



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-320547-24

Development	Permission for continued use of existing car park together with all associated site works.
Location	South Main Street Car Park, Stonebridge Lane, South Main Street, Wexford
Planning Authority	Wexford County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	20240614
Applicant(s)	ALUT Limited
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Refuse
Type of Appeal	First Party
Appellant(s)	ALUT Limited
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	29 th November 2024
Inspector	Aisling MacNamara

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site contains the South Main Street/ Stonebridge Lane car park which is an existing pay and display car park located in Wexford Town Centre that contains 37 spaces. The site has an area of 0.14ha and is located to the rear of South Main Street. The car park is backed onto by the rear of existing two and three storey buildings that front South Main Street and Bride Street.
- 1.2. The site is adjoined by two other car parks, The local authority operated Bride Street car park on higher grounds to the west which is accessed from Bride Street and the Ropewalk car park to the southeast which is accessed from King Street.
- 1.3. There is a one way system for vehicular traffic through the car park. Cars enter the car park via a ramp from the Bride Street car park and exit through Stone Bridge Lane which links to South Main Street and also provides a pedestrian link.
- 1.4. The subject car park is separated from Ropewalk car park by a high metal fence which does contain a pedestrian gate which was open on day of site visit and allows pedestrians to walk between the two car parks.
- 1.5. There are national monuments recorded on and in the vicinity of the site (town defences, structure, midden).

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. Permission is sought to continue the use of the existing car park on the site together with all associated and ancillary site works.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

On 19th July 2024 Wexford County Council issued a notification of their decision to refuse permission for the development for two reasons as follows:

1. The proposed egress arrangements would give rise to hazards and obstructions to users of South Main Street including pedestrians. As such the proposed development would be contrary to Objectives TS42 and TS43 of

Volume 1 and Sections 6.2.6 and 6.3.2 of Volume 2 of the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 and to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2. Permanent use as a car park would not be an appropriate use for this land, having regard to its town centre location. As such the proposed development would be contrary to Objective TS45 of Volume 1 and Section 6.3.2 of Volume 2 of Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 and to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

- The report of the Executive Planner forms the basis of the planning authority's decision and includes a recommendation to refuse permission. The report states that car parking is not considered to be the optimal use of this centrally located serviced site. The report notes the concerns raised by the Roads Department regarding the egress arrangements. Notes that a barrier control system for exiting traffic that was approved under ABP PL26.245562 has not been installed and that this compromises traffic safety. A temporary permission of two years only would be recommended if the egress issue was resolved. The report notes that the site is identified as of potential flood risk.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- The report of the Executive Technician, Wexford MD Office states that the current situation of vehicles exiting the car park onto South Main Street is an undesirable traffic movement as traffic currently must cross a very busy footpath onto South Main Street to exit the car park. It recommends further information be sought – the applicant should submit a revised site layout map showing traffic exiting the car park via Bride Street car park or Ropewalk car park.
- Fire Service – no comments

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

None

3.4. Third Party Observations

None

4.0 Planning History

The following is the relevant planning history of the site:

- PA20180420 – grant May 2018 – permission for the continued use of the existing car park.

Condition 2 states that the car parking use shall cease within two years of the date of the final grant of permission. This for the reason having regard to the unsuitability of the subject use of these opportunity lands on a long term basis.

- 20150021, PL26.245562 – grant March 2016 – permission to make permanent the present temporary unauthorised use of the car park including gates / barriers at the exit and entrance, the restoration / reinstatement of site boundary walls, the siting of pay stations, public lighting, cctv monitoring and electric car ports.

Condition 2 states that the car parking use hereby permitted shall cease within two years of the date of this order, having regard to the unsuitability of the subject use of these opportunity lands on a long term basis.

- W2010041 (relates to a larger site containing the subject site and the adjoining Ropewalk car park) – grant 2010 – permission for the retention of car park

Condition 2 states that this is a temporary permission only and that the car park shall be removed from the site by June 2015. This is to review the effect of the development on the amenities of the area.

- W0005944 (relates to a larger site containing the subject site and adjoining Ropewalk car park) – grant June 2004 – permission for the demolition of

existing retail units, storage units and domestic dwellings to provide 148 car parking spaces. Condition 2 states that the permission is a temporary permission only and the use of the land as car park shall have a duration of three years. This is to allow the planning authority to assess the impact of the development.

- RL2983 – Feb 2013 – An Bord Pleanála decided that works carried out at South Main Street Car Park (site between Stone Bridge Land and the Council's Bride Street Car park) are exempt development – the works included creating an opening between the Ropewalk yard car park and Bride street car park and erection of a ramp leading from the upper car park (Bride Street) to the lower (Ropewalk yard car park), erecting temporary fencing, parking, signage etc. (site between Stonebridge Lane and Bride Street Car park)

The following relates to the adjoining Ropewalk Car park:

- PA20240500 - Split decision June 2024 –
Permission granted for the continued temporary use of the site as a car park. Condition 2 states that the car park use shall cease within two years of the date of the final grant of permission, having regard to the unsuitability of the subject use of these opportunity lands on a long term basis.

Permission refused for the use of the site for car wash and valet facility for one reason: (i) insufficient information submitted in relation to water supply, chemicals and impact on Town Wall national monument, hours of operation, staff, traffic and parking.
- PA20180212 – grant April 2018 – permission for the retention for the continued temporary use of the site as car park with car wash and valet facility. Condition 2 states that the car park / valet use shall cease within two years of the date of final grant of permission, having regard to the unsuitability of the subject use of these opportunity lands on a long term basis.
- PA 20150012, PL26.244676 – grant July 2015 – permission to make permanent the present temporary use of the car park and car wash and valet

area. Condition 2 states that the car parking / valet use shall cease within two years of this order, having regard to the unsuitability of the subject use of these opportunity lands on a long term basis.

The following relates to Wexford County Council Part XI proposed development on land at Crescent Quay, Wexford:

- LAC2109 – March 2022 - the members of Wexford County Council resolved to proceed with the proposed development consisting of a proposal by Wexford County Council for a new temporary surface car park with provision of 120 spaces at Crescent Quay Wexford.

5.0 Policy Context

Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028

Chapter 5 Design and Place-making in Towns and villages

- Objective TV04 To promote compact urban form, which is appropriate to context, in the interests of the efficient use of resources and optimising the opportunities to walk and cycle and the feasibility of public transport.
- Objective TV36 To pursue a variety of methods to increase the number of people living and working in our towns and villages in terms of investment decisions, local authority own projects and in the assessment of planning applications. Such activities and methods will include, but are not limited to:
 - The creation of street networks, streets, buildings and blocks and places which is both an appropriate form of development in terms of permeability and also an effective means of achieving compact growth.
 - Utilising opportunities to develop infill, backland and brownfield development.
 - Active land management including site assembly and the use of CPOs.
 - Appropriate zoning of new land and matters such as density and building heights in local area plans.

- Applying a more flexible approach to development management standards such as separation distances, open space provision and parking subject to performance criteria and design quality being achieved.
- Reusing or redeveloping existing sites including building more intensively.
- Developing institutional lands.

Objective TV55 To support development which will add to the vitality and vibrancy of our towns and villages including development which will increase population, result in additional services and extend opening hours, subject to normal planning criteria including residential amenity.

Chapter 8 Transportation Strategy

- Objective TS42 To provide and maintain a safe, efficient and sustainable roads network in the county, to secure improvements to the road network and to balance the needs of all users placing pedestrians, cyclists and public transport at the top of the hierarchy of users.
- Objective TS43 To ensure that the public safety of all road users, including pedestrians and cyclists, has the highest priority in the design of development and vehicular access points and in the exercise of traffic management functions. Road Safety Impact Assessments, Road Safety Audits and other road safety reports shall be sought where appropriate to inform planning decisions¹¹.
- Objective TS45 To review current and new car parking provision, to consider restricting motor vehicle access on certain roads and streets and to consider the designation of low emission zones where such measures would promote sustainable transport modes and would have wider environmental and social benefits having regard to the need to avoid creating significant traffic congestion and undue adverse impacts on residents and commercial activity and to facilitate appropriate access for people with disabilities.

Development Management Manual

- Section 6.2.6 Siting and Design of Access / Egress Points
- Section 6.3.2 Location of New Car Parks

The location of car parks will require detailed consideration. Parking areas in the wrong location can add to congestion in the town centres which results in pedestrian conflict, increased pollution and reduced functionality in the public transport system. In town centres surface level car parking is an extremely poor use of valuable public infrastructure and can sometimes, due to the income stream from charges, be an impediment to the redevelopment of the sites in which they are located.

Parking areas within town centres will be required for those who have mobility issues but in general large parking areas must be located on the edge of the centre and, if possible adjacent to public transport routes with good pedestrian and cycle facilities nearby.

The location of urban car parks shall be identified in the Local Area Plans for the four main towns in the county

County Wexford Retail Strategy

- Wexford Town (Key Town in core strategy)– retail function is a level 1 Regional Town
- 6.2.1 Wexford Town

Fig 6.1 Wexford Town –map shows Retail Offer, Core Retail Areas and Opportunity Sites

Occupying, adapting and/or redeveloping vacant and derelict premises within the core retail area is the preferred and optimal solution for accommodating future retail development in Wexford Town. Vacant units and other opportunity sites that could potentially be redeveloped for retail purposes are available at the following town centre locations:

6. 'Public car park South Main Street behind Sky in the Ground Pub (entered from public car park off Bride Street and exited onto South Main Street) and Rope Walk private car park accessed off King Street Upper

- Key Actions and Recommendations – Improvements can be made to sustain the vitality and viability of the town centre, through a number of measures which are listed in the plan and include the following relevant to the proposed development:
 - Encourage and facilitate the reuse of vacant buildings or under-utilised sites throughout the town including car parking opportunity sites (refer to section 6).
 - Consider redevelopment of smaller car parking sites in prime town centre locations for appropriate retail and or commercial town centre uses.
 - Consider increasing the extent of the pedestrian priority zone further along South Main Street (to the South) so to encourage access to underutilised segments of the town centre.
- Objective WX01 To strengthen the role of Wexford as a strategic location, a self-sustaining regional economic driver and Key Town on the Eastern Corridor. Retail is an integral part of the town's economy complementing its inherent strengths including innovation, enterprise, tourism, culture and services and has an important array of amenities, vibrancy, liveability/quality of life and quality built environment
- Objective WX02 To focus on regenerating the traditional town centre and main street areas and how they relate to the expanded town, with a view to creating more attractive, desirable places that people want to live and spend time in, for work, shopping or recreational purposes.
- Objective WX05 To encourage the reuse of vacant buildings or under-utilised sites throughout the town. The redevelopment of car parking sites in prime town centre locations are identified for appropriate retail and/or commercial town centre uses

5.1. Natural Heritage Designations

The subject site is not within or immediately adjacent to any designated or Natura 2000 sites. The site is located:

- 0.2km from Slaney River Valley SAC
- 0.5km from Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA and Wexford Slobs and Harbour pNHA

5.2. EIA Screening

The proposed development does not come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA, that is, it does not comprise construction works, demolition or intervention in the natural surroundings. Refer to Form 1 in Appendix 1 of report.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

The grounds of appeal are summarised as follows:

- The site has benefited from continuous temporary permissions for more than 20 years and therefore the principle of the use is well established.
- Regarding traffic hazard no objection has been raised by Council's engineering staff in the assessment of other applications on the site, there is no record of traffic incidents at the junction of Stonebridge Lane and South Main Street, An Bord Pleanala have previously considered that vehicular exit from the laneway does not raise traffic hazard issues, Stonebridge Lane's use as an entrance and exit predates the 1963 Planning Act (has only become one way exit in last 13 years with the construction of the ramp access from Bride Street car park), no design alterations are proposed.
- The proposal for 37 spaces is not a large car park, within easy walk of town centre and is accessible.
- The proposal is not contrary to objective TS42, TS43, TS45, Section 6.3.2.
- Wexford County Council have approved a proposal for 120 spaces on an opportunity site at Crescent Quay in the town centre with no time limit (LAC2109). The principle of permitting car parks on opportunity site is established. In addition, Wexford County Council have granted permission for

75 spaces immediately adjoining the site for period of two years (PA20240500).

- The CDP includes a policy for the location of urban car parks to be identified in Local Area Plans. The Wexford LAP will not be in place until mid 2025. There is no map to show how compliant car park proposals can be made.
- The car park has been underpinning the survival of retail units in the south end of Main Street and provides for the needs of residences in the surrounding area.
- The use of the site as car park was supported by Wexford Borough Council who agreed to the construction of a ramp link in order to deliver on an objective in the 2002 Wexford Development Plan to upgrade the route from South Main Street to Bride Street via Stonebridge car park.
- Risk that site would fall into disuse and attract anti social behaviour.
- The car park supports the night time economy in this surrounding area.
- Closure would result in indiscriminate parking in the area.

7.0 Assessment

7.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including all submissions received in relation to the appeal and inspected the site and having regard to relevant local policies and guidance, I consider that the main issues in this appeal are as follows:

- Principle of development
- Traffic and access

7.2. Principle of development

7.2.1. The appeal site is part of a larger backland site located to the rear of South Main Street, King Street and Bride Street at a central location close to the retail core of Wexford town centre. Permission was granted in 2004 for the demolition of older buildings on the site and to provide a car park for a temporary period of three years.

Upon the lapsing of that original permission, subsequent permissions have been granted by both Wexford County Council and An Bord Pleanála for the use of the land as car park subject to condition that the use ceases after a number of years having regard to the need to review the effects of the development on the amenities of the area and because the long term use is unsuitable on lands identified as opportunity site.

- 7.2.2. In the subject application, the planning authority have now refused permission for the continued use of the car park because the permanent use of the car park would not be an appropriate use of this land having regard to the town centre location and that the development would be contrary to objective TS45 which is an objective to review car parking provision and to consider restricting motor vehicle access on certain roads and streets and promote sustainable transport modes.
- 7.2.3. The appeal makes reference to the historic precedent of granting permissions for carparking use on the site and makes reference to other recent decisions by Wexford County Council to grant permission for car parks in town centre locations under PA20240500 and LAC2109 and indicates that there is a strong precedent of decisions that support the proposed development. In this regard I consider that this proposal should be assessed and determined on its own merits having regard to the sensitivity of the receiving environment, the specifics of this particular development and the current policy context.
- 7.2.4. The Wexford Town and Environs Development Plan 2009-2015 has expired. Wexford County Council has commenced the process of the preparation of a new Local Area Plan which is currently at pre-draft stage. The principle of the proposed development is to be considered on its own merits having regard to relevant national and local policies.
- 7.2.5. Under the Wexford County Development Plan (CDP) 2022-2028 Wexford town is designated a regional Key Town. The plan includes many objectives to promote good design and place making including objectives such as objective TV04 which is to promote compact urban form and efficient use of resources and optimising opportunities to walk and cycle, TV36 to increase the number of people living and working in towns and villages through a range of measures including utilising opportunities to develop infill, backland and brownfield development and

redeveloping existing sites more intensively, and TV55 to support the vitality and vibrancy of towns and villages.

- 7.2.6. Against this backdrop, the County Retail Strategy of the CDP includes objectives relating to the county's urban centres. In relation to Wexford town, it is an objective in WX01 to strengthen the role of the town as a self sustaining regional economic driver and Key Town and it is an objective under WX02 to regenerate the town centre and main street areas to create more attractive places for people to live and spend time in. The strategy includes key actions and recommendations to sustain the vitality and viability of the town centre. One of these key actions is to "encourage and facilitate the reuse of vacant buildings or under utilised sites throughout the town including car parking opportunity sites". Another key action is to "consider redevelopment of smaller car parking sites in prime town centre locations for appropriate retail or commercial town centre uses". It is a specific objective under WX05 to encourage the reuse of under utilised sites including car parking sites. The strategy includes a list of opportunity sites and the site of the proposed development is listed as opportunity site 6. It should be noted that the Ropewalk car park and the site at Crescent Quay, which have recently received planning permission for grant of permission for temporary car park use, are also included as opportunity sites.
- 7.2.7. The appeal site is earmarked in the CDP as a site where there is an opportunity to redevelop the lands for more intensive development. By its nature, a car park is an inefficient, inactive and unattractive use of use of key central lands that in itself contributes little to the vibrancy and vitality of the area. Whilst the appellant indicates that the car park sustains businesses and residences in this area, I note that there are a number of other car parks in this area including the local authority's Bride Street car park, the adjoining Ropewalk car park, a multi storey car park at Oyster Lane and a small car park at Mary's Lane. This is also pay and display parking available on surrounding roads. I am satisfied that there is good availability of parking options for people in the centre.
- 7.2.8. I am satisfied that the use of the site as a car park compromises the potential for the future redevelopment of the site for other more intensive uses that could promote the vitality and vibrancy of the area.

- 7.2.9. Furthermore, the car parking use incentivises car dependence over other more sustainable modes such as public transport, walking and cycling and that this is contrary to CDP objectives TV04 or TS45 to generally promote sustainable transport modes over cars.
- 7.2.10. In conclusion, I am of the opinion that the proposed car park use is not in accordance with objectives in the CDP to promote the redevelopment of the site as an opportunity site and is not in accordance with objectives to promote the vibrancy and vitality of central urban areas and to promote compact urban form by the efficient use of resources including central urban lands
- 7.2.11. A new local area plan is being prepared for the town and the view could be taken that consideration could be given to granting permission for a temporary period of a number of years pending the delivery of the new local area plan. In this regard I note that section 6.3.2 of the CDP states that the location of urban car parks are to be identified in local area plans. However, the current County Development Plan is for the period 2022-2028 and in this plan the site is identified as an opportunity site that offers development potential. I also note that temporary permissions have been granted over the last 20 years to allow time for either development of the site or time to assess the impacts of the development. This is a significant time period over which there has been no change in the use. Since the preparation for National Planning Framework there is greater focus on promoting compact development including more intensive use of central lands for residential and employment use and on making centres more attractive. Wexford is a level 1 Key Town and has potential to attract investment on prime redevelopment sites. I am of the opinion that permission should not be granted for another temporary period and refusal of permission is recommended.

7.3. Traffic and access

- 7.3.1. The planning authority refused permission because the proposed egress of traffic from the appeal site, through the Stonebridge laneway and alleyway would give rise to hazards and obstructions to users of South Main Street and would be contrary to objectives TS42 and TS43 of the CDP which relate to road safety. Concerns were raised in the report of the local authority's road section which stated that the current arrangement of vehicles exiting the car park onto South Main Street is an

undesirable traffic movement because traffic must cross a busy footpath onto South Main Street.

- 7.3.2. In this regard, I note that the Stonebridge laneway has historically been used as an access and that in more recent years, the appeal site containing the South Main Street car park has been separated from the adjoining Ropewalk car park by a fence and that a one way ramp was constructed linking the site to the adjoining upper Bride Street car park. This means that cars enter the appeal site car park using the one way ramp from Bride Street car park and then egress through the laneway which is restricted to exiting cars only. No cars from the Ropewalk car park or the Bride Street car park exit through the alleyway. This limits the number of vehicles using the laneway.
- 7.3.3. The Stonebridge laneway also provides a pedestrian link between the three car parks and South Main Street. However, users of the Bride Street and Ropewalk car park have the option of direct access onto Bride Street or King Street and can access the Main Street that way.
- 7.3.4. The Stonebridge laneway is narrow and has a shared surface for both vehicles and pedestrians. Any vehicles existing travel at very low speeds anticipating pedestrians on the alleyway and on the footpath at the junction with South Main Street. South Main Street is also a narrow one way street where vehicles also travel at low speed.
- 7.3.5. The planning authority raised the concern that an approved barrier control system has not been put in place (refer PA20150021, PL26.245562) and that this is required in order to provide safe egress from the site. In this regard, I note that the barrier is not in place however notwithstanding, speeds of vehicles around the car park and through the laneway are very slow as drivers anticipate other vehicles and pedestrians and negotiate the narrow laneway.
- 7.3.6. Due to the established use of the Stronebridge laneway as an exit for vehicles, the narrow width of the laneway and the high number of pedestrians using the laneway and the footpath on South Main Street, including low vehicle speeds in this area, I am satisfied that sightlines are acceptable and that the development does not result in traffic hazard and does not obstruct road users.

8.0 AA Screening

- 8.1. I have considered the proposed development in light of the requirements of S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.
- 8.2. The subject site is not located within or adjacent to any European Site. The closest European Site, part of the Natura 2000 network, is the Slaney River Valley SAC, c 200m from the proposed development.
- 8.3. The proposed development is located in a central urban area and comprises the continuation of an existing car parking use.
- 8.4. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the proposed development I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because it could not have any appreciable effect on a European Site.
- 8.5. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:
 - the nature of the proposed development to continue an existing car park use wherein no works are proposed,
 - the location of the development in a serviced urban area,
 - distance from the European site network and
 - absence of ecological or hydrological pathways to a European site.

I consider that the proposed development would not be likely to have a significant effect individually or in combination with other plans and projects on a European site and appropriate assessment is therefore not required.

9.0 Recommendation

I recommend that permission be refused for the reason below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations

1. The site is located in a central urban area of Wexford Town which is a regional Key Town and the primary retail centre in the county. In the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028, the site is identified in the Retail Strategy of the plan as an 'Opportunity Site' for future development and where objective WX05 of the plan is to encourage the reuse of underutilised sites in Wexford town and that the redevelopment of car parking sites in prime town centre locations are identified for retail and / or commercial town centre uses.

Furthermore, the Wexford County Development Plan includes objectives to promote compact development including objective TV36 to increase the number of people living and working in towns through methods such as redeveloping existing sites more intensively, and objective TV55 to support development that add to the vitality and vibrancy of towns and villages.

The proposed development for continued use of the land for car park would compromise the future development potential of this underutilised town centre site close to the retail core. The proposed development would therefore be contrary to objectives WX05, TV36 and TV55 of the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 and would seriously injure the amenities of property in the vicinity and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.

Aisling Mac Namara
Planning Inspector

23rd December 2024

Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	320547-24		
Proposed Development Summary	Permission for continued use of existing car park together with all associated and ancillary site works.		
Development Address	South Main Street Car Park, Stonebridge Lane, South Main Street, Wexford		
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes	Proceed to Q2.
		No x	No further action required
2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?			
Yes		State the Class here.	Proceed to Q3.
No			Tick if relevant. No further action required
3. Does the proposed development equal or exceed any relevant THRESHOLD set out in the relevant Class?			
Yes		State the relevant threshold here for the Class of development.	EIA Mandatory EIAR required

No			Proceed to Q4
4. Is the proposed development below the relevant threshold for the Class of development [sub-threshold development]?			
Yes		State the relevant threshold here for the Class of development and indicate the size of the development relative to the threshold.	Preliminary examination required (Form 2)

5. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?		
No	x	Screening determination remains as above (Q1 to Q4)
Yes		Screening Determination required

Inspector: _____
Aisling Mac Namara

Date: 23rd December 2024