

**Report in accordance with the requirements of Part 8 of the
Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)**

Stephen Street Cultural Plaza

1.0 Introduction

Sligo County Council is seeking to redevelop a key urban space within the town centre for use as a public pedestrian square. Sligo lacks a large multi functional public open space in the heart of the city capable of hosting a variety of events and such a development is considered essential if Sligo is to prosper and become a place people want to visit and spend time in.

Public spaces are important for the life of a city. Well designed and planned public spaces enhance the physical environment and improve the 'livability' and sustainability of urban centres. They provide a focal point for the community and a place where residents and visitors alike can meet for a variety of purposes.

The space currently occupied by the Stephen Street car park has the potential to be the central, animated square which Sligo needs. In recent years, the car park has been temporarily adapted to cater for larger events such as concerts, festivals, markets and public screenings.

The proposal is to redevelop this space into a high quality permanent public plaza for all residents and visitors of Sligo to use and enjoy. This will help promote the city as a destination and provide the opportunity to host a wider range of events and activities.

This new square will be a major focal point for Sligo City's cultural, social, and recreational life, and a must-visit venue for tourists to Sligo and the Northwest's Wild Atlantic Way.

The new plaza will have interpretive elements for visitors, performance space for public events, a play area for children and recreational/social areas for public enjoyment. The space will be capable of accommodating a variety of open-air activities, such as outdoor markets, festivals, live performances, art exhibitions, etc.

2.0 Description of the proposed development

The proposed works include the following:

1. Hard landscaping consisting of granite paving and granite benches;
2. Soft landscaping consisting of formal reinforced grass lawns, play area, and the planting of low shrub beds;
3. Removal and replanting of trees;
4. The provision of a fixed canopy to provide a permanently covered space;
5. The provision of a retractable canopy to provide occasional covered space at the western corner of the site;
6. Interpretative signage;
7. All associated site development works.

It is proposed to remove all car parking spaces and pave the majority of the space in high quality granite paving slabs. To soften the scheme and to provide 'break out' spaces and built in seating, it is

proposed to create two grass mounds c. 0.5m max from ground level in the eastern corner of the square. The grass in this area will be 'reinforced grass' capable of being driven over and walked over extensively without damage. The walls around these mounds will act as informal seating benches. Unstructured play elements (final details of which will be confirmed at detailed design stage) will be located in this area to provide interest for children.

Two canopy types are proposed to be located in the square. There will be a permanent canopy structure, details of which will be finalised via an architectural competition. This canopy should be viewed as a functional canopy (provide cover from the weather) but also as a 'piece of public art' which could be an attraction in its own right.

Retractable canopies are proposed in the western corner of the site, final details of which will be determined at design stage. These canopies could be used to facilitate outdoor markets, art exhibitions, informal performance space, outdoor seating etc.

The cantilevered structure illustrated in the drawings and often referred to as 'the Shell' is NOT part of this proposal and will be subject to a separate Part 8 process.

3.0 Development Plan policy

Sligo County Council is committed to an urban strategy that aims to enhance the quality of its urban core, as contained in the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 (as currently incorporated into the Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023) (SEDP).

Since 2004 it has been an objective of the Council to redevelop the car park to the south of Stephen Street into an urban square. The relevant objectives in the SEDP are as follows:

- O-OS-26 Develop suitably landscaped urban squares at the following locations..... including "Stephen Square - at Stephen Street car park".

- O-OS-25 Develop and maintain a secondary network of children's playgrounds" at locations including "Stephen Street Square"

Within this context, the development of a public plaza at this location is in accordance with development plan policy.

4.0 Sligo City Public Realm Plan

In February 2018, Sligo County Council commissioned international design consultancy Building Design Partnership (BDP) to prepare a public realm plan (PRP) for Sligo. The preparation of such a Plan is an objective of the County Development Plan 2017-2023. The PRP is now completed.

The aim of the Plan is to propose improvements to Sligo's public spaces, including streets and car parks and to enhance the town as an attractive place in which to live, work and visit. It also proposes a palette of materials to be used on the City's streets over the coming years to ensure consistency and improve the look of public spaces.

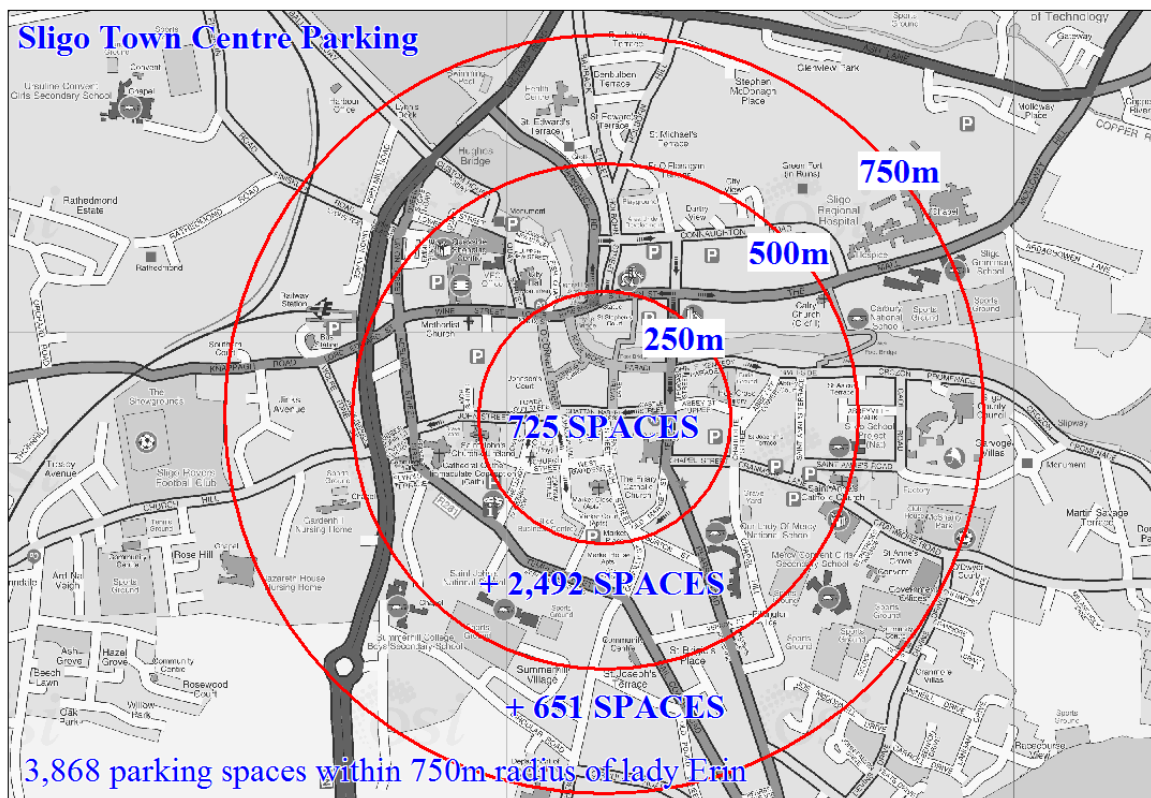
The Plan's vision is to enhance the image and setting of Sligo through the enhancement of its streets and spaces, conservation of its built heritage, encouraging people to explore, businesses to flourish and creating a vibrant street scene.

As part of the PRP process, BDP engaged with stakeholders and key interest groups to ensure that the people of Sligo have an input into the emerging Plan.

The Plan has proposed a number of initiatives around the city core which embody its vision and the principles of good urban design and place making. The creation of an urban plaza between the Garavogue River and Stephen Street on this site is seen as the cornerstone of the Plan and is a project that is expected to stimulate further investment and interest in Sligo.

5.0 Access & Car Parking

The proposal necessitates the removal of all existing car parking spaces in order to create a pedestrianised plaza. The loss of these car parking spaces merits consideration in respect of this part of the urban area. However, it is noted that within 500m of the Lady Erin statue in Market Cross (generally considered as the centre of the urban core), there are 2,424 other car parking spaces. This is a sizeable amount of spaces within easy walking distance of the city centre and compares well with other Irish towns of a similar size. It is therefore considered that the removal of these spaces will not adversely affect the availability of car parking for, or cause significant inconvenience to, visitors, workers or residents of Sligo City.



Access to the space will be controlled by means of retractable bollards at the junction with Stephen Street and access for deliveries and emergency vehicles as well as for existing properties within the existing car park will be retained. Similar arrangements apply on Rockwood Parade across the river.

The proposed layout of the plaza has been designed to ensure that articulated vehicular access and the placement of a stage for large events is achievable.

6.0 Archaeology

The proposal has been the subject of an Archaeological Impact Assessment carried out by an archaeologist licensed by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The report concludes that while the proposal is unlikely to impinge on the archaeological layer, archaeological monitoring of ground works should be undertaken during the construction phase of the development.

7.0 Ecology

The proposal has been the subject of a Screening for Appropriate Assessment in compliance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive. Having regard to the limited scale of the proposed development and the fact that it will not impact on the qualifying interests of the adjoining SAC, it was concluded that there are not likely to be significant effects on the Natura 2000 network arising from the proposed development.

A bat survey was also carried out at the site. The recommendations of this report will be taken into consideration at detailed design stage.

8.0 Conclusion

Sligo County Council is committed to transforming the urban core of Sligo into a place of safety and human scale, free of the barriers created by traffic congestion and delivered back to the pedestrian in such a way that provides sustainable streets and places, providing a balance between the demands of commercial realities and the need for calmed places for people to meet, carry out their business affairs and avail of the amenity that civic places, squares, and greens can provide. The Public Realm Plan for Sligo and the initiatives proposed therein embodies this idea and the redevelopment of the Stephen Street car park is the first step towards *achieving* such a vision.

9.0 What happens next?

After the expiration of the period during which submissions or observations may be made, a report will be prepared and presented to the elected members of Sligo County Council. This report will incorporate a list of the persons or bodies that made submissions, along with a summary of the issues raised by them and the Chief Executive's response. This report will also recommend whether or not the proposed development should be proceeded with as proposed, or should not be proceeded with.

Following consideration of the Report by the members of the Council, the proposed development may be carried out as recommended in the Report, unless the members, by resolution, decide to vary or modify the development, otherwise than as recommended in the Report, or decide not to proceed with the development.