

Townscape and Visual Impact Addendum

In response to a Request for Further Information by An Bord Pleanála (Ref: ABP-304028-19)

Mixed Use Development - Opera Site, Limerick

Limerick City and County Council

September 2019

Quality information

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Revision History

<u>Revision</u>	<u>Revision date</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Authorized</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>
0	10/09/2019	Original			

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Appendix 1

Human Eye – Horizontal Focus

1 Townscape and Visual Impact Addendum

1.1 Introduction

This townscape and visual impact addendum has been prepared in response to a Request for Further Information (RFI) received by An Bord Pleanála (Ref: ABP-304028-19) relating to the proposed Opera site re-development, a mixed-use scheme in Limerick city centre. The Proposed Development site is bounded by Michael Street, Ellen Street, Rutland Street, Patrick Street and Bank Place.

In addition to the EIAR Report, Chapter 12 and associated 23 photomontages provided in the Opera Site Planning Application, this addendum assesses amended and additional photomontages as part of the RFI request made by ABP.

RFI Item 1a: Photomontages

Request to provide amended photomontages from the following viewpoints to illustrate a wider perspective with the existing buildings at Steamboat Quay (Clarion Hotel), the existing Riverpoint development and the permitted development at Bishop's Quay - Planning Ref: PL91.247888 (16/800) from the following locations:

- Western side of River Shannon in the vicinity of O'Callaghan's Strand / Sarsfield Bridge / Clancy's Strand
- Thomond Bridge
- St. John's Castle

RFI Item 1b: Photomontages

Request to provide an additional photomontage of the Proposed Development looking north-eastwards along O'Connell Street in the vicinity of its junction with Cecil Street in conjunction with the permitted Rugby Experience - Planning Ref: ABP 301154-18 (17/1180).

Provision of one additional photomontage

In addition to the RFI, one extra photomontage (Photomontage 15B) has been produced from a viewpoint located at the R527 at Shannon Bridge. This photomontage supplements Photomontage 15 taken from the riverfront at O'Callaghan Strand north of Shannon Bridge.

All photomontages in relation to this RFI response are contained in a booklet of 'Planning Application Photomontages prepared in Response to Request for Further Information' by Pedersen Focus Ltd., which is provided as a separate document with this submission.

This addendum should be read in conjunction with the booklet of photomontages, which includes a viewpoint / photomontages location map for orientation. An overview of additional viewpoints / photomontages provided in this RFI response is enclosed in Figure 1 overleaf.



Figure 1 Viewpoint / Photomontage location map

1.2 RFI Item 1a: Photomontages

The following amended panoramic photomontages have been prepared in response to Section 1a of the RFI:

- Photomontage 12B - Thomond Bridge
- Photomontage 14B - Western side of River Shannon in the vicinity of O'Callaghan's Strand / Sarsfield Bridge / Clancy's Strand
- Photomontage 23B - St. John's Castle

Photomontage 12B: Thomond Bridge

Photomontage 12, as submitted with the planning application, cannot be extended into a wider panorama as it would not capture the Clarion Hotel, which is screened by intervening existing built structures from this particular viewpoint location. It was therefore required to move the viewpoint slightly further east along Thomond Bridge in order to capture at least the upper most section of the Clarion Hotel, while still capturing the Proposed Development at the Opera site in full.

The description of Photomontage 12 as provided in the planning application (EIAR Report, Chapter 12, Section 12.6.4) remains valid as follows: *“This view is of one of the key waterfront panoramas towards the core city as identified in the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan. The River Shannon is framed by the medieval quarter of Limerick and the Georgian Extension on the left and the promenade along Clancy’s Strand on the right. The open view south across the River Shannon captures a number of important waterside buildings as identified in the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan namely, sections of King John’s Castle to the left followed by the buildings of Limerick City Council, Limerick Circuit Court ... and Sarsfield House ...”* A local landmark is the bell tower of St. Mary’s Cathedral extending above St. John’s Castle and, although not designated, the lattice structure telecommunication tower above the Georgian Quarter in the background.

In addition to the above, the extended panoramic image captures the permitted building at Bishop’s Quay, the existing Riverpoint building and the upper most section of the Clarion Hotel in the background. The proposed Opera development will be seen as detached from the permitted existing tall building developments, due to a long distance between them. The proposed 14 storey tower will alter the existing skyline further in this panoramic view, as it will add another vertical urban landmark in the skyline of Limerick City, which integrates into the existing townscape as it is set back from the river front and seen in conjunction with existing surrounding townscape. The magnitude of visual effects remains as stated in the planning application (EIAR Report, Chapter 12, Section 12.6.4) as follows: *“The stepped down tower structure to the right of the main tower softens the overall verticality. The underlying existing characteristic components of the river front remain intact. The magnitude of visual effects is considered High. The resulting significance is Major-Moderate. The change in visual amenity from this viewpoint is considered to be beneficial due to the bold but high-quality appearance of the Proposed Development”*.

The significance of cumulative effects resulting from the additional tall building in the Limerick riverfront skyline is considered Major-Moderate. The cumulative change is considered Neutral as the proposed development stands apart from the permitted / existing tall buildings in the distance and do not directly relate to one another. The city centre skyline will alter further due to the introduction of an additional tall building structure.

Photomontage 14B: Western side of River Shannon in the vicinity of O’Callaghan’s Strand / Sarsfield Bridge / Clancy’s Strand

Photomontage 14, as submitted with the planning application, illustrates a panoramic view to the east / northeast of the beginning of the medieval heart of the city to the left, the Georgian part of the city including St. Mary’s Cathedral to the left and St. John’s Cathedral to the right.

The Clarion Hotel is screened at the original viewpoint location for Photomontage 14 by intervening vegetation located along the riverfront. In order capture a panoramic view including the Clarion Hotel building at Steamboat Quay, the viewpoint was required to be moved to the north-western side of Sarsfield Bridge. Photomontage 14B extends this panoramic view further to the south including the Clarion Hotel in the background. In order to include the permitted Bishop’s Quay development, the existing Riverpoint and the Clarion Hotel building, the horizontal field of view was required to be extended to approximately 150 degrees (please refer to annotations on Photomontage 14B).

The Proposed Development together with the permitted / existing tall buildings, will add another tall building in views along the riverfront of Limerick city centre when an observer pans its view from the left to the right, i.e. from the east / northeast to the south and back. This additional photomontage confirms the findings of the cumulative townscape and visual effects included in the planning application (EIAR Report, Chapter 12, Section 12.8) which states that: *“Combined views of The Bishop’s Quay and Opera developments will be possible for the majority of views from Shannon Bridge and O’Callaghan’s Strand towards Sarsfield Bridge or from the eastern end of Thomond Bridge looking south. The tallest and most prominent building structures of the Proposed Developments will be approximately 650m apart. The Opera development will introduce a new high-rise development at the northern end of the city centre of Limerick, which is currently low-rise but pronounced by the bell tower of St. Mary’s Cathedral. The Bishop’s Quay development adds another high-rise development in close proximity to the existing 59m high Riverpoint building, also located at The Bishop’s Quay, and the existing Clayton Hotel with 57m slightly further south at Steamboat Quay.*

If the second high-rise building would be constructed at Bishops' Quay, there would be 3 high-rise buildings located within approximately 480m to each other at the southern end of the Limerick city centre forming a band of similar buildings in style and height along the quays. The proposed Opera development will be seen as detached from these developments due to the long distance between them. The Opera site is also not located along the river front, which integrates this Proposed Development into the existing townscape."

Photomontage 14B confirms also the following statement made in the same section: "*Views of both developments [the proposed Opera development and Bishop's Quay development] at the same time from within the city centre and the Georgian Quarter are unlikely. The viewer has to turn the head to see either one or the other development"*. The panoramic view of Photomontage 14B has been the result of combining a series of images taken by panning a camera from northeast to south in 15 degree sections, just as an observer would need to do when on site. The horizontal field of view required to capture the proposed, permitted and existing tall buildings along or near the riverfront is approximately 120 – 150 degrees. It should be noted that the horizontal area of focus of a human eye is approximately 60 degrees. This is where objects are seen sharp. Therefore, the observer would need to turn the head in order to see the panoramic view illustrated in Photomontage 14B. Please refer to detailed graphics illustrating the horizontal and vertical field of vision of a human eye which is included in Appendix 1. In order to read Photomontage 14B correctly, it is recommended that the viewer should go on site and view the panoramic image in cylindrical projection, a method used to map a panorama onto a curved surface. The arc of curvature in degrees is equal to the overall horizontal field of view.

The residual cumulative townscape and visual effects remain as stated in the planning submission (EIAR Report, Chapter 12, Section 12.8) as follows: "*The sensitivity of the townscape character in views along the river front is considered High-Medium. Additional changes to the townscape character are considered High as the character of the Limerick skyline will change further. A new prominent tall landmark will be introduced to the currently low-rise character of the northern city centre. The significance of cumulative effects is considered Major-Moderate. The cumulative change is considered to be Neutral as both developments stand apart and do not directly relate to each other"*. The permitted Bishop's Quay building and the existing Riverpoint building will form a cluster, which is visually detached from the Clarion Hotel and the proposed Opera site development. The Clarion Hotel and the proposed Opera development will also not stand in relation to each other due to the long distance between them.

Photomontage 23B: St. John's Castle

Photomontage 23, as submitted with the planning application, illustrates a panoramic view from the visitor platform within St. John's Castle and overlooks the castle courtyard and the River Shannon. This view has been extended to capture the permitted Bishop's Quay development and the existing Riverpoint and Clarion Hotel buildings in the distance.

The assessment provided for Photomontage 23, as stated in the EIAR report, Chapter 12, Section 12.6.4 remains valid. In addition, cumulative effects of the Proposed Development in conjunction with the permitted / existing tall building structures are considered as follows:

Combined views of the permitted Bishop's Quay, the existing Riverpoint building and the Clarion Hotel will be possible in this view when looking south along the River Shannon. The tallest and most prominent building structures of the Proposed Development and the Bishop's Quay tower will be approximately 650m apart. The Opera development will introduce a new high-rise development at the northern end of the city centre of Limerick, which is currently low-rise but pronounced by the bell tower of St. Mary's Cathedral. It will be seen distinctly separated from the permitted Bishop's Quay development and the existing Riverpoint building, which form their own cluster of tall buildings in the distance. The Clarion Hotel is standing on its own further south. As stated in the cumulative assessment for Bishop's Quay in the planning application (EISR Report, Chapter 12, Section 12.8): "*The proposed Opera development will be seen as detached from these developments due to the long distance between them. The Opera site is also not located along the river front, which integrates this Proposed Development into the existing townscape. ... The sensitivity of the townscape character in views along the river front is considered High-Medium. Additional changes to the townscape*

character are considered High as the character of the Limerick skyline will change further. A new prominent tall landmark will be introduced to the currently low-rise character of the northern city centre. The significance of cumulative effects is considered Major-Moderate. The cumulative change is considered to be Neutral as [the permitted Bishop's Quay, existing Riverpoint and Clarion Hotel buildings] stand apart and do not directly relate to [the Proposed Development at the Opera site]".

1.3 RFI Item 1b: Photomontages

The following new photomontage has been prepared in response to Section 1b of the RFI:

- Photomontage 24 - O'Connell Street in the vicinity of its junction with Cecil Street

As description of this photomontages is included below:

Photomontage 24: O'Connell Street in the vicinity of its junction with Cecil Street in conjunction with the permitted Rugby Experience - Planning Ref: ABP 301154-18 (17/1180)

The viewpoint is located on O'Connell Street southwest of the junction with Cecil Street and within one of the key linear urban vistas available in the grid pattern of the Georgian Quarter of the city centre as identified in the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan. This view, looking northeast, is enclosed to either side by Georgian terraced townhouses and modern buildings, and it has been selected in order to capture the full height of the permitted Rugby Experience and the surrounding built context.

Local landmarks will be the Rugby Experience (once completed), St. Augustine's Church and the clock tower of Penny's department store in the middle distance. Arthur's Quay Shopping Centre is a low-rise focal point at the end of the vista in the background.

The value of this view is considered Regional. Visual receptors are pedestrians, vehicular traffic, people going or coming from work, working inside and some residents. Views are experienced on a daily basis and mainly as a sequence of views moving through the area. The susceptibility of receptors to change is therefore considered Medium. The sensitivity is considered High.

The Proposed Development at the Opera site will mainly be screened by the intervening roof and bell tower of St. Augustine's Church located further northeast along O'Connell Street. Small sections of the upper most tip of Parcel 5 will appear just above the roof of the church and beside the gable facing O'Connell Street. The visible part of the development will not become a character changing element in this view as it will be barely recognisable. The magnitude of visual effects is therefore considered Negligible resulting in a Minor-Negligible Neutral significance.

In terms of cumulative effects, the permitted Rugby Experience will, once completed, become a main focus point in this view. The Proposed Development at the Opera site will mostly be screened and therefore not result in additional townscape and visual effects in conjunction with the Rugby Experience. As stated in the EIAR Report, Chapter 12, Section 12.8 Cumulative Effects: "... *the Rugby Museum will become visually more prominent than the proposed Opera site in views further north along O'Connell Street until passing the Rugby Museum ...*". Photomontage 6 (taken at the Crescent at junction Hartstonge Street) and Photomontage 7 (taken at O'Connell Street near junction with Cruise's Street) together with the additional Photomontage 24 illustrate a sequence of views of the Proposed Development from the Crescent and along O'Connell Street. They show the changing visibility and prominence as one moves closer to the proposed Opera site and the associated changes in screening effects by intervening existing surrounding townscape.

The magnitude of cumulative townscape and visual effects is therefore considered to be Negligible in this view. The significance of cumulative change is considered Negligible and Neutral as the Opera Site development is mainly screened.

1.4 Additional Photomontage

Photomontage 15B has been added to provide a view from Shannon Bridge, which is one of the 3 bridges crossing the River Shannon in Limerick city centre, and in addition to Photomontage 15 located along O'Callaghan Strand further northeast. A description of the photomontage is included overleaf.

Photomontage 15B: R527 / Shannon Bridge

This view is also part of a range of key waterfront panoramas towards the city centre as identified in the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan. It illustrates an open view from the north-western end of Shannon Bridge of the existing Riverpoint building straight ahead, the Clarion Hotel to the right further south and the permitted Bishop's Quay development north of the Riverpoint building. The majority of the view contains modern river front buildings of similar height, which are intersected by distinct tall building structures. The medieval part of Limerick city with St. Mary's Cathedral is located upstream to the northeast in the background.

The value of this view is considered at Regional level. Visual receptors will mainly be pedestrians, cyclists and vehicle drivers. The susceptibility to change is considered High as the majority of receptors will view this open panorama as an important and integral part of a high quality townscape experienced regularly or daily. The sensitivity is considered High-Medium.

The proposed tower of Parcel 5 will form a new urban vertical landmark in the background at the point of interchange between the modern river front transitioning to the mediaeval core of Limerick city. In contrast to the tall buildings in the centre and right in this view, the proposed tower of the Opera development is set back from the river front and integrates therefore well into the surrounding urban grain due to its location and the selection of façade material. Its tallness will not be prominent from this location as the much closer permitted and existing tall buildings draw the attention and define the city skyline in this view. The composition of the existing river front will therefore not change significantly following the introduction of the proposed Opera site tower. The magnitude of visual effects is considered Medium. The resulting significance is Moderate. The change in visual amenity from this viewpoint is considered to be Beneficial due to the integration potential of the Proposed Development at the northern end of the Georgian core.

In terms of cumulative effects, additional changes to the townscape character are considered Low due to the distance between the Proposed Development and the observer as well as the integration of the Proposed Development into the existing townscape character. While the addition of the tower element will be readily recognisable, the character of the Limerick skyline will not change significantly in this view. The significance of cumulative effects is therefore considered Minor. The cumulative change is considered to be Neutral as the permitted and existing developments stand apart and do not directly relate to each other.

Similar to panoramic Photomontage 14B, this panoramic view has been the result of combining a series of images taken by panning a camera from northeast to south in 15 degree sections, just as an observer would need to do when on site. In order to read Photomontage 15B correctly, it is recommended that the viewer should go on site and view the panoramic image in cylindrical projection, a method used to map a panorama onto a curved surface. The arc of curvature in degrees is equal to the overall horizontal field of view.

1.5 Summary

Following a review of the townscape and visual impact assessment (TVIA) included in the EIAR Report, Chapter 12 and in particular Section 12.6.4 – Residual Visual Effects and Section 12.8 - Cumulative Effects, the amended and additional panoramic photomontages prepared for this RFI response confirm the findings of the TVIA, which have been cited in relevant sections above.

The proposed development will amend the Limerick skyline when seen along the Shannon riverfront in conjunction with the permitted Bishop's Quay development, the existing Riverpoint and Clarion Hotel buildings (refer to RFI Photomontages 12B, 14B, 15B and 23B) and become a prominent new landmark in the currently low-rise character of the northern city centre. This change will result in significant townscape and visual effects. The significance of cumulative effects is considered Major-Moderate. The cumulative change is considered to be Neutral as the permitted Bishop's Quay, existing Riverpoint and Clarion Hotel buildings stand apart at either end of the city centre and do not directly relate to the Proposed Development at the Opera site.

The permitted Rugby Experience at O'Connell Street will be visually more prominent than the Proposed Development at the Opera site in views where both developments are visible together due to the long distance between both developments (approx. 530m) and screening effects by intervening existing buildings (refer to RFI Photomontage 24).

Appendix 1

Human Eye – Horizontal Focus

