



Kilcatherine, Eyeries, County Cork
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The Secretary,
The Planning Authority,
Cork County Council
27 July, 2009

Objection to Planning Permission

Planning Ref No.: 09/752

Applicant: Royal National Lifeboat Institution

Date of application: 06/07/2009

Development: Construction of stand-alone building for Castletownbere lifeboat station comprising crew and lifeboat facilities, souvenir outlet and siting of fuel storage tank for the afloat lifeboat and RNLI standard building signage

Location: on new reclaimed land between the Ferry Slipway and Barrack Point Castletownbere Harbour Co. Cork

Dear Sirs;

While in no way objecting to the nature of this development or questioning the need for a Castletownbere Lifeboat Station, the location of this development is totally at variance with all principles of good planning, with the Cork County Development Plan 2009 and the Bantry Local Area Development Plan 2005.

Summary

It is intended to locate a lifeboat station, fuel storage tank, and 'souvenir outlet' on reclaimed land at the center of the most congested traffic pattern on the Bearhaven peninsula. [See aerial map of site, Annex 1]

The proposed site is on recently reclaimed land that extends the ill-ordered and unmonitored parking, turning, and transit area which extends from the SuperValu corner across the parking area to the quay edge.

This corner is the intersection of two main roads. The R572 brings all traffic from the Cork direction into the town while the R571 which brings traffic from Kenmare down from the north. Uncontrolled traffic jams are frequent and prolonged. Right of way lies with the boldest.

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The current parking area surrounds the proposed site and extends for some distance on both its landward sides. The parking area is extremely congested and inadequate for current needs. Double parking and parking in the road, even on the junction, is habitual, frequently reducing the access roads to single lanes. Emergency access to this location could not be guaranteed and would add to the current traffic chaos.

Local traffic – including school buses - turn up to the quays to avoid the narrow main street, where one side parking continues in spite of intermittently enforced legal restrictions.

Articulated lorries servicing the fishing industry on the contiguous Mainland Quay vie with traffic, pedestrians shopping trolleys, wheelchairs accessing disable parking, local mini-bus services and those waiting for (or at) the telephone boxes at this notorious location.

As the Bantry Area Plan states:

The Mainland Quay is some 304 metres long with a water depth of 4 metres MLWS. The Quay accommodates fish landing berths, an old auction hall (currently leased to private industry), Harbour Offices, BIM Training College, net repair area, harbour roads, open spaces (parking) and services. [Bantry Area Plan. 2005]

The car ferry for Bere Island is located directly adjacent to the proposed site. On the other side of the proposed site is quay step access for the many small boats servicing the tourist industry's marine activities, the Bere Islanders, and others calling to the town for provisions.

It is inexplicable that any development relating to emergency services could even be considered at this location. This is particularly so given the long standing primary goal of relocating all port-based activities on the adjacent Dinish Island, an infill island developed by the State for the marine sector with excellent access for emergency vehicles, including helicopters, close proximity to the hospital and no traffic congestion. The state is currently completing a €25 million redevelopment project to further upgrade this large facility.

Development Plan considerations

Views and amenity

2.1.6. The town is also set in a dramatic and largely unspoilt landscape that is an important asset for the development of secondary, tourist based, economic activity. [Cork Development Plan 2009]

3.3.50. Castletownbere is located on the Beara Peninsula and has a unique landscape setting with an important harbour where fishing and marine related activities are central to its employment function. The town's dramatic and unspoilt landscape is an important asset for the development of its tourism activity. [Cork Development Plan 2009]

The proposal would entirely obscure the marine views of the Harbor and Bere Island from the SuperValu corner and the only off-street parking area available to tourist visiting the town.

At quiet times this area, with its stately line of palm trees, offers passive open space and park-like marine views seldom equaled in the seaside towns of West Cork.

The proposed development would be there at ALL times, used and unused, blocking off a quadrant of these marine views.

Finally, it is particularly unsustainable to propose a 'souvenir outlet' on the back of such an intrusive development when an increasing number of suitable buildings in the town are current available for this class of activity which will continue to decline without the support of the local authority planners.

Traffic considerations

2.1.11. There is only one principal road running east-west through the town, giving rise to certain traffic circulation and parking problems. A preliminary indicative route for a future relief road to the north of the town centre has been identified. There is also a need to identify a new car park location and to provide public lighting and footpaths in a number of locations. [Bantry Area Plan. 2005]

6.3.3 Other Development Matters

There is a lot of congestion outside of the SuperValu shop; the Council is looking at introducing one-way traffic there and in the town generally. The Department and the Council are working in co-operation on traffic management options. [Cork Development Plan 2009]

6.7 Key Matters Raised

There are major infrastructure deficits in the town environs; principally, there are no sewerage treatment facilities, inadequate parking facilities and unacceptable congestion caused by traffic volumes through the town. A submission has proposed the extension of parking facilities at the east end of Castletownbere; a full traffic survey for the town; a re-alignment of the road opposite the supermarket and the installation of a zebra crossing, and the implementation of a one-way system around Castletownbere extending the road along the quay up to the West End. [Cork Development Plan 2009]

More specifically:

The Department has prepared draft Terms of Reference for a Land Use Study of the area which would include waste management, traffic management, security, parking, marina siting, managing the interfaces between the town and harbour etc. [6.3.3 Other Development Matters, Cork Development Plan 2009]

The development would be premature until such time as this Land Use Study is completed to ensure no further congestion at the SuperValu corner and until one-way traffic or other traffic management options have addressed this continually deteriorating situation.

The emergency response time could be substantially lowered if the time of the day coincided with peak traffic congestion. The access by the emergency service could be greatly prolonged due to the inchoate nature of vehicular and pedestrian movements in the immediate area of the development. There is no designated site for emergency helicopter landing.

This location could not be more poorly chosen to support an emergency service which relies on a saving of minutes for the saving of lives. Multiple ambulances and other emergency vehicles as well as large media presences are routinely part of the maritime disasters of our island nation. It is almost unthinkable to allow such a spectacle at this location, especially when recently redeveloped facilities on adjacent Dinish Island have been provided by the state and offers clear advantages to the operators of such an emergency service.

Shore side berth on pontoons

6.4.9 Lifeboat

Grant-aid of €1 million was also announced in October 2007 for the provision of a lifeboat shore facility for the RNLI which is due to be constructed on reclaimed foreshore within Castletownbere Fishery Harbour Centre. The project will provide a shore side berth on pontoons for the Severn class lifeboat currently based at Castletownbere Fishery Harbour Centre. The vessel will remain afloat on all stages of the tide and enable faster emergency response times. [Cork Development Plan 2009]

The additional of a 'shore side berth on pontoons' to enable the vessel to remain afloat at all tides will further impact on the established activities of the Ferry operating directly adjacent to this proposed development. It will also reduce considerably if not entirely eliminate the traditional access to Castletownbere from the adjacent pier and steps traditionally (and currently) used for this purpose by residents and visitors alike.

No where in the planning application description is there mention of the 'shore side berth pontoons' in spite of their impact on the traditional activities of the residents and visitors to the area. It is not sufficient to suggest that activities below the HWM are outside the jurisdiction of the local authority if their impact is as significant as the operation of an emergency service – a lesson which should have been hard learned by all parties after the 'Tribunal of Enquiry into the Disaster at Whiddy Island'.

Conclusion

The lifeboat shore facility for the RNLI is a badly need development.

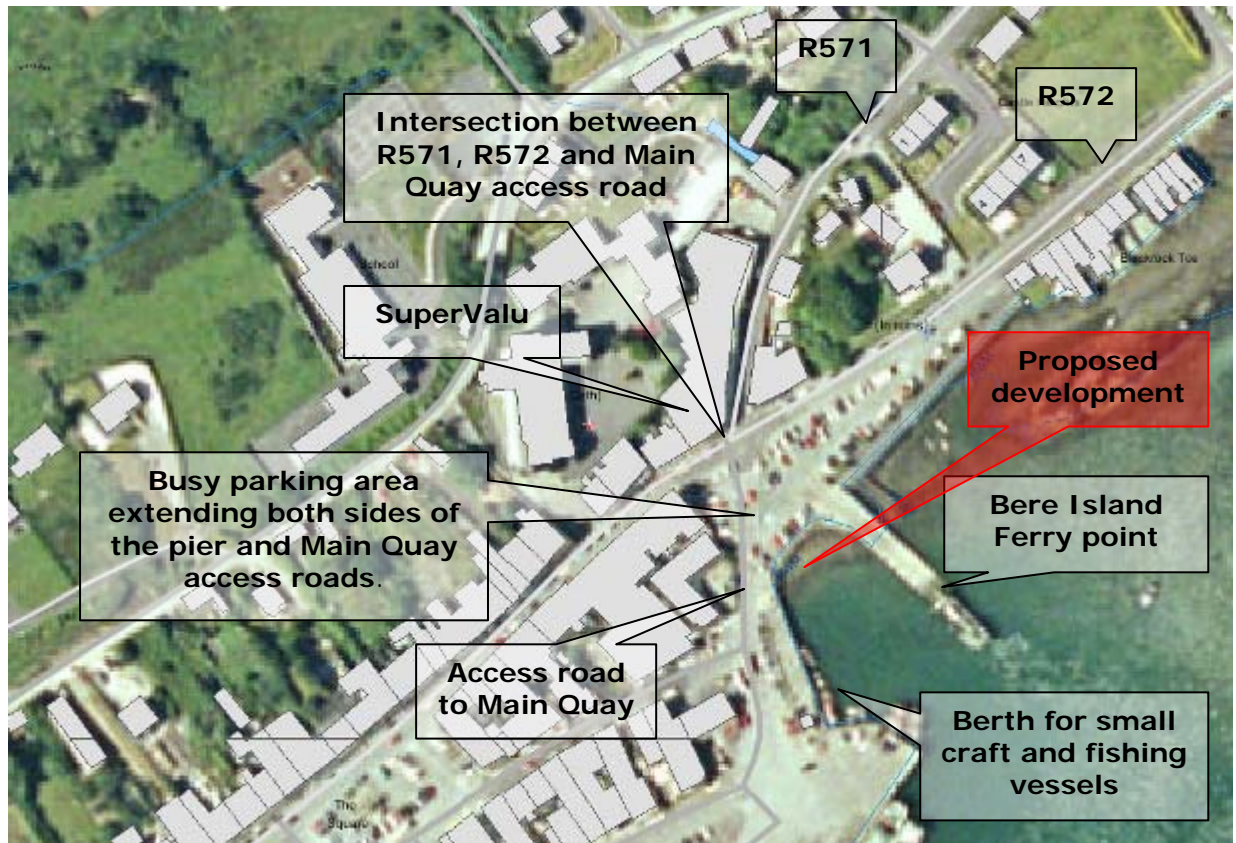
The service proposed lies at the heart of Castletownbere's (and its wide spread environs') vibrant and caring community. As the RNLI says, 'Volunteer crew members readily exchange leisure, comfort and sleep for cold, wet and fatigue. Their lifesaving work is essential, often difficult and sometimes dangerous'. They deserve the best on-shore support the planning system can provide.

The local authority would not be supporting this valuable lifeboat service, the Irish state's investment in the area, or the better planning and development of the town by approving this development at this location.

Yours, etc.,
Tony Lowes

ANNEX 1

Arial photo of the R571 and R572 intersection showing the congested nature at the site of the proposed development.



(Source <http://ims0.osiemaps.ie/website/publicviewer/main.aspx> accessed 27 July 2009)