



In the matter of the Compulsory Purchase Order

**Cork City Council – Lehenaghmore Roads Improvement Scheme
Acquisition Order No. 2 of 2022**

And

**In the matter of an Oral Hearing before
An Bord Pleanála on May 22nd 2024**

**EVIDENCE OF
Robert Farrell
Executive Planner
Strategic & Economic Development
CORK CITY COUNCIL**

Compulsory Purchase Order Cork City Council, Lehenaghmore Roads Improvement Scheme

Acquisition Order No. 2 of 2022

Evidence of Robert Farrell, Executive Planner, Cork City Council

I have a Bachelor of Arts in Geography from University College Cork and a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Amsterdam, graduating in 2017. I also have a Masters in Sustainable Development from Technological University Dublin, which I undertook on a part-time basis while working. During my 7 years working as a professional planner, I have been employed in both the private and public sectors. Most recently, I joined Cork City Council in February 2024 and work as an Executive Planner in the Strategic and Economic Development Directorate. Before this I held the position of Executive Planner in the Development Management section of Dublin City Council. My current role affords me responsibility for overseeing the strategic planning of the south-west zone of the Cork City administrative area.

Context

Cork City's administrative area expanded in 2019, increasing the city's population to approximately 210,000 people and enlarging the city area to five times its original size. The extension encompassed many surrounding suburbs, including Togher and the Lehenaghmore areas to the southwest of the city. Such areas, while functionally a part of the city, were previously considered part of the county, situated on the outskirts of the city. These areas continue to have the characteristics of more rural, or urban fringe, locations, particularly with respect to infrastructure such as roads.

Cork City has, like many other urban areas in Ireland, experienced significant growth in recent decades, resulting in a continued expansion of residential areas and the urban environment, a phenomenon known as urban sprawl. Unchecked urban sprawl is detrimental to the creation of sustainable towns and cities as it results in habitat degradation, inefficient public transport services and increased emissions through private car use, among other things. The Lehenaghmore area of Cork has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent decades, with several large residential developments substantially increasing the area's population. The supporting infrastructure, particularly the roadways, have not necessarily kept pace with the residential development.

The Pouladuff / Lehenaghmore (L2455) and Togher (L2454) Roads act as the two key transport corridors which connect Lehenaghmore to Cork City Centre and surrounding suburbs. Significant sections of both roads are characterised by narrow lanes, steep embankments and a complete absence of either footpaths or cycle lanes. Given the existing and increasing population of the area, the roads do not provide safe and accessible routes for locals, particularly the most vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists. Furthermore, due to the various existing constraints, public transport in the area is inefficient and, as such, does not offer residents an attractive alternative to private car use.

In order to meet the existing, and future, demands of local residents, to promote a modal shift away from private car usage, to achieve proper planning and sustainable development and for the Council, which is also the road authority for the area, to provide facilities for all road users, it is necessary to upgrade the road infrastructure in this area which in turn requires the acquisition of the lands proposed to be acquired pursuant to the CPO herein.

The Scheme

The Lehenaghmore Road Improvement Scheme, to which this CPO acquisition relates, extends from the junction of the Pouladuff / Lehenaghmore (L2455) Road and Tramore Road just north of the South Ring Road to lands just south of the junction between the Lehenaghmore Road and Togher Road, adjacent to Lehenaghmore Park. The scheme also includes a large portion of the Togher Road, extending from the aforementioned junction with the Lehenaghmore Road to an area just north of the Ashbrook Heights estate. The project objectives are as follows:

- Improve road safety in the vicinity of Lehenaghmore along the L2455 and L2454.
- To improve the level of service for users of the L2455 between Pouladuff Roundabout and Barretts Junction and the L2454 Togher Road from Togher Community Grounds to south of Ashbrook Heights.
- To enhance the public realm along the route and improve the overall environment.
- To enhance pedestrian, cyclist and public transport connectivity and promote the use of sustainable modes of transportation in the Lehenaghmore and Togher areas.

The Lehenaghmore Road Improvement Scheme will see the upgrading of approximately 2.6 kilometres of road, with 1.9km of the Lehenaghmore Road and 0.7km of the Togher Road set for improvements. There are a multitude of works proposed as part of the overall scheme, which include the following:

- A minimum 1.8m wide footpath on the outbound side of the L2455 for approximately 1.5km.
- A minimum 2.0m wide footpath on the inbound side of the L2455 for approximately 1.45km.
- A 2m wide segregated cycle lane on the outbound side of the L2455 for approximately 1.5km.
- A 3m wide footpath on the eastern side of the L2455 over the N40 for 300m.
- A 2m wide footpath on the eastern side of L2454 Togher Road from Lehenaghmore Park Sports Ground through Barrett's junction, approximately 700m.
- A 4m wide pedestrian and cycle bridge alongside the old Bandon Railway bridge.

The scheme will also involve the widening of the existing roads, and the provision or improving of bus shelters, crossing facilities, boundary/entry treatments, new roundabout, surface water drainage and low-energy lighting.

Planning Policy Context

The Scheme accords with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and is consistent with the relevant national, regional and local plans and strategies including:

National Policy

- The Irish Government's **Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24)** sets out a roadmap for delivering upon Ireland's climate ambitions and aligns with legally binding carbon budgets and sectoral ceilings agreed by Government in 2022. The plan forms an overarching framework which seeks to assist in Ireland's commitment to achieving a 51% reduction in emissions from 2021 to 2030, and to achieving net-zero emissions no later than 2050. The plan establishes the current state of play in each of the key sectors of the economy, including transport, and identifies key targets, measures and actions for achieving an overall reduction in emissions for each sector. There has been no discernible change to the key performance indicators established for the Transport sector in CAP 23, which only increases the importance of implementing measures to reduce emissions. The existing Irish transport system embeds car-dependency and increased emissions by design, and CAP24 emphasises the crucial role of spatial and land-use planning in designing transport systems that can support our net-zero ambition. CAP24 emphasises the importance of the role of Local Authorities in the development of active travel infrastructure and the necessity to improve conditions for public transportation. The proposed Scheme comprises the development of active travel infrastructure which is likely to encourage more people to walk or cycle, as opposed to driving in private cars, to and from work and other destinations accessed by the scheme as well as widening the roadways which will benefit bus routes.
- Project Ireland 2040 – The **National Planning Framework (NPF)** is the Government's high-level strategic planning document establishing the overarching principles, policies and objectives driving future growth and development across the country up to 2040. These issues are addressed in the NPF as National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) and National Planning Objectives (NPOs) which seek to deliver these targets. The Scheme aims to develop pedestrian, cyclist and public transport connectivity in the area, while enhancing the public realm along the route and improve the overall environment. As such, it will improve connectivity between existing and future residential areas and amenities. The Scheme is, therefore, considered to be consistent with NSO 1- Compact Growth, NSO 4 – Sustainable Mobility and NSO 7 – Enhance Amenity and Heritage. It is also considered that the scheme aligns with and NPOs 26, 27 and 64.
- The **National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022)** sets out a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel and public transport to support Ireland's overall requirement to achieve a 51% reduction in carbon emissions by the end of this decade. Within the policy document there is stated support for the continued development of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, the expansion of bus capacity and services (including bus stops) and continuing to improve safety conditions for vulnerable road users. The policy is guided by the three key principles of 'Safe and Green Mobility', 'People Focused Mobility' and 'Better Integrated Mobility'. These three key principles are underpinned by ten high-level goals. The Scheme contributes positively, in my opinion, to at least five of the ten goals of the policy, while being neutral to, or unrelated to, the remaining five goals. The five goals the scheme can be said to contribute towards are as follows:

1. Improve mobility safety (by delivering better road conditions, footpaths and segregated cycle lanes).
2. Expand availability of sustainable mobility in metropolitan areas (Extending footpaths and cycle lanes into currently unserved areas).
3. Encourage people to choose sustainable mobility over the private car (Enhanced active travel infrastructure provides safer routes for users).
4. Design infrastructure according to Universal Design Principles and the Hierarchy of Road Users model (Scheme will accord with principles of Universal Design and DMURS).
5. Better integrate land use and transport planning at all levels. (Scheme will cater to existing and future residential developments in a growing area of the city).

Regional Policy

- The **Southern Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy** (RSES) adopted in 2020 translates the high-level objectives of the NPF at a regional level. The RSES also includes the Cork Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (Cork MASP) which sets out policy at the city level. These are set out in Regional Planning Objectives (RPOs) and Cork MASP Policy Objectives (Cork MASP POs). The Scheme is therefore considered to be consistent with RPOs 151, 152, 159, 160, 162, 168, and 174, and Cork MASP POs 7, 9 and 21.
- The **Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy** (CMATS) provides a framework for future transport planning in the Cork Metropolitan Area up to 2040. Support for increased investment in walking, cycling and public transport is emphasised within this Plan. Both the Pouladuff and Togher roads have been identified as strategic routes where it is an aim to support improved and increased public transport provision. CMATS also outlines a potential future network of cycle routes, which includes designating sections of the Lehenaghmore and Togher roads as comprising 'secondary' cycle routes. CMATS has included, and superseded, the Cork Cycle Network Plan 2017, which itself included the aforementioned routes.

Local Policy

- The Cork City Council **Climate Change Adaptation Strategy** 2019-2024 sets out seven themes under each of which there are a series of actions that the Council aims to undertake. The strategy sets out actions in response to the impact of climate change and plans for future development of climate change reliance. Action 8.6 of the Infrastructure and Built Environment theme promotes cycling and walking to support a greater uptake of active travel in the city, thus reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality. It also promotes the modal shift away from private cars through land use planning policy and other initiatives like mobility management initiatives to support the great use of walking and cycling, such as the 'Cork Cycle Network Plan' to help deliver this action. Given the Scheme seeks to enhance active travel infrastructure, through the provision of

footpaths and segregated cycle lanes in a currently unserved area of the city, it can be said that it will directly contribute towards achieving the targets of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, specifically action 8.6.

- Lands associated with the subject CPO acquisition were previously located within the Cork County Council administrative area, prior to the 2019 boundary changes. Cork County Council prepared a Local Area Plan (LAP) for the Ballincollig-Carrigaline Municipal District, within which the subject lands were located. Section 3.5.65 of the LAP notes that the Togher – Lehenaghmore area has continued to expand and identifies the necessity to provide adequate footpaths and lighting in the area. Section 3.5.78 also states that significant road improvements are needed in the area to service current and future traffic volumes, as well as the provision of paths, lighting and cycling routes. The Cork County Council LAP has been superseded by the Cork City Development Plan, following the boundary change and adoption of the City Development Plan. Notwithstanding this, the Scheme can still be said to comprise a significant milestone in achieving the overall ambitions to improve access and connectivity in this area, as outlined in the Ballincollig-Carrigaline Municipal District LAP.

Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028

The Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 came into effect on 8th August 2022. The subject CPO acquisition to facilitate the works accords with several objectives set out in the Plan which support improvements to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, public transport corridors and works which enhance the urban environment, including:

- One of the nine principles of the strategic vision of the City Development Plan (CDP) set out in paragraph 1.5 of the Plan is ‘sustainable and active travel’ and the need across the city for a shift toward walking, cycling and public transport.
- Table 4.3 of the CDP outlines some key walking and cycling improvements proposed and specifically refers to the Lehenaghmore Road Improvement Scheme. It states that the scheme will provide connectivity between the Togher and Lehanaghmore and further on to the City Centre and western suburban and will address the infrastructural deficit which has been more acute as the area developed in recent years.
- Section 4.20 of the City Development Plan sets out Cork City Council’s commitment to improving pedestrian and cycle connectivity in the areas identified in Table 4.3.
- Strategic Objective 3 ‘Transport and Mobility’, which seeks to support the implementation of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS).
- Objective 2.10 ‘The 15-Minute City’, which seeks to support the delivery of accessing all necessary amenities within a 10-minute walk or cycle or 15-minute public transport journey. This includes support for public and active travel infrastructure projects.
- Objective 3.35 ‘Safe and Secure City’, which promotes increased pedestrian activity and connectivity between areas.

- Table 3.8 of the CDP showcases a Department of Education preliminary assessment of additional educational capacity for Cork City in which the Lehenaghmore area is identified as a growth area where there have been new or expanded primary schools. This assessment highlights the increasing need for improved mobility networks in the area, to facilitate safe and efficient transport to and from schools.
- Objective 4.1 'CMATS', which supports the implementation of CMATS including the projects in relation to walking and cycling.
- Objective 4.4 'Active Travel', which promotes walking and cycling as efficient, healthy, and environmentally friendly modes of transport by securing the development of a network of direct, comfortable, convenient, and safe cycle routes and footpaths across the city.
- Objective 5.1 'A Climate Resilient City', which promotes an environmentally sustainable and low-carbon city where people can benefit from integrated climate and environmental action measures which also offer social and economic benefits.
- Objective 5.5 'Climate and Environmental Action Strategies', which focuses on the implementation of actions contained in a suite of strategies and plans, including the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019.

Planning Policy Compliance

As set out in the preceding paragraphs, the Scheme is considered to align with all relevant national, regional and local planning policy and strategies. The Scheme is specifically addressed in the City Development Plan and its role in improving pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is consistent with Strategic Objective 3. The overall Lehenaghmore Road Improvement Scheme comprises an array of interventions designed to improve road infrastructure and promote sustainable transportation and active travel in the Lehenaghmore and Togher areas. The delivery of these improvements to the local road infrastructure will enable increased connectivity between existing and future residential areas and will contribute to achieving climate action targets through the provision of segregated cycle lanes and pedestrian footpaths. The works as approved under the Part 8 process are consistent with the objectives identified and will help to deliver the compact sustainable growth envisioned in the NPF.

Active travel is a key component of a sustainable city. The NPF, RSES, City Development Plan and CAP24 all identify the need for active travel and sustainable transport as part of the approach to deliver sustainable compact growth. The City Development Plan is based on the principle of integrated land-use and transport planning and sustainable active travel is a fundamental component of this integrated approach. The central Development Plan concept of the walkable or 15-minute city is based on a network of neighbourhoods underpinned by public transport, walking and cycling networks and enhanced permeability between neighbourhoods and communities. In order to achieve a sustainable future growth of the south-west suburbs, it is essential that a modern, safe road network can be provided, one which includes safe and accessible routes for more vulnerable road users. As such, the proposed scheme is integral to achieving these aims.

Conclusion

The Lehenaghmore area, and its immediate surrounds, have undergone significant levels of residential development in recent decades, while the local road network has not developed at the same pace. Given the increased demand placed upon the local road network, and lack of suitable alternatives to private car use, the area experiences significant congestion at peak hours. Furthermore, the lack of appropriate cycling and pedestrian facilities has resulted in high levels of car dependency.

The City Development Plan supports the 15-minute city approach and encourages increased public transport and active travel opportunities. It recognises the local road network challenges in Cork, including the Lehenaghmore area, and identifies targeted improvements to sustainable and active infrastructure through the increased provision of pedestrian and cycle routes. In order to ensure accessibility and safety in the Lehenaghmore area it is essential that viable cycle and pedestrian infrastructure is delivered in a coordinated manner.

In this regard the subject CPO acquisition is a key enabler to support the sustainable development of this area of the city. The proposed works will provide significant improvements to the area in terms of connectivity and includes the provision of high-quality continuous walking and cycling facilities which will provide benefits in relation to the promotion of active travel for communities in this area.

In considering the merits of the Scheme, having regard to compliance with the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy and the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 and other documents considered herein, I certify that the Scheme is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, and I am informed and believe that the acquisition of the lands which are the subject matter of the CPO acquisition herein is reasonably necessary, and is proportionate, taking into account the acquisition of land from the landowners concerned and the public benefit of the scheme, for the implementation of the Scheme in question which has received the relevant approval under the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended and Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as amended under same.

Robert Farrell

Executive Planner

17 May 2024