



Galway Harbour Company

Galway Harbour Extension

Environmental Impact Statement

Chapter 13

Material Assets

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13 MATERIAL ASSETS

13.1 ARCHITECTURAL / CULTURAL

13.1.1 Introduction

Because the proposed development is to be located on reclaimed lands from the sea, there are no existing architectural or cultural heritage elements being impacted by the new port. (The separate proposed ground works to the existing protected structure of the railway bridge is covered under a separate visual impact assessment in Section 13.2). Furthermore, the immediate environs of the site including the existing Galway Harbour Enterprise Park, has no element of architectural or cultural significance being impacted by the proposal. However, due to its proximity to the city centre urban fabric and Galway having a very distinctive cultural image, it was considered important to examine the impact of the harbour extension on the wider city scale and the perception of its sense of place. For the purpose of keeping the E.I.S concise and relevant, and conscious that this impact study does not technically fall within the strict meaning of Environmental Assessment, it was deemed appropriate to address these issues under a separate study title “Physical, Cultural and Architectural Study” and is included in Appendix No. 13.1.

This study sees the proposed development as less a land reclamation project from the bay area and more as a physical and cultural extension of the city and where the process of developing a new port architecture for Galway is started. The study also examines the universal nature of ports and the unique themes that are particular to Galway. It looks at the hidden meaning and layers of living ports and their interpretation within a Galway context. It is seen as a complimentary study, to the Environmental Impact Assessment, where the more subliminal aspects of the proposed development are explored and exposed.

13.1.2 Cultural Loss of Existing Harbour

The proposed relocation of the existing harbour operations and activities to the proposed harbour extension will result in a cultural loss to the existing harbour, general environs, city centre and city in general. This section assesses this cultural loss and its implications for the city and should be read in conjunction with the “Physical, Cultural and Architectural Study” in Appendix 13.1.

13.1.2.1 Culture of Existing Harbour

Applying the term “cultural” to the existing harbour may appear surprising, as it would not generally fall within that category in the prevailing use and understanding of the word. When Galway is described as a cultural city, it usually refers to the arts, music, language and general ambiance of the city created by its street culture. However, under E.P.A guidelines, cultural assets include not only physical elements such as settlements and structures, but social assets such as history and tradition. The relocation of the existing harbour will result in a certain loss of its historic, physical, social and cultural relationship with the city. (This theme is explored in more detail in Section 1.14 of the Physical, Cultural and Architectural Study as contained in the appendix section 13.1). The culture of the existing harbour is embodied in the following elements:

- The tradition of large ships entering, docking and departing the harbour.
- The visual animation that ships bring to the harbour in such close proximity to the city centre.
- The operational elements of the harbour including cranes, cargo, crew etc.
- The infrastructural element of the harbour including buildings, warehouses, pipelines etc.

13.1.2.2 Assessment of Cultural Loss

The removal and relocation of the existing harbour to the proposed harbour extension will result in the cultural loss of the above four elements. Assessing this loss however, is not measurable to any reliable extent. This is due to the fact that the culture and tradition of the existing harbour is subjective and personal and influenced by our attitude, perception and feelings towards the facility. Culture and tradition are less tangible and less visual, are perceived in a more subliminal way and consequently, the impact of their loss is not assessable in an objective, scientific way. What we can state is, that, for a lot of people who have either a curiosity or fascination with the harbour and its activities, or who engage in the pastime of “shipspotting”, will miss the operations and visual impact of larger vessels in the harbour. For the city, the presence of ships and shipping activity so close to the city centre, is a unique experience in the Irish urban context and has proved to be an attraction for both citizens and visitors to the city. Finally, whilst none of the existing harbour buildings or warehouses, that will become redundant and eventually removed because of the relocation, are protected structures, and in most cases have a negative impact on the quality of the urban environment, nevertheless, they do form part of the uncelebrated heritage of the city and their loss will be loss of part of the memory of the city. However, over the last 15 years, the existing harbour area has experienced significant new mixed development and urban renewal and there has been a gradual awareness, acceptance and even desire to continue that expansion and to see the city centre extend to around the amenity lung of the harbour waters. In addition the existing harbour will be retained as a marina to cater for all types of sailing and pleasure craft, including occasional fishing and exhibition vessels which maintains its maritime use and presents a nautical and sailing image to the city. Critically, both the location and layout of the new port adjacent is designed to ensure that the visual and cultural link between the city and its port is maintained, albeit at a greater remove from its existing central location. Finally, whilst this will be a certain cultural loss, it must be balanced against the fact that the harbour relocation is designed to secure the future of port activities in Galway and without the relocation, the existing harbour would, in time, cease shipping operations anyway, which would be a greater loss for the city. Consequently, the cultural loss in this particular micro area of the city and city centre is to ensure that there is no overall cultural loss to the greater macro city area.

13.1.2.3 Conclusion

The cultural loss is not measurable in any objective way, but will be a loss nevertheless. However, the loss is insignificant in comparison to the potential loss of the overall shipping industry to Galway, which the relocated harbour is designed to prevent.

13.1.3 Lough Atalia Bridge – Visual Assessment

13.1.3.1 Visual Impact Assessment of Proposed Road Works at Lough Atalia Railway Underbridge

13.1.3.1.1 Introduction

This section looks at the architectural visual impact of the proposed road works under the Lough Atalia underbridge. It should be read in conjunction, with, and be seen as complimentary to the separate archaeology and conservation study on the proposal as included in Appendix 13.2.6 outlines the background, history, construction, description, inspection of trial holes, assessment and recommendation of the proposed works. The trial hole results of the proposed works are included in Appendix 6.2.

This assessment is based on the drawings 2139-2169, 2139-2170 and 2139-2171 and photomontage, plate 11 in the EIS Volume of Drawings.

13.1.3.1.2 Necessity of Works

The proposed works consists of lowering the road and footpaths running under the railway underbridge to cater for the safer movement of large vehicles under the bridge. At the middle of the bridge, the road surface will be some 1.2metres lower than the existing road level. The lowering of the road will address the various incidents and safety issues of high vehicles striking the arch rib construction of the underbridge over the years, including a relatively recent incident which resulted in the road being closed for four days. It will also rectify the issue of the existing bridge height not being of suitable height for modern articulated lorries and other large vehicles using Lough Atalia Rd. Finally, it will also address the traffic safety issue of large vehicles having to cross the white centre line marking of the road, to occupy the centre portion of carriageway in order to travel under the bridge and avoid the lower arched section of the bridge to either side.

13.1.3.1.3 Existing Underbridge Context

The existing underbridge is separate, but forms part of a continuance of the viaduct over Lough Atalia which links the railway line as it extends through Renmore with the railway station lands at Ceannt Station. The continuance is emphasised by the consistency of materials between the viaduct and underbridge, comprising a cast iron spanning structure on local quarried rusticated limestone bridge abutments even though the design, construction and intermediate supporting piers of the viaduct are different.

From an urban perspective, the railway bridge is significant, because at the upper railway line level, it defines the point of arrival into the city, in what is one of the most dramatic railway entrances to any city in Ireland, and at the lower road level, it provides a gateway or doorway into the city centre for road traffic. Consequently, the bridge is a significant transition point into the city centre. The underbridge also spans over one of the four main traffic routes, both across the city from west to east and into the city centre from the east.

In terms of its immediate visual environs, the underbridge is more appealing when approached from the north east with a green amenity strip and Lough Atalia to one side and the high limestone wall boundary to the Ceannt Station lands on the other side. From the south west the approach is more industrial and discordant in nature, with the oil compound on one side and the high steel mast and two storey station signal house emerging from over the level of the railway bridge.

The movement on the road crossing under the underbridge is primarily vehicular in nature with a high traffic rate in both directions reflecting its main arterial status. Pedestrian and bicycle traffic is small and limited due to the high vehicular count, relatively narrow, low but deep bridge span which makes it a hostile environment for non-vehicular movement. There is already a discernible

slope in the road on approaching and travelling under the bridge from both sides which was obviously provided to optimize the height clearance under the bridge. In general the underbridge is in the main, approached and viewed while travelling in a vehicle, which makes its study and appreciation relatively limited, brief and fleeting.

The main proposed visual changes are:

- The gradual lowering of the road under and beyond the bridge to a maximum depth of 1.2 metres under the existing road level.
- A corresponding gradual lowering of the footway at each side under and beyond the bridge to a corresponding depth under the path level.

13.1.3.1.4 Visual Impact Assessment

The purpose of the proposed works is both practical and necessary in the context of Health & Safety, Traffic Safety, Vehicular Safety and general risk to the bridge structure. The most obvious change will be the lowering of the road. Whilst there is a discernible dip in the existing road under the bridge at present, the proposed lowering will be considerably more pronounced. The lowering of the footpaths next to the existing bridge abutments will visually make the bridge appear higher. However the perceived additional height will not be apparent on the existing road approach to the bridge, prior to the start of the proposed sloped section of the road. In addition, the trial holes confirm that the existing rusticated limestone construction of the bridge abutments, extend down to the new path level, which ensures a consistency of material, finish and construction techniques to the new portion of exposed pier wall.

Overall the visual impact of the proposed changes is slightly negative in terms of the existing visual composition and appearance of the bridge. However, the impact must be gauged against the visual impact of the consistent incidents and risk of damage to the underbridge, which is not readily or practically assessable, but is a factor that requires consideration. On balance, the negative visual aspect of the proposed changes, are regarded to be counteracted by the positive removal of risk and danger to the bridge, to give an overall neutral outcome to the assessment.

