recent submission in relation to the above-mentioned proposed road development and will take it into consideration in its determination of the matter. Please accept this letter as a receipt for the fee of €50 that you have paid.

Please note that the proposed road development shall not be carried out unless the Board has approved it or approved it with modifications.

The Board has also received an application for confirmation of a compulsory purchase order which relates to this proposed road development. The Board has absolute discretion to hold an oral hearing in respect of any application before it, in accordance with section 218 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Accordingly, the Board will inform you in due course on this matter. The Board shall also make a decision on both applications at the same time.

If you have any queries in relation to this matter please contact the undersigned officer of the Board at laps@pleanala.ie

Please quote the above-mentioned An Bord Pleanála reference number in any correspondence or telephone contact with the Board.

Tell
Glaó Áitlúil
Facs
Láithreán Gréasáin
Ríomhphost

Tel (01) 858 8100
LoCall 1890 275 175
Fax (01) 872 2684
Website www.pleanala.ie
Email bord@pleanala.ie

64 Sráid Maoilbhríde 64 Marlborough Street
Baile Átha Cliath 1 Dublin 1
D01 V902 D01 V902

Yours faithfully,

Ms Eimear Reilly

Eimear Reilly
Executive Officer
Direct Line: 01-8737184

HA02A

Tel
Glaó Aitlíúil
Facs
Láithreán Gréasáin
Ríomhphost

Tel
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www.pleanala.ie
bord@pleanala.ie

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Baile Átha Cliath 1
D01 V902

64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 V902

A PROPOSED ROAD DEVELOPMENT COMPRISING OF THE N2 SLANE BY-PASS AND PUBLIC REALM ENHANCEMENT SCHEME

Submission from the Bypass Slane Campaign

February 2024

Introduction

We welcome the fact that an application has finally been lodged by Meath County Council for planning permission for the above scheme. We believe that the scheme is urgently required to properly deal with the extremely hazardous road traffic conditions that have existed in Slane for decades. Furthermore, we welcome the plan to enhance the environment of the village as it is clear that the volume of traffic has obstructed a range of developments, both public and private, around the village over decades.

Previous N2 Slane Bypass application by Meath County Council

To begin, it is important to state how disappointed we, and many others across the Slane community were, with the previous decision by An Bord Pleanála in its refusal to grant permission for the previous scheme.

We were particularly disappointed that this decision was taken in opposition to the Board's own inspector who oversaw the process of the Oral Hearing. We believe the decision, which shut down the application and necessitated the commencement of a completely new process, was a seriously missed opportunity. Furthermore, the decision was in no way constructive nor did it go any distance whatsoever towards providing a solution for the people of Slane. The atmosphere in the village following this remote announcement was despondent to say the least; all hope for a better, safer future had been extinguished. We continue to wait for the delivery of a safe road through our village.

This decision was delivered in early 2012 and the resulting new application process which has been characterised by announcements, postponements and punctuated by interminable consultations, dragged out over no less than twelve further years. We hope that the very lengthy process leading to this current application has allowed for the design of a scheme of a standard and quality that ABP will now find acceptable and that the scheme can proceed without further unnecessary delay. The Slane community needs protection from further threat and danger and also deserves to enjoy the proper development and enhancement of the public realm that is experienced by towns and villages across county Meath and elsewhere.

We were also very disappointed at the time of the last refusal that the Bord, contrary to the recommendation of their own inspector, did not opt to seek further information, which would have kept the process alive, delivered the bypass in a much timelier manner and avoided the absolute waste of taxpayer's money and the time, talent and energy of all involved in trying to resolve the ongoing serious situation in Slane.

Impact on Brú na Bóinne WHS

We recognise that part of the reason for the refusal of the previous scheme was that Meath Council Council failed to adequately consider and mitigate for the proximity of the scheme to the UNESCO Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site.

We note that significant changes have been made to the design of the scheme in order to move the line of the bypass further away from the western edge of the WHS and also to redesign the bridge crossing of the River Boyne to propose a lower structure with less visual impact.

We agree that appropriate protection continue to be given to the WHS but such consideration must be appropriate and proportional and must take account of the need to protect the lives of the resident community in the area.

We completely reject the idea that seemed to have been held in certain quarters during the last Oral hearing that protection of the perceived integrity of the WHS must be maintained at all costs including the very real impacts on the Slane community.

Doug Comer, in his report for MCC presented during the last Oral Hearing, described something of UNESCO's vision for resident and neighbouring communities of World Heritage Sites. He described the concept of Gateway Communities where settlements like Slane would be actively included in the management of a WHS with visitor services and traffic routed through the community in order that significant economic benefit is experienced. Slane does not benefit in this way from the WHS and has negatively impacted on those living within the WHS and even outside it in the Slane area with extremely strict planning measures and excessively lengthy, complicated and expensive application processes imposed. The 2015 WHS management plan called for a Steering Committee which was to have local community representation with a representative from the Slane community. This still has not happened. On top of these impositions, Slane suffered further with the refusal of permission for a bypass in 2012.

Need for the Scheme

Twenty-three people have lost their lives on the roads around Slane and as far as we can tell, at least twelve of these incidents involved local people. The problems facing the use of the road through Slane village are very real and have had a massive impact on the community over generations at this stage. It is thoroughly reprehensible that the responsible authorities have let so much time pass before seeking to properly address the problem. There has been one road death in the village since the ABP rejection in 2012, but this incident took place on the N51 and was not strictly due to the sub-standard characteristics of the N2. Nonetheless, it is arguable that this incident could have been averted with proper public realm design and traffic management that would have followed construction of a bypass.

At the last Oral Hearing, among other lacunae in the MCC application, it was very striking to members of the local community how little attention and thought had been put into presenting the scale of the need for a comprehensive solution to the very serious road traffic problems for users of the N2 and the Slane community. Had the local community not come together to present their stories and experiences of the road, the volumes of traffic and the multiple incidents—several of which resulting in the deaths of close relatives—the local experience would have been almost completely absent from the proceedings.

A series of presentations from various representatives of life in the village was organised independently of MCC, by the Slane Bridge Action Group and the Bypass Slane Campaign. It is clear

that this half-day session had a significant impact on the proceedings of the oral hearing. A very strong message on the impact on the quality of life in the village was given from the everyday experience of schoolchildren walking to school each day along the N2 to St Patrick's NS, to those families who were directly affected by bereavement, the circumstances of which were truly shocking. This information was not presented in the last EIS, and incredibly, it also appears to be absent from the current EIS. The reality of the lived experience in Slane is at the very core of the application – this road is not solely an engineering problem – and this should not be forgotten by any of the parties involved in this application process.

It seems bizarre that this message is not present at all in the EIS submitted by MCC in support of the current scheme. The current application devotes only a brief section to the justification of the need for the construction of the bypass–Chapter 2 Background and Need–which does not begin to adequately reflect the scale of the horrors visited on the village.

Chapter 2, Background and Need, where it might be expected that detailed information on the litany of incidents and deaths might be presented, does have quite a detailed section on the day-to-day problems caused by high traffic volumes, oversized vehicles, etc. but omits completely any mention let alone objective presentation, quantification or description of previous incidents including the 2009 pile-up on Chapel Street which sparked the previous application. There seems that only the barest of reference has been made in the EIS to the fact that deaths have taken place on the N2 as a result of its sub-standard layout.

Chapter 11 Human Health presents in detail the possible impact on human health relating to the construction and operation of the N2 Slane Bypass Scheme but again, makes no reference to the current health impacts of the sub-standard road nor to the cumulative impacts should a bypass not be provided.

Chapter 24 Risk of Major Accidents and/or Disasters focuses on two situations:

- where the proposed scheme may CAUSE a major accident and/or disaster and
- where the proposed scheme is vulnerable to hazards resulting from a major accident and/or disaster.

Again, ironically, the risk of a major accident and/or disaster happening should the proposed scheme not be delivered, is not considered.

In relation to the current application, we note that MCC met with ABP on a number of occasions during the process leading to the current application and we hope that, in the interests of finding a lasting comprehensive solution that ABP engaged in a constructive and proactive way. We wonder whether the outcome of the last application process would have been different had this option been available to MCC at the time.

We urge APB to consider extremely carefully before any possible decision to refuse permission and shut down the process again. MCC in communication to ourselves in the Bypass Slane Campaign have made it very clear that should permission not be granted on this occasion, they will not proceed with a further attempt to seek permission for a revised scheme. They have not explained to us, or the Slane Community, what they would do to protect the Slane community from the dangers and degraded environment that would remain, should this be the final outcome.

Route of Proposed Bypass – lack of E-W solution

As we have said in almost every consultation/submission we have made since the beginning of this particular scheme, it is a matter of huge concern to us that the proposed bypass of the village is only a partial one, providing relief only along the north-south route. The previous traffic studies have made it clear that provision of the bypass as proposed will lead to an increased volume of traffic along the N51 on the eastern approach to the village. Any traffic travelling along the bypass that wishes to travel west will be directed through the centre of the village. All classes of traffic will be travelling in both directions along this route, including HGVs. Thus, it is clear that it will not be possible to remove HGVs completely from transiting through the village.

We seriously wonder what the point of the consultation processes was given that so many of the concerns and observations of the local community have been ignored.

It is a matter of some surprise and disappointment to us that Meath County Council have persisted with pursuing only a north-south road solution despite the reasons and deliberations by ABP following the last application specifically highlighting this issue among others. In this 'ruling' one of the key reasons for refusal was the fact that the proposed bypass at that time was only north-south. We understand that discussions have happened in the lead-up to the current submission between MCC and ABP and hope that this matter has been discussed. We understand that significant additional costs might be involved and that there may well be good reasons for the focus on only a north-south bypass, but the information behind this decision as well as ABP's position in relation to same, is not known. We trust that this will have been discussed between MCC and ABP in the pre-planning consultations although the documents provided relating to these consultations are lacking in any significant detail. We remain to be assured that the traffic management solution suggested by MCC for the N51 east-west route through the village will work and is not merely a displacement of a proportion of the traffic from the N2 onto another road in the village.

Village Enhancement Plan and Traffic Management

Although it is clear that many of the measures proposed in the Village Enhancement Plan depend on the delivery and implementation of the bypass of the village, we believe that Slane Village deserves and badly needs the implementation of an acceptable enhancement plan even, and particularly, if the bypass is not delivered.

The proposed traffic management strategy for the N51 does not seem robust enough to deal with the likely increased traffic levels. As we have learned in the village already, the imposition of low speed limits does not solve such problems without adequate and consistent enforcement, which does not exist and likely will not exist. We would like to see a more considered and effective and convincing, reassuring plan. The lack of clear information on the rights of way etc. at the Square, the very heart of the village, is also worrying.

This is not just an engineering problem and we recognise that the provision of the proposed public realm plan is an acknowledgement of this.

Other Developments

The State recently announced the purchase of Dowth Hall and its estates to provide a National Park in the Boyne Valley. This is a hugely positive development for the general public, the local community and the surrounding areas - provided that the plan does not result in further imposition on the local host community in the manner in which we are currently imposed upon as a result of hosting the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

These impositions are well documented - from refusal of the desperately needed Slane bypass, to onerous planning conditions for farmers and residents and to outright refusal of planning for those living in, and around, the core and buffer zones and increasingly, the peripheral areas. Any development of the Dowth Estate will likely increase traffic on not only the M1 motorway but also the current N2 and N51 through Slane. If provision is not made to upgrade the N2 through Slane by means of a bypass, the people living here can look forward to increased volumes of traffic as it transits through the village bringing increased safety risks and further degradation of the village environment. In contrast, the construction of the bypass and the accompanying public realm plan with its provision of off-street parking, could instead have the potential to see Slane benefit from the tourism which would come with the development of the National Park.

Similarly, Meath County Council plan to develop a Greenway using the canal towpath through Slane. We understand these plans are at an advanced stage. The provision of a Greenway where visitors can drive to and join at various points en-route, with Slane named as a natural location from which to access the amenity, also highlight the very real need to solve the issue of the sub-standard road and enhance the public realm space.

The construction of a bypass of the village and accompanying public realm enhancement scheme is the difference between resolving the issues pertaining to Slane and giving the village the opportunity to unlock the opportunities both the National Park and the Greenway present and maximise the potential Slane undoubtedly possesses, or exacerbate the chaos and danger that exists from the current road network through it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we welcome the application by Meath County Council for the provision of a bypass of Slane village and hope that the proposed scheme would finally see a resolution to the very real danger that the N2 through Slane poses to the people who live here and those who travel through. We do not wish to undermine this application but we do want to press home in as forceful a way as possible the continuing dire need for a proper, comprehensive solution to be finally delivered.

Conor Brady, 42 Ledwidge Hall, Slane Co. Meath 

