

Planning Report

Redevelopment of Port Facilities at Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork

Strategic Infrastructure Development Application to An Bord Pleanála

May 2014



Prepared on behalf of
Port of Cork

1. Introduction

This planning statement sets out the case in favour of the proposed development under the following headings:

- (a) The strategic importance of the Port of Cork;
- (b) The economic and spatial planning justification for the project;
- (c) The relevant planning history;
- (d) The nature and extent of the proposed development as compared to PL 04.PA0003;
- (e) The planning issues;
- (f) Community gain.

2. The Strategic Importance of the Port of Cork

The Port of Cork plays a key strategic role in the development of both the Cork City region and the wider Irish economy. By facilitating the movement of goods to and from the UK and Continental Europe, the Port also plays an important role in the development of the EU's Internal Market.

Ensuring that the Port of Cork continues to meet the external connectivity needs and supports the development of the wider regional and national economy is of key importance. This is clearly enunciated in Irish government policy, including the National Spatial Strategy, the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP), the South West Regional Planning Guidelines and the Government's recent National Ports Policy statement.

The Port of Cork has also been designated for inclusion (alongside Dublin Port and Shannon Foynes) as a Core Network port under the EU Trans-European Network – Transport (TEN-T). This recognises the strategic importance of the port to the island of Ireland where practically all trade is exported by sea and its role in the movement of goods to and from the UK and Continental Europe. The Government's National Ports Policy statement also identifies Port of Cork as a 'Tier 1 Port of National Significance'.

The Port of Cork's strategic importance is evidenced by the fact that it is the second largest multi-modal port and the largest natural harbour in Ireland, capable of handling all of the principal modes of port traffic. It is also the second largest Lo-Lo port, handling almost 23% of all Lo-Lo trade, and it accounts for 21% of break bulk and almost 39% of liquid bulk trade in the State.

3. The Economic and Spatial Planning Justification for the Project

3.1 Economic Benefits

The Port of Cork serves a catchment area which represents a large and strategically important part of the State's population and economic base. Almost two-thirds of the Port's customers are located in Cork while over 70% are in the South West region and 92% are in Munster. This has important implications in terms of the requirements for port capacity to serve this catchment area

The key drivers of the rationale and need for the proposed Ringaskiddy Port Redevelopment include the existing physical constraints in handling larger vessels and the changing nature of port activities, including the trend towards port-centred logistics. Addressing these needs would allow the Port of Cork to meet and secure its future development potential, and this would translate into significant quantified economic benefits for Cork and the surrounding region, as well as the national economy.

The port's ability to retain its overall share of the market in Ireland is important for the regional economies of Cork and Munster, and the future growth of the Cork Gateway. This will require the port to respond competitively to the developments that are taking place in shipping through ensuring sufficient capabilities and configuration of capacity.

Failure to adequately respond to port sector developments, however, would likely mean that the Port of Cork will lose competitiveness and market share to other ports, including Dublin. This will result in greater costs for the Irish economy, as well as undermining the commercial viability of the Port of Cork.

The potential overall economic impact that would arise from successful expansion of the Port of Cork at Ringaskiddy includes the direct and indirect impacts that would arise in the construction phase and in the operational phase of an expanded port.

The impact of construction phase employment should not be underestimated in the context of the wider labour market and high levels of unemployment among construction sector professionals.

During the operational phase of an expanded port at Ringaskiddy, additional ongoing economic impacts would arise. Indecon's modelling suggests that the direct employment supported by the port could rise by 785 to 815 FTEs while economy-wide employment (including indirect/multiplier impacts) could increase by 1,095 to 1,136 FTEs. The direct employment supported would include jobs in the local and wider Cork areas.

Of considerably greater importance from the perspective of longer-run, sustainable socio-economic impacts would be the expected impacts that would arise through the implications for the external trade of the Port of Cork. Assuming the proposed Ringaskiddy developments are fully implemented, it is estimated that future expansion of the port could support over 82,000 additional jobs by 2023 and over 182,000 additional jobs by 2033.

While it is important to assess the positive impacts of the planned Ringaskiddy Port Developments, it is also critical to highlight the costs associated with failure to develop the port. These costs would arise primarily in the form of a loss in the value of trade handled by Port of Cork once capacity is reached and additional over-capacity trade must be handled at other ports. It is estimated that the overall value of this loss in trade from Port of Cork could amount to up to €25.7 billion in present value terms over the period to 2033. While this does not represent a net loss in trade to the national economy (as the trade could still be handled at other ports), the additional transport and other costs associated with handling this trade at more distant ports would place the Cork region at a competitive disadvantage, and this would adversely impact on investment and overall economic development.

Indecon also undertook a formal Cost-Benefit Appraisal of the socio-economic impacts of the proposed Ringaskiddy Port Redevelopment. The objective of this appraisal was to assess whether the proposed developments would deliver a net economic return to the Irish economy. The results of the appraisal suggested that proceeding with the proposed Ringaskiddy Port Redevelopment would be likely to deliver a net economic return to the Irish economy. This is evidenced by a Benefit-Cost Ratio of 2.31 to 1, which represents a very positive result, but also one that is rigorously based.

3.2 Spatial Planning Benefits

In addition to direct impacts, an important indirect, catalytic impact would emerge over time as the Port relocates its existing operations at Tivoli and City Quays to Ringaskiddy, thereby releasing current port lands in the Cork Docklands for potential re-development into employment-intensive economic activities. Paragraph 13.77 of the Draft Cork City Plan 2014 notes that "with appropriate investment, the South Docks area is capable of supporting a large residential and working population, however the achievement of this will be dependent on the relocation of the Port of Cork and the SEVESO site".

In regard to Tivoli, paragraphs 14.14 and 14.15 of the Draft City Plan note that "the Port of Cork proposes to relocate the existing container shipping operations from Tivoli to the lower harbour, namely, Ringaskiddy. When implemented, this will create an opportunity to redevelop Tivoli Docks for alternative purposes".

The Draft City Plan notes that "Tivoli has an extensive south facing waterfront and the commuter rail line runs along its northern boundary. The CASP Update identifies it as an area with future potential for residential and employment uses. The City Council is therefore committed to supporting the regeneration of the Tivoli area through the preparation of a Local Area Plan. The timing of the preparation of a local area plan will be linked to the programme for relocation of the Port and the likely timetable for lands becoming available for redevelopment".

The delay in the approval for the relocation of port activities from the City Quays and Tivoli has resulted in a corresponding delay in the redevelopment of these areas for new employment and housing areas. A decision of the Board to approve the proposed strategic infrastructure development at Ringaskiddy would generate renewed interest in the regeneration of those areas.

4. The Relevant Planning History

The most significant previous planning application was the proposal submitted by the Port of Cork Company under PL 04.PA0003 for “demolition of the public pier and slipway at Ringaskiddy and the construction of a container terminal and a multi-purpose Ro-Ro berth, and replacement of the public pier and slipway to the east of the site at Ringaskiddy Deepwater Port & Ferry Terminal”. The Board decided to refuse consent for the following reason:

“The proposed development entails the relocation of commercial freight activities of the Port of Cork from its existing location at Tivoli Docks, which is served by a railway line and has reasonably direct access to the national road network, to a location to the south-east of Cork city at Ringaskiddy which is not connected to the national rail system and would be totally reliant on road-based transport.

While the Board accepts that there is a need to move port activities from Tivoli Docks and expand at other location(s) within the Cork Harbour area, it is considered that the proposed development would:

(a) result in much of the port related traffic traversing the city road network which would adversely impact on the carrying capacity of the strategic road network in and around Cork city and in particular the carrying capacity of the strategic interchanges at Bloomfield, Dunkettle and Kinsale Road and the Jack Lynch Tunnel which it is necessary to preserve; the proposed development would exacerbate serious traffic congestion at these strategic interchanges; and

(b) be unable to make use of rail freight carrying facilities in the future and would, therefore, represent a retrograde step in terms of sustainable transport planning (noting references to the potential for rail freight in the Regional Planning Guidelines for the South West Region 2004-2020 and the Cork Area Strategic Plan 2001-2020).

The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area”.

The Board’s Inspector had also recommended refusal for the following reason:

“It is considered that the proposed development by reason of excessive noise and the curtailment of boating and leisure activities in the lower harbour area and Oyster Bank in particular, would seriously injure the amenities of the residents of the lower harbour area and in particular the residents of Ringaskiddy, White Point, Black Point and parts of Monkstown. The proposed development would therefore be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area”.

However the Board did not support the recommendation to refuse on the grounds of potential noise and leisure impacts. The Board’s Direction explained that:

“In deciding not to accept the Inspector’s second recommended reason for refusal the Board in relation to noise had particular regard to the pattern of industrial and port development in the vicinity and having regard to the mitigation measures proposed considered that a refusal for reasons of noise disturbance was not justified. In relation to boating and leisure activities the Board had particular regard to the multipurpose use of Cork Harbour ranging from commercial shipping and industrial to small craft sailing and local angling and considered that the development of port facilities at this area would be acceptable provided other planning considerations were met and satisfactory mitigatory measures for the leisure and boating activities were put in place”.

Since the Board's decision in 2008, there have been significant changes in the planning context in regard to the reason for refusal. The potential for port-related rail freight services has been thoroughly reviewed at the local, national and European levels and there is now a general consensus that the rail freight services in Cork Harbour would only be feasible for certain niche cargoes. These services can be provided at Tivoli in the short term and at Marino Point in the medium to long term.

There has also been progress in improving the carrying capacity of the strategic interchanges referred to in the Board's decision. The Kinsale Road Interchange has already been upgraded. The upgrade of the Dunkettle Interchange has been approved and the notices to treat have already been served. The improvement of the Bloomfield Interchange will be included in the proposed upgrade to the N28 which the NRA expect to submit to the Board for consent in January 2015.

There have also been significant changes to the planning policy framework. Following the Board's decision in June 2008, the CASP Update 2008 and the Cork County Development Plan 2009 recommended that the implications of the Board's decision be considered by the Port of Cork Company and the planning authorities. This was achieved in 2010 by the commissioning of a study of the feasibility of rail freight services which was used to inform a comprehensive review of the Port of Cork Strategic Development Plan. The revised strategic plan for the port was then endorsed by the South West Regional Planning Guidelines 2010, the Middleton and Carrigaline Electoral Area Local Area Plans 2011, and the Draft County Development Plan 2013.

In parallel with these changes in the hierarchy of plans at the regional, county and local area level, there have also been changes at the national and European levels. In 2011, the European Commission adopted a proposal to transform the existing patchwork of European roads, railways, airports and canals into a unified transport network (TEN-T). The National Ports Policy 2013 (NPP) addressed the implications of the inclusion of three Irish ports - Dublin, Cork and Shannon Foynes - within the European network. The NPP noted that efficient hinterland connections are critically important to a port's ability to facilitate large volumes of traffic. While TEN-T core ports should have a connection to both core road and rail networks, the NPP acknowledges that "freight movements over short and medium distances (below some 300km) will to a considerable extent remain on trucks".

In general there has been a shift in the attitude of the planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála to the strategic road network. There is now greater consensus on what constitutes 'strategic traffic' and on the priority which should be given to strategic traffic when there is limited spare capacity on the national route network. There is also more emphasis on addressing problems with traffic congestion by demand management rather than by waiting for future investment in additional road capacity.

The effect of this evolution in the policy framework is that there has been considerable change in relation to each of the reasons and considerations which were cited by the Board in refusing consent for the previous application.

5. The nature and extent of the proposed development as compared to PL 04.PA0003

The development proposed under PL 04.PA0003 involved the construction of a container terminal with quay walls of 480m, 18 ha of new reclamation for open storage and a Ro-Ro berth of 269m. The current proposal will provide new container and multipurpose berths totalling 514m and an extension of 182m to the existing deep water berth at Ringaskiddy West.

While the current proposal involves a similar length of new berths, there is no longer a proposal for a significant extension to the existing reclaimed area. As a result the container operations will be of smaller scale and will be set back further from the residential areas at Rushbrooke and Cobh.

On the other hand there will be additional development at Ringaskiddy West which was not included in the previous proposal. However the extent of the development proposed at the deep water berth was significantly reduced at the pre-application stage by the omission of the reclamation originally proposed at the ADM Jetty.

6. Review of the Planning Issues

6.1 Traffic and Transportation

The traffic impact assessment for the operational phase of the redevelopment indicates that, in 2018, there could be a traffic impact of major significance in the peak periods. The proposed mitigation measure is to reduce Port HGV traffic during the commuter peak periods by introducing the Ringaskiddy Mobility Management Plan (RMMP). This will manage freight generated by the Port during the peak periods until the opening of the N28 Upgrade. The management of freight will include utilising the available road capacity outside the peak periods to accommodate the movement of Port HGVs to and from Ringaskiddy. In 2033, with the N28 upgrade in place, the impact of the development will be negligible during the peak periods.

During the construction phase, there may also be traffic impacts of major significance in the peak periods. As with the mitigation required during the operational phase, mobility management will be used to reduce construction traffic during the 07.45 - 09.15 and 17.00 - 18.00 commuter peak periods. Construction vehicles will use the strategic road network (i.e. N28 and N40) to access the site and will be restricted from using local roads or unsuitable roads on grounds of safety.

Following the introduction of mitigation, in 2017 during the construction phase and in 2018 during the operation phase, there will be no residual traffic impacts of major significance.

6.2 Noise and Vibration

Some of the proposed changes in port operations have the potential to elevate noise levels at the noise sensitive properties if worst-case activities are involved and no mitigation measures are in place. The noise and vibration assessment outlines a range of mitigation measures to reduce noise impacts associated with the proposed redevelopment, including extensive noise barriers and the use of alternative quieter alarm systems.

Some of these measures (e.g. the use of alternative alarm systems for plant) have the potential to generate improvements in the noise environment at the deepwater berth as compared with the existing scenario. With the proposed mitigation measures in place and notwithstanding the potential improvements to the noise environment in some areas (e.g. alarm noise), it is expected that the noise environment in the vicinity of the proposed redevelopment will remain broadly similar to the existing noise environment in the vicinity of the Port.

6.3 Air Quality

The proposed port redevelopment has the potential to generate dust and odours during the construction phase and air emissions from vessels in port and associated HGV movement during the operational phase.

The construction emissions likely to arise during construction will be within acceptable levels and the dust and odour emissions will be subject to measurement and control throughout the construction phase.

The potential release of fugitive dust during bulk grain operations has been addressed through the range of best practice measures and handling protocols adopted by the Port of Cork. The existing codes of conduct and operational procedures adopted by the Port of Cork will be applied to the proposed redevelopment.

Air pollutant levels are within European Air Quality limits and will remain so during both the construction and operational phases. Dust monitoring is carried out at three site boundary locations as part of an on-going monitoring programme. All levels recorded are within the EPA Best Practice Limit for dust deposition. There will be no significant air quality impact resulting from the project.

6.4 Coastal Processes

A modelling programme was undertaken to evaluate the construction and operational phases of the proposed redevelopment at Ringaskiddy; this included tide and sediment transport modelling. The impact of the proposed development was quantified in terms of the changes in current regime for both the proposed redevelopments at Ringaskiddy and the additional slipway at Paddy's Point. The proposed construction will not impact on tidal current regime beyond the immediate vicinity of the redevelopment. A minor increase in maintenance dredging will be required at Paddy's Point but the general sediment transport regime will remain unchanged.

Sediment plume and deposition modelling was undertaken for dredging during the construction phase of the two Ringaskiddy sites showing minimum levels of deposition outside the immediate vicinity of the dredging envelope. Suspended sediment levels associated with the dredging programme showed that the turbidity levels would be increased within the local area but peaks would only persist for short periods of the tide.

6.5 The Water Environment

When mitigation measures are implemented, the potential impact on the Cork Harbour water body is assessed as imperceptible. A Water Framework Directive (WFD) Assessment has been carried out and has concluded that the proposed development will not compromise the achievement of the four main objectives of the WFD.

The flood risk assessment determined that the predominant source of flood risk in this area emanates from coastal flooding. The site is located within Flood Zone C (outside the 0.1% flood extent) and is therefore suitable for all types of development. The proposed redevelopment will not have any impact on the flood risk and is therefore compliant with the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Planning Guidelines 2009.

The proposed redevelopment will connect to the new Cork Lower Harbour Main Drainage Scheme and will therefore receive appropriate treatment prior to discharge to coastal waters. If necessary the Port of Cork will install a new package treatment works on the site in order to treat sewage from the proposed redevelopment prior to completion of the drainage scheme. The impact on receiving water quality will be negligible.

6.6 Ecology

Sampling was undertaken within the inner Ringaskiddy Basin and at Paddy's Point to assess potential impacts from the proposed redevelopment on marine ecology. The loss of approximately 3 hectares of subtidal and intertidal habitat will not have any adverse impact on either commercial or recreational fishing within the harbour due to the relatively small areas involved in the context of the harbour as a whole. Some species temporarily using the area will potentially be exposed to the noise produced by pile driving and dredging. However risk mitigation measures are proposed based on specific guidance provided by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The site is not directly located within any statutory or non-statutory designated sites of nature conservation value and is considered to support only a small percentage of the total wintering bird species present within Cork Harbour SPA. The most significant breeding bird species recorded was Common Tern which is a special conservation interest of Cork Harbour SPA. This species was recorded nesting on mooring dolphins within the existing Ringaskiddy Deep Water Berth. A wide ranging suite of mitigation measures is proposed throughout the EIS to protect the marine and coastal habitats and the species using the study site.

7. Community Gain

Under Section 37G (7) (d) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), the Board may attach a condition requiring the developer to construct or finance a facility, in whole or in part, or to provide or finance a service, in whole or in part, which, in the opinion of the Board, would be a substantial gain to the community. The Port of Cork proposes to allocate a sum of money, to be determined by the Board, which will be used to finance the provision of appropriate facilities or services in consultation with the planning authority.

8. Summary and Conclusion

The proposed development will be of significant economic and spatial planning benefit to the Cork Gateway and to the South West Region. The new port infrastructure will address the existing physical constraints in handling larger vessels and allow the Port Company to respond competitively to the changing nature of port activities, including the trend towards port-centred logistics.

The relocation of port activities to the lower harbour will facilitate the redevelopment of the South Docks and Tivoli which have important roles to play in the achievement of the housing and employment targets set out in the Cork Area Strategic Plan.

The issues raised in the Board's previous decision under PL 04.PA0003 are being addressed, partly by the changes in the planning policy framework and also by the upgrades to the strategic road network which have already been completed or are progressing through the planning, approval or funding stages. The proposed development is not dependent on completion of the N28 Upgrade as the traffic impacts will be addressed by demand management measures designed to reduce the generation of Port HGV traffic during the commuter peak periods.