

**LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

PLANNING REPORT

PLANNING REF: 26/60260



Applicant Name:	Bircrest Limited
Development Description:	Amend permission of the permitted Neighbourhood Centre building granted under LCC Reg. Ref. 23/60348, as amended under LCC Reg. Ref. 25/60040, (now known as 'Sand Wood'). The site is generally bound to the north by Aghnaharna Drive, to the east by Holy Family School Road, and to the west and south by undeveloped lands and a residential development currently under construction, granted under LCC Reg. Ref. 23/60350 (also known as 'Sand Wood'). No amendments are proposed to the permitted 67 No. residential units. The development will principally consist of: the change of use of the permitted creche and cycle store to a retail unit; the subdivision and part change of use of the permitted retail unit to a medical centre, retail unit, a refuse store and ESB switchroom; provision of a mezzanine level (c. 139 sq m) above first floor level within the southern extent of the Neighbourhood Centre building to provide additional office floor space; rationalisation of the ground and first floor layouts of the Neighbourhood Centre building and modifications to the footprint of the building, increasing the floor area by c. 57 sq m. The development will result in an overall increase in floor area of the Neighbourhood Centre building by c. 196 sq m, from 1,426 sq m to c. 1,622 sq m. The development also proposes: the provision of 3 No. additional car parking spaces; minor cycle & car parking layout changes; landscaping; boundary treatments; and all other associated site works above and below ground. A site at Summerhill, Portlaoise, Co. Laois (now known as 'Sand Wood'). The site is generally bound to the north by Aghnaharna Drive, to the east by Holy Family School Road, and to the west and south by undeveloped lands and a residential development currently under construction, granted under LCC Reg. Ref. 23/60350 (also known as 'Sand Wood').
Development Address:	Summerhill, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.
Date of Site Inspection:	28 th May 2026
Decision Due Date:	30 th June 2026
Recommendation:	Refusal

Site Location/ Context

The subject site is located in the newly developed residential estate “Sandwood” in the townland of Summerhill or Aghnaharna approximately 1.4km south east of Portlaoise town centre. The subject site is broadly rectangular shaped, has a stated area of 3.390ha. The site is bound to the north by the R-945 Regional Road, Aghnaharna Drive between O’ Devoy Roundabout and O’ Kelly Roundabout.

The site is generally bound to the north by Aghnaharna Drive, to the east by Holy Family School Road, to the south by undeveloped lands, and to the west by a residential development currently under construction, granted under LCC Reg. Ref. 23/60350 (also known as Sand Wood).

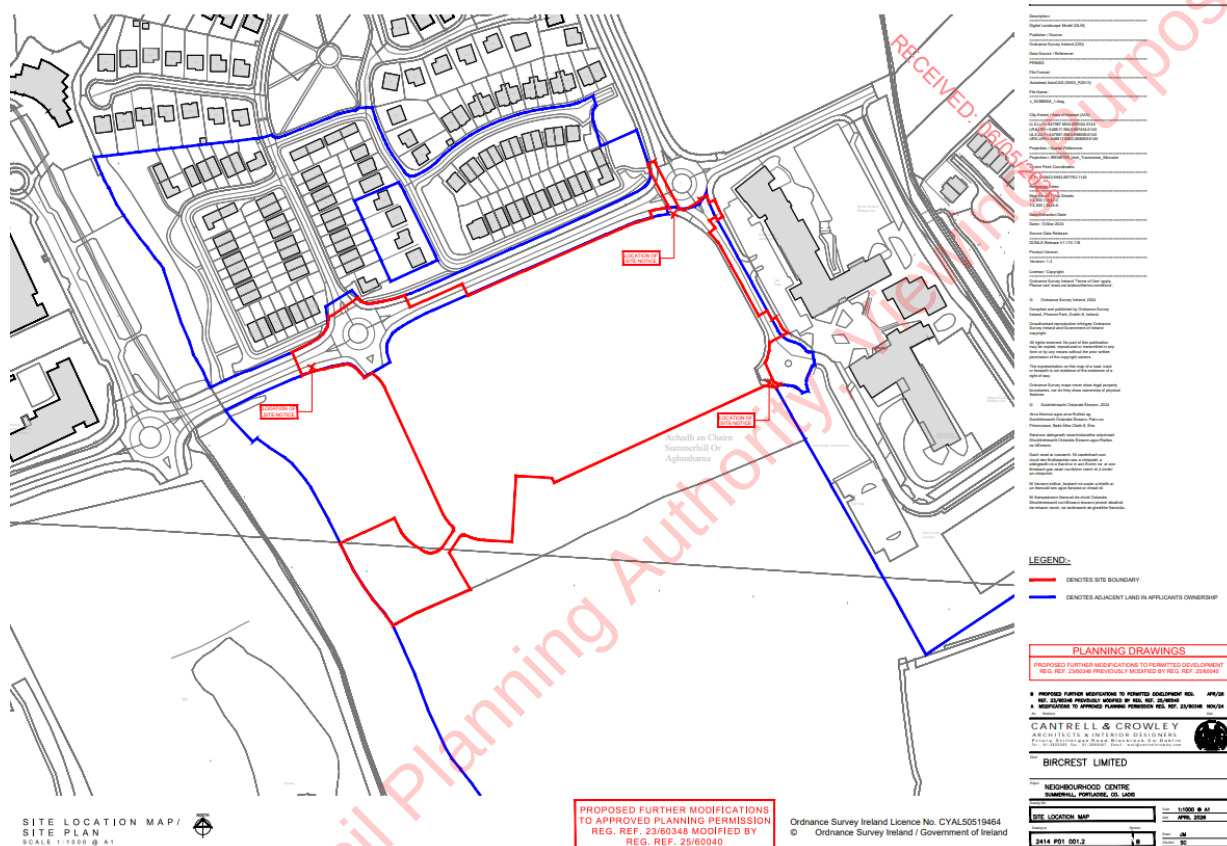


Figure 1.0: Site Location

Proposed Development

Permission for the following:

Amend permission of the permitted Neighbourhood Centre building granted under LCC Reg. Ref. 23/60348, as amended under LCC Reg. Ref. 25/60040, (now known as ‘Sand Wood’). The site is generally bound to the north by Aghnaharna Drive, to the east by Holy Family School Road, and to the west and south by undeveloped lands and a residential development currently under construction, granted under LCC Reg. Ref. 23/60350 (also known as ‘Sand Wood’). No amendments are proposed to the permitted 67 No. residential units. The development will principally consist of: the change of use of the permitted creche and cycle store to a retail unit; the subdivision and part change of use of the permitted retail unit to a medical centre, retail unit, a refuse store and ESB switchroom; provision of a mezzanine level (c. 139 sq m) above first floor level within the southern extent of the Neighbourhood Centre building to provide additional office floor space; rationalisation of the ground and first floor layouts of the Neighbourhood Centre building and modifications to the footprint of the building, increasing the floor area by c. 57 sqm. The development will result in an overall

increase in floor area of the Neighbourhood Centre building by c. 196 sq m, from 1,426 sq m to c. 1,622 sq m. The development also proposes: the provision of 3 No. additional car parking spaces; minor cycle & car parking layout changes; landscaping; boundary treatments; and all other associated site works above and below ground.

In summary, no changes are proposed to the previously permitted 67 no. residential units.

The development comprises minor modifications to the Neighbourhood Centre building, including revisions to the internal layout, elevational changes, and alterations to the roof profile. These amendments result in a reduction in the overall height of the building from 14.85 metres to 13.36 metres, and a decrease in gross floor area from 1,484 sqm to 1,426 sqm.

The proposal also includes minor revisions to the car parking layout, landscaping adjustments, and all associated ancillary site works, both above and below ground.



Figure 2.0: Site Layout Plan

AA Screening

A screening for Appropriate Assessment Report was prepared and is appended to this report. It concludes that no likely significant impacts are predicted due to the nature of the proposed development.

EIA Screening

The proposed development is not specified in Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001(as amended). In any event, it is considered, having regard to nature, size and location, the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment. Therefore, EIA is not required.

Flood Risk

The proposed development is not within the confines of the Flood Zone.

Submissions/ Observations / Representations

Last date for receipt of submissions/observations/representations was 09/06/2026.
None received by the Planning Authority.

Pre-planning

A pre- planning consultation has not occurred in respect of this proposal.

Planning History

PI Ref 25/60040: amend permission to the permitted Neighbourhood Centre building granted under LCC Reg. Ref. 23/60348, The development will principally consist of the minor revisions to the Neighbourhood Centre building, including internal layout changes, elevational changes and amendments to the roof profile. The development results in a reduction in the principal height of the Neighbourhood Centre building from 14.85 metres to 13.36 metres and a reduction in floor area from 1,484 sq m to 1,426 sq m. The development also proposes minor car parking layout changes; landscaping; and all other associated site works above and below ground. The development also proposes minor car parking layout changes; landscaping; and all other associated site works above and below ground. Permission Granted

PI Ref 25/60385: application by Bircrest Limited to construct 92 No. residential dwellings comprising 86 No. 4-bed houses and 6 No. 2-bed sheltered housing units. The proposed development will be 1 No. and 2 No. storeys in height. The development will also include:

minor amendments to the Link Road permitted as part of Phases 1A & 1B and its continuation through the Phase 2 site; minor amendments to the landscape and boundary treatment to the south of the Phase 1A site; car parking; cycle parking; public open space; drainage connections; boundary treatments; hard and soft landscaping; pumping station; lighting; and all associated site and development works above and below ground.

Permission granted by the Council after a Material Contravention of the Plan.

PI Ref 25/60386: application by Bircrest Limited on lands due east for permission to construct a creche (c. 961 sq m) and 74 No. residential dwellings comprising 64 No. 4-bed houses and 4 No. 1-bed and 6 No. 2-bed sheltered housing units. The proposed development will be 1 No. and 2 No. storeys in height. The development will also include: minor amendments to the landscape and boundary treatment to the south of the Phase 1A site to provide car parking and access to the proposed creche; the continuation of the Link Road permitted in Phases 1A & 1B, as proposed to be amended and extended as part of the Phase 2 application; car parking; cycle parking; public open space; drainage connections; boundary treatments; hard and soft landscaping; lighting; and all associated site and development works above and below ground.

Permission granted by the Council after a Material Contravention of the Plan.

PI Ref 25/60387: application by Bircrest Limited on lands due east for permission to construct 36 No. 4-bed, 2 No. storey houses. The development will also include: the

continuation of the Link Road permitted in Phases 1A & 1B, as proposed to be amended as part of the Phase 2 application and extended as part of the Phase 2 & 3 applications; car parking; public open space; drainage connections; boundary treatments; hard and soft landscaping; lighting; and all associated site and development works above and below ground.

Permission granted by the Council after a Material Contravention of the Plan.^{dk}

PI Ref 23/60348: Proposed works at O'Devoy (O'Deevy) roundabout comprising active travel infrastructure improvements to include the introduction of new shared pedestrian/cycle areas on the southern side of the Southern Circular Road and Aghnaharna Drive and improved pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities across the site access arm of this junction. Proposal for the removal of the redundant western arm of the roundabout to the southeast at the Holy Family School Road and the provision of new active travel infrastructure incorporating a two-way cycle track with the adjoining footpath along the eastern boundary which transitions to a shared pedestrian / cycle facility to the north as it approaches the O'Kelly roundabout and continues on the southern side of Aghnaharna Drive on the western arm of this roundabout. Wastewater will be pumped via a rising main to discharge into the existing 450mm public wastewater sewer to the north-east at the O'Kelly roundabout. Potable water supply will be provided through a new connection to the existing 400mm public watermain on Aghnaharna Drive. A pumping station is proposed southwest of the main development site. The development site area, roadworks, water and drainage works and pumping station will provide a total application site area of c. 3.39 Ha. The development will consist of: a 2 No. storey Neighbourhood Centre (1,484 sq m) principally comprising a retail unit 361 sq m), a creche (289 sq m), refuse storage (23 sq m) and cycle storage (65 sq m) at ground floor level and office floorspace (746 sq m) at ground and first floor level; the provision of 57 No. houses (comprising of: 5 No. detached dwellings (three-storey 5-bed); 3 No. semi-detached corner dwellings (two-storey 4-bed); 29 No. semi-detached dwellings (two-storey 4-bed); 20 No. edge house t-shape dwellings (two-storey 4-bed); and 5 No. 3 No. storey duplexes comprising 5 No. 2-bed units and 5 No. 3-bed units. The development will also include: a new Link Road through the site, providing vehicular entrance/exit to the site via O'Devoy (O'Deevy) roundabout; roof plant at the Neighbourhood Centre; ancillary car parking spaces; public open space; boundary treatments; hard and soft landscaping; sub-stations; lighting; and all associated site and development works above and below ground. Permission granted following a Material Contravention procedure.

PI Ref 23/60350: Permission for development at this c. 2.14 Ha site at Summerhill, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. The site is generally bound to the north by the Portlaoise Southern Circular Road, to the east by Holy Family School Road, and to the west and south by undeveloped agricultural lands. Works are also proposed at O'Devoy (O'Deevy) roundabout comprising active travel infrastructure improvements to include the introduction of new shared pedestrian / cycle areas on the southern side of the Southern Circular Road and Aghnaharna Drive and improved pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities across the site access arm of this junction. Wastewater will be pumped via a rising main to discharge into the existing 450mm public wastewater sewer to the north-east at the O'Kelly roundabout. Potable water supply will be provided through a new connection to the existing 400mm public watermain on Aghnaharna Drive. The development site area, roadworks, and water and drainage works will provide a total application site area of c. 2.37 Ha. The development will

consist of the provision of 45 No. residential dwellings comprising: 1 No. detached dwelling (three-storey 5-bed); 2 No. semi-detached corner dwellings (two-storey 4-bed); 18 No. semi-detached dwellings (two-storey 4-bed); 20 No. edge house t-shape dwellings (two-storey 4-bed); and 4 No. semi-dwellings (two-storey 3-bed). The development will also include: a new Link Road through the site, providing vehicular entrance/exit via O'Devoy (O'Deevy) roundabout; ancillary car parking spaces; public open space; boundary treatments; hard and soft landscaping; sub-station; pumping station; lighting; and all associated site and development works above and below ground. Permission granted

Referrals

Internal Reports

MD Engineer:	No report at time of writing.
Roads:	Further Information requested.
Water Services Section:	No report at time of writing.
CFO:	Not Reviewed.

Prescribed Bodies/External Reports

Uisce Eireann:	No report at time of writing.
HSE:	
An Taisce:	No report at time of writing.

Policy and Objectives

Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

Chapter 7, DM TC 1 Commercial/Retail Development

In assessing planning applications for commercial development, a number of considerations will be taken into account:

- *Conformity with the land use policies in respect of commercial development,*
- *The design, quality and mix of uses being proposed particularly in town centres where redevelopment and changes of use need to be orientated towards creating a vibrant and lively, quality directed commercial core,*
- *The requirement that design quality protects but also enhances the architectural character of the town, particularly in relation to landmark*
- *structures and viewpoints,*
- *The potential impact of traffic generation, parking provision and desirability thereof and whether or not consideration has been given to access and commuter movements,*
- *Potential impact on the amenities of the surrounding areas,*
- *The energy efficiency and overall sustainability of the development which includes practical considerations, such as servicing, deliveries, waste/recycling and overall management thereof,*

- *Whether or not a land contamination assessment is necessary and is required as part of the Planning Authority requirements,*
- *Whether or not an E.I.S. and/or N.I.S or AA has been deemed necessary and provided as part of the Planning Authority requirements,*
- *The requirements for bring banks in line with council requirements.*

Retailing Policy Objectives

RTP 6: Permit retail development of a size and scale which is appropriate to the level of the town/settlement area, including its population, as defined within the County retail hierarchy.

RTP 7: Ensure that all retail development permitted is in accordance with the Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG, 2012) and the Laois County Retail Strategy.

Assessment

Principle of the Development

The subject site is zoned Residential 2 in the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 stated objective “to provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities”. The provision of a neighbourhood centre building on lands zoned Residential 2 is normally acceptable; as such the proposed development is acceptable in principle.

Design and Siting

The amendment proposes a series of changes to the permitted Neighbourhood Centre, including revisions to uses, layout, and floor area. **Notably the permitted creche and cycle store are proposed to be replaced with a new retail unit**, while the existing retail unit will be subdivided to provide a medical centre, pharmacy, and associated service spaces.

A new mezzanine level will be introduced to increase office floor space, alongside internal layout rationalisation and minor extensions to the building footprint. These changes result in an overall increase in the Neighbourhood Centre floor area from 1,426sqm to approximately 1,622sqm.

The proposal also includes minor amendments to car and cycle parking (including 3 additional spaces), landscaping, boundary treatments, and other associated site works.

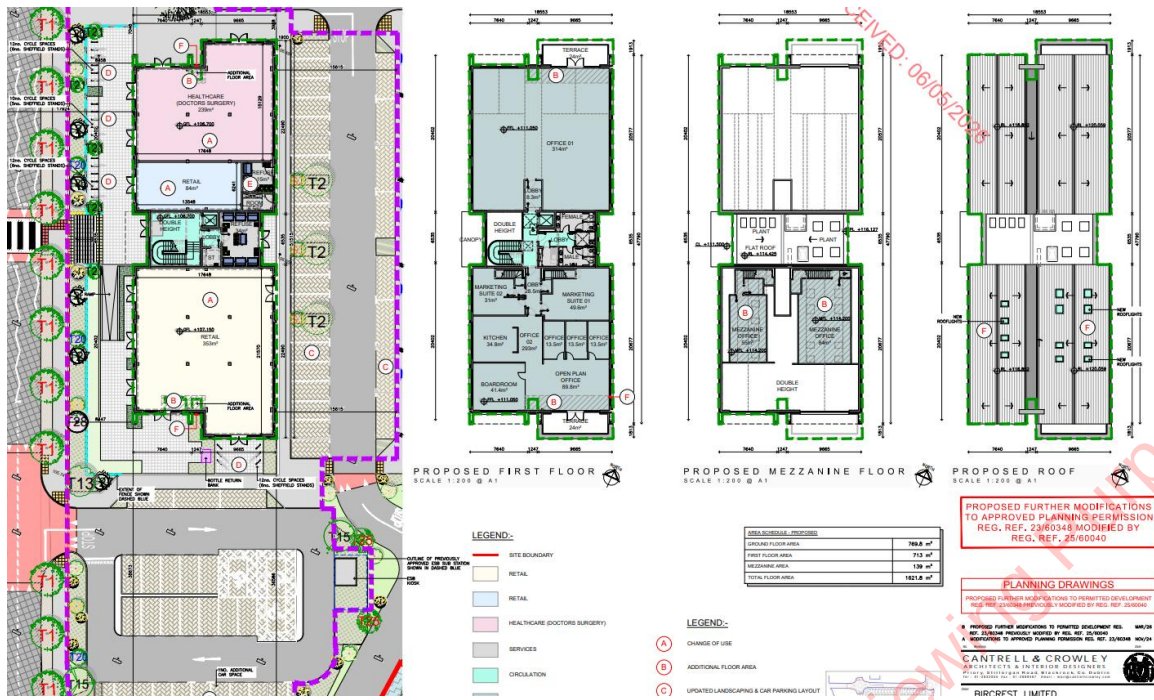


Figure 3.0: Proposed Amendments – retail area in place of creche and cycle store, mezzanine level inclusion and revised layouts

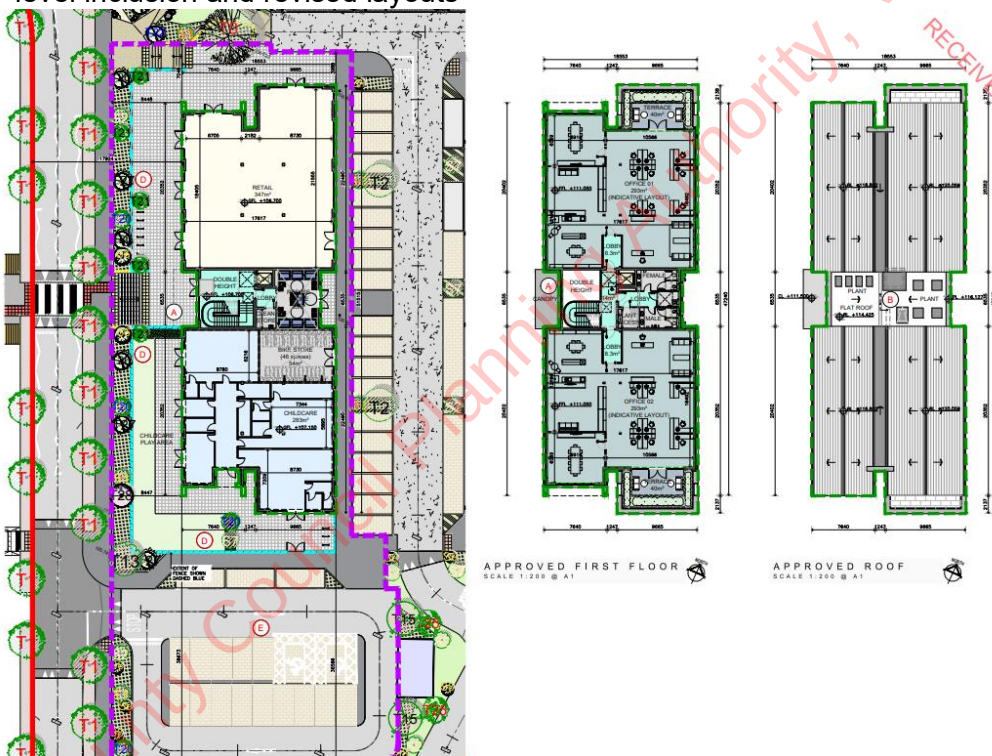


Figure 3.1: Original Permission (PI Ref: 23/60348 amended by 25/60040)

It is noted that the proposed development seeks to remove the permitted creche within the Neighbourhood Centre on the basis that a replacement, larger creche is to be delivered as part of a separate Phase 3 development [approved under PI Ref 25/60386](#) the expiry date of which is 23rd February 2031.

However, concerns arise in relation to the reliance on a creche that is not yet constructed [and may not be until towards the end of its permission life](#) and is subject to a separate planning permission. In the absence of a guaranteed delivery

mechanism or clear phasing strategy, there is a risk that the Neighbourhood Centre could be developed and occupied without any childcare facility in place.

This scenario would result in a deficiency in essential social infrastructure to support the residential population, contrary to the requirements for sustainable community development. The proposed removal of the permitted creche is therefore considered premature pending the delivery of the replacement facility.

~~Accordingly, further clarification is required in relation to the phasing and delivery of the Phase 3 creche, and consideration should be given to securing the provision of childcare facilities to ensure that adequate services are available to serve the needs of the existing and future residents of the area.~~

Services

No changes proposed to the services

Access

No changes proposed to access. External layout changes noted as follows.

- relocating the 2 No. accessible car parking bays further east within the Neighbourhood Centre car park;
- Merging the north-easternmost cycle spaces to the western cycle spaces;
- removal of the western access gate for the creche and continuation of fencing up to the buildings elevation

Recommendation

Having regard to the foregoing, it is recommended that permission be refused for the following reasons:

1. Loss of Essential Childcare Facility

The proposed development seeks the removal of a permitted crèche facility within the approved Neighbourhood Centre (Reg. Ref. 23/60348 as amended under 25/60040), which formed an integral part of the overall development and was intended to provide essential childcare infrastructure for the residential population.

The replacement of this facility with retail use, in the absence of a constructed or operational alternative childcare facility, would result in a deficiency in social and community infrastructure. This is considered contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and to the zoning objective for Residential 2 lands, which seeks to provide for residential services and community facilities.

The applicant has indicated that a replacement crèche is to be delivered as part of a separate Phase 3 development. However, this facility is not yet constructed and is subject to a separate planning permission which is valid until 2031. No legally enforceable phasing or delivery mechanism has been demonstrated to ensure that the replacement childcare facility will be provided in a timely manner relative to the occupation of the Neighbourhood Centre and wider residential development.

Accordingly, the proposed removal of the permitted crèche is considered premature and gives rise to a real risk that the development could proceed without any childcare provision. This would undermine the creation of a balanced and sustainable community, would seriously injure the amenities of the area and is therefore considered contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Emily Tobin

Emily Tobin
Executive Planner
08th June 2026

Donal Kiely
Senior Executive Planner

Donal Kiely

Senior Executive Planner, 10/06/2026

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ANNEX 1

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

Laois County Council Planning Authority, Viewing Purposes Only

**APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT
AND
DETERMINATION**

(A) Project Details			
Planning File Ref	26/60260		
Applicant name	Bircrest Limited		
Development Location	Sandwood, Summerhill, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.		
Site size	3.390ha		
Application accompanied by an EIS (Yes/NO)	No		
Distance from Natura 2000 site in km	The nearest Natura 2000 Site is the River Barrow & River Nore SAC which is located circa 8.7km south east of the subject site.		
Description of the project/proposed development Amend previously approved neighbourhood centre.			
(B) Identification of Natura 2000 sites which may be impacted by the proposed development			
			Yes/No If answer is yes, identify list name of Natura 2000 site likely to be impacted.
1	Impacts on sites designated for freshwater habitats or species. <u>Sites to consider:</u> River Barrow and Nore	<i>Is the development within a Special Area of Conservation whose qualifying interests include freshwater habitats and/or species, or in the catchment (upstream or downstream) of same?</i>	No
2	Impacts on sites designated for wetland habitats - bogs, fens, marshes and heath. <u>Sites to consider:</u> River Barrow and Nore	<i>Is the development within a Special Area of Conservation whose qualifying interests include wetland habitats (bog, marsh, fen or heath)</i>	No
3	Impacts on designated terrestrial habitats. <u>Sites to consider:</u> River Barrow and Nore	<i>Is the development within a Special Area of Conservation whose qualifying interests include</i>	No

		<i>woodlands, dunes or grasslands, or within 100m of same?</i>	
4	Impacts on birds in SPAs <u>Sites to consider:</u> River Nore	<i>Is the development within a Special Protection Area?</i>	No

Conclusion:

If the answer to all of the above is **No**, significant impacts can be ruled out for habitats and bird species.

No further assessment in relation to habitats or birds is required.

If the answer is **Yes** refer to the relevant sections of **C**.

(G) SCREENING CONCLUSION STATEMENT		
<i>Selected relevant category for project assessed by ticking box.</i>		
1	AA is not required because the project is directly connected with/necessary to the conservation management of the site	
2	No potential significant affects/AA is not required	X
3	Significant effects are certain, likely or uncertain. Seek a Natura Impact Statement Reject proposal. (Reject if potentially damaging/inappropriate)	
Justify why it falls into relevant category above (based on information in above tables)		
Having regard to the proximity of the nearest Natura 2000 site and given the nature and extent of the proposed development, with no direct connections to the hydrology of the SAC/SPA, it is not considered there would be potential for significant effects on the Natura 2000 network.		
Name:	Emily Tobin	
Position:	Executive Planner	
Date:	08 th June 2026	