

An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report 17-HC0003

Development

Slane Bypass.

Location

Slane, Co. Meath.

Planning Authority

Meath County Council

Prospective Applicant

Meath County Council

Inspector

Mairead Kenny

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. By letter dated 30th July 2015 Meath County Council requested that the Board enter into pre-application consultations under Section 51A of the Roads Act 1993, for the development of a bypass for the village of Slane. A total of 4 no. pre-application meetings took place between An Bord Pleanála (the Board) and the prospective applicant on 21st September 2015, 7th December 2018, 12th March 2020 and 9th March 2023.
- 1.2. This report is prepared following the request by the prospective applicant to close the pre-application consultations between the applicant and the Board. It provides an overview of the proposed project, a summary of the meetings and the advice provided by the Board and the legislative provisions, and it recommends a list of prescribed bodies, which are deemed relevant.

2.0 Background

- 2.1. An application by Meath County Council for the N2 Slane Bypass was considered by the Board under HA0026. The Board refused to approve the proposed development in March 2012. There were two reasons for refusal. The Board's order also included a section entitled 'Comments on the Inspector's Report'. The Board is referred to the order which is to the rear of this case file.
- 2.2. In the letter to the Board dated 30th July 2015 Meath County Council listed a number of studies which have been undertaken since the decision under HA0026.
- 2.3. In response to a letter from the Board the prospective applicant submitted details of the background to the scheme, design of route, assessment of options and consultation undertaken to date. This was received by the Board on 17th of September 2015. The background to the scheme is to overcome the inadequacies of the N2 and reduce ongoing safety risks in the village of Slane and at approaches to Slane bridge. The proposals for a bypass of Slane on the N2 date back several decades.

3.0 Proposed development

3.1. As described in the documentation initially lodged under this pre-application consultation the scheme would comprise:

- A 3.5 km long Type II dual carriageway road crossing the River Boyne at a new 200m long bridge 1.1 km to the east of the existing N2 Slane bridge.
- To traverse a route from a new roundabout at Johnstown, to pass under Rosnaree road at Fennor, to meet the N51 at Cashel, 1.2 km east of the centre of Slane village and to join the N2 again at the northern extent of the scheme at another planned roundabout.
- Realignment of the existing N 51 over a length of 700 m is included.

3.2. As the scheme design emerged over the years of the pre-application consultation period it evolved to incorporate an urban design scheme in Slane. The name of the scheme was changed to N2 Slane Bypass and Public Realm Enhancement Scheme.

4.0 Pre-Application Consultations

4.1. A report of the 4 no. pre-application meetings is given in this section. The full record is available on the Board along with letters outlining certain clarifications which the applicant sought. I refer below also to other correspondence and a Board Direction, all outlined in chronological order.

4.2. During the first meeting the project was described as being at a very early stage. Traffic management alternatives were being considered as outlined in the letter to the Board on 30th July 2015. The prospective applicant stated that there would be a need to reappraise the project in terms of the road network in the area. The N2 Ashbourne to Ardee road scheme was stated to now be suspended. The Board noted the importance of justifying the nature of the road and cross sections pertaining and that the proposal be set in a strategic/policy context. The prospective applicant stated that a steering group was in place for delivery of the management plan for the World Heritage Site. During the meeting it was agreed that the prospective applicant would formally write to the Board seeking clarifications regarding the decision in the previous case. Regarding whether a future application should follow an east or west route the Board's representatives indicated that it was

unlikely that the Board could impart advice on this as it might be perceived as prejudging any application. The prospective applicant was advised to consult with the Department with regard to engagement of a World Heritage expert.

- 4.3. By letter of 24th of November 2015 the prospective applicant commented on the policy context in response to matters reported in the record. It emphasised that the County Development Plan 2013 – 2019 includes positive provision for the delivery of a bypass of Slane.
- 4.4. By letter of 18th of December 2015 the prospective applicant set out a number of questions relating to the Board's decision and matters in the reports of the Board's Inspectors. Amongst the issues raised were the selection of a route to the east of the village, the consideration of alternatives, compliance with the development plan, whether or not the planning framework is satisfactory in the absence of a Landscape Conservation Area, traffic management and the impact on Slane village, transboundary development, the basic form of the structure and its design parameters and other issues.
- 4.5. A letter of response was issued by the Board on 13th April 2016. That letter was written subsequent to a presentation of an update to the Board which was made on 11th April 2016. The letter outlined the Board's opinion that further proposals for the Slane Bypass will need to address key principles which were identified:
- Project justification to be established in a supporting and robust policy framework at national, regional and local level.
 - Alternatives to be comprehensively addressed in a local, regional and national context.
 - An extremely robust analysis and supporting case for any route alignment chosen.
 - Route alignment chosen to be based on transparent and accountable consideration and discounting of alternatives.
 - Supporting documentation and assessments to be based on comprehensive and up-to-date surveys, analysis and best practice.
- 4.6. The second pre-application consultation meeting on 7th December 2018 followed a considerable elapse of time since the initial meeting of 21st September 2015. The

prospective applicant stated that the Board's letter of 13th of April 2016 had proven to be useful and the applicant had gone back to a starting point vis-à-vis the proposed development. The project as a whole was described as being at a crucial stage. The proposed road development is strongly supported including in the NDP 2018 – 2027 and the Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016 – 2035. The proposed development will improve the quality of the built environment in Slane village. A Wide Area Traffic Model is in preparation and preliminary routes for a bypass on the western and eastern side of the village and traffic management options including HGV bans, tolling options and others have been generated. A World Heritage expert has been appointed and a statement of significance regarding the Outstanding Universal Value of Bru na Boinne was prepared in 2018. Independent assessments in relation to the World Heritage site are taking place at the route option selection stage. The Board's representatives noted that at the previous oral hearing the impacts of further development which might take place on lands at roundabouts was discussed as was the suitability of the extent of the buffer zone for the World Heritage Site. The prospective applicant noted that updated archaeological investigations had not revealed any spectacular large ritual complex archaeological sites. The applicant confirmed that all options for a bypass located to the west or east of the village were viable from a cost benefit perspective. The Board's representatives queried whether an urban renewal scheme might form part of any planning application and the prospective applicant confirmed that this was under consideration.

- 4.7. At the third meeting the Slane Bypass scheme was described as being near the end of Phase 2 Option Selection. It was reiterated that the approach to the project addresses the key issues raised in the previous refusal of permission including by the appointment of Dr Stephen Carter from the earliest stage, preparation of a Heritage Impact Assessment and the holding of meetings with ICOMOS. The public display of the emerging preferred option took place in November 2019. It is considered the traffic management alternatives would not address problems in Slane and would result in HGV traffic being diverted to less suitable routes. Western options for a bypass would directly impact priority habitat and have a greater negative architectural heritage impact. Eastern options would have a minor adverse impact of moderate significance on the OUV of the WHS. Eastern option EG scored well in terms of avoidance of Annex I habitats and is better screened and views from

Knowth, least intrusive on the landscape and is one of the best choices in terms of benefits to cost. The HIA did not identify significant negative impact on the WHS by any of the eastern routes. The southern section of the preferred option is 440 m further away from the WHS buffer zone and the bridge crossing is better screened by comparison to the previous proposal. In discussion the Board's representatives queried if the deep cutting which would be required at the southern end of the scheme would be visible from the WHS. The prospective applicant advised that due to topography and alignment the cutting, which is in rock, would be shielded from view.

4.8. An EIA scoping report was submitted in writing to the Board on 24th May 2022. The accompanying letter sought the opinion of the Board on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the EIAR as provided for in section 50(3) of the Roads Act.

4.9. At the fourth meeting the prospective applicant advised that the scheme is now entitled N2 Slane Bypass and Public Realm Enhancement Scheme. Phase 3 design is complete and the statutory documents are nearing completion. The purpose of the meeting was to give an overview of final design and some of the key elements. The proposed public realm improvements were described as creating a much-improved living environment within the village. The CPO would include 4 no. residential properties, 3 no. of which are occupied houses. The Type II dual carriageway was deemed to have economic and road safety benefits over a Type I single carriageway and to be only 3 m extra width. A detailed drawing of the bridge and photomontage images from the East and West and from Knowth were presented. The key mitigation measures for ecology and surface water were noted. Regarding the WHS the design changes and implementation of mitigation had resulted in a change in assessment by Dr Carter from 'minor magnitude and moderate significance' to 'negligible impact and minor significance'. The changes and mitigation include refinement of the vertical alignment of the bypass and bridge and selection of a shallow profile bridge span. Ongoing consultations with prescribed bodies were described. The Climate Impact Assessment is in preparation. The development offers a multimodal transportation solution and addresses a range of transportation needs. In discussion the applicant clarified that a short section of the bridge will be visible from Knowth and that a wide range of options for Visual Impact Assessment

are under consideration. The Board's representative's advised that induced traffic and encouragement of car use be addressed when considering climate impacts.

- 4.10. By letter of 26th of July 2023 Meath County Council requested closure of the pre-application consultation process.

5.0 Legislative Provisions

- 5.1. Section 51A of the Roads Act of 2015 provides for consultations with An Bord Pleanála before making an application under Section 51.
- 5.2. The Roads Act provides that the Board may give advice in relation to the procedures involved in making the application, and what may have a bearing on its decision in relation to the application in respect of the effects of the proposed road development on the environment, or an area, site or land, and proper planning and sustainable development.
- 5.3. Section 51A of the Roads Act consultations does not require the Board to provide an opinion on whether the project is strategic infrastructure or not.
- 5.4. On completion of consultations between the Board and the applicant, the Roads Act states that the applicant may apply to the Board for approval in relation to a proposed road development.
- 5.5. I note the applicant submitted an EIA scoping document. The Board advised that as a scoping exercise had already been done by the prospective applicant, a further scoping exercise would not be warranted and throughout the meetings the Board provided environmental advice in respect of the effects of the proposed road development on the environment.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1. Following the insertion of Section 51A into the Roads Act, a Road Authority or Local authority may enter into consultations with the Board prior to submitting an application under Section 51 (2) in relation to a proposed road development.
- 6.2. The Board may give advice to the Authority regarding procedures involved and which considerations relating to the effects of the proposed development on the

environment or the proper planning and sustainable development may have on its decision in relation to the application.

- 6.3. During the meetings, advice was provided as noted on the attached file.
- 6.4. A recommended list of prescribed bodies, who should be forwarded copies of the application documentation, is as follows:

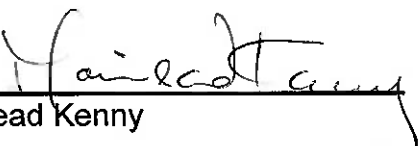
Section 51(3)(b) Bodies:

- (i) The Commissioner of Public Works in Ireland
- (ii) Failte Ireland
- (iii) An Taisce
- (iv) Any other prescribed body or person

It is considered that the following prescribed bodies should also be notified:

- (i) Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government
- (ii) Development Applications Unit of DHLGH
- (iii) Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- (iv) Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment
- (v) Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport
- (vi) Regional Authorities
- (vii) Meath and Louth County Councils
- (viii) Environmental Protection Agency
- (ix) Geological Survey of Ireland
- (x) Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- (xi) National Transport Authority
- (xii) The Heritage Council
- (xiii) Health & Safety Authority
- (xiv) Inland Fisheries Ireland
- (xv) Irish Water

Further notifications should also be made where deemed appropriate.


Mairead Kenny
Senior Planning Inspector

15 September 2023

