

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES ON NEWCASTLE ROAD
BALLYMAHON CO LONGFORD

Prepared for Longford County Council



This Report is prepared in compliance with the European Habitats Directive to assess the impacts, if any, on the Special Areas of Conservation for habitats and species and the Special Protection Areas for birds in the environs of the project. The European Habitats Directive is transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, SI 94/1997, amended by the Birds and Habitats Regulation SI No 477 of 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary..... 2

2. Introduction and background..... 3

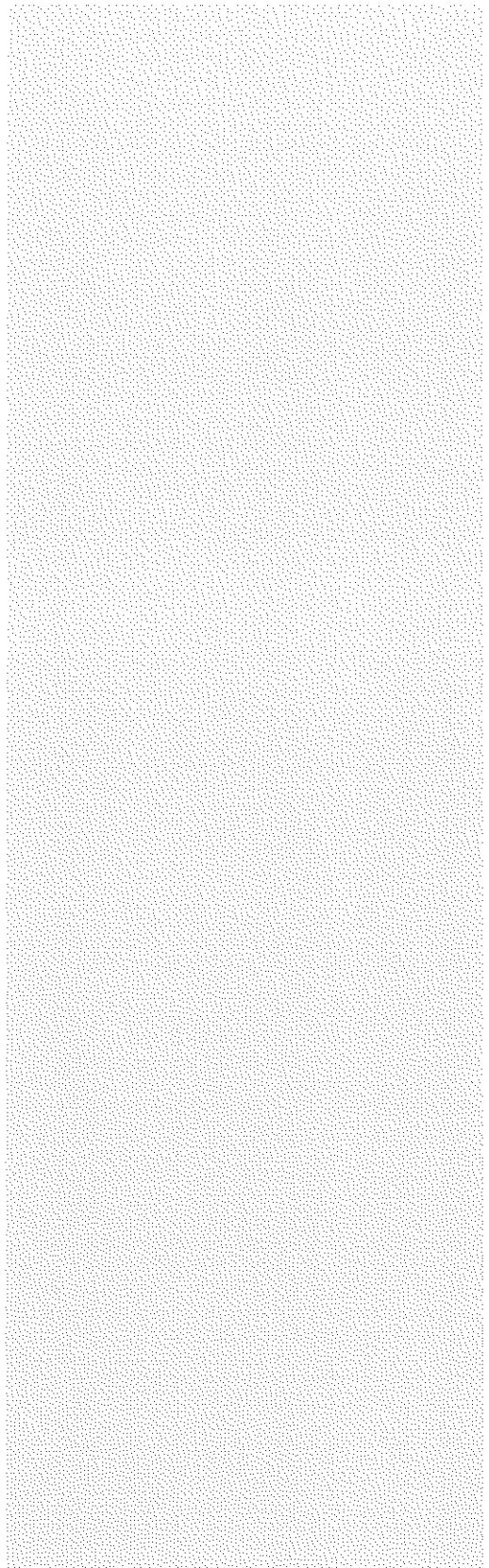
3. Assessment Methodologies..... 5

4. Screening..... 8

5. Conclusion 18

6. Finding of No Significant Effect..... 20

7. Appendices and Photographs..... 23



1. Executive Summary

Member States of the European Union are required to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, respectively. SACs and SPS are collectively known as Natura 200 sites or European sites. An "Appropriate Assessment" (AA) is a required assessment to determine the likelihood of significant impacts, based on best scientific knowledge, of any plans or projects on the "qualifying interests" of European sites. A screening for AA determines whether a plan or project, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European site in view of its qualifying interests. The European sites of relevance to the proposed project are located at Lough Ree. The location of the proposed project is not itself designated as a European site.

This report is an Appropriate Assessment Screening of the proposed traffic calming measures (the project) on the Newcastle Road between Toome Cross and the entrance to Center Parcs at Ballymahon, Co. Longford. This report fulfils the legal requirement to carry out a screening assessment under the legislation, relevant guidelines and steps to take. The project is managed by the Roads Department of Longford County Council. The aim of this AA screening report is to ascertain if the proposal for traffic calming measures is likely to have a significant effect on a European site.

In accordance with the Planning and Development Act (2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the objective information provided in this report, it is concluded that the proposals to carry out traffic calming measures on its own or in combination with other plans/projects is not likely to have a significant effect on the European sites at Lough Ree. An Appropriate Assessment under the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), is therefore not required.

The reasons for this conclusion are set out in this report but are summarised as follows. The size, scale, proximity and nature of the project is deemed to be small enough and distant enough to conclude that the effects on the European sites , if any, would not be significant. The project is to be contained within the existing land-take and no extraction or drainage of the watercourse at the River Inny is foreseen.. The nature and scale of the works required to facilitate this project are not complex and are in the nature of surface works not requiring excavation. The contractor will undertake to comply with the highest standards of site management to avoids spills, run-off and inappropriate disturbance/removal of vegetation or fauna. The contractor will be subject to spot-checks by a qualified ecologist during the period of the works to ensure compliance. The ecologist will also advise on compliance measures to control the spread of invasive species. While none were recorded at the site care will be taken to ensure that none are imported to the site from construction activities.

The assessment has been made on the basis of information made available to the authors at the time of writing. It should be noted that prior to a final determination being made, the assessment contained in this report may be reviewed on receipt of any additional information received from prescribed bodies or public submission as part of the Part 8 process.

2. Introduction and Background

Background to this project

The proposed traffic calming measures screened in this report are located between the entrance to the Center Parcs development and Toome cross-roads, Ballymahon, Co. Longford. (Figure 1.)

The proposals are considered a consequent and necessary contribution to road safety in the area. BensonEcology was contracted to prepare this Report.



Figure 1. Location of proposed Traffic Calming from Toome Cross Roads to Center Parcs entrance

The project falls under the responsibility of the Roads Department of Longford County Council.

The aim of this report is to ascertain if the proposed project is likely to significantly affect a European site and therefore require an “appropriate assessment” under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. An appropriate assessment is a further step in the analysis process to determine the impacts on the integrity of European sites.

The Purpose of the Appropriate Assessment Screening

Member States of the European Union are required to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, respectively. SACs and SPAs are collectively known as European. An ‘Appropriate Assessment’ (AA) is a required assessment to determine the likelihood of significant impacts, based on best scientific knowledge, of any plans or projects on European sites. A screening for AA determines whether a plan or project, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European site in view of its qualifying interests and conservation objectives.

This report is a requirement under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC - *Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna*. The 'Habitats Directive' provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. It was transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, SI 94/1997, amended by the Birds and Habitats Regulation SI No 477 of 2011.

The Habitats Directive states that plans and projects must be subject to an appropriate assessment if the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site, but is likely to have a significant effect either individually or in combination with other plans or projects on Natura 2000 sites. This was reinforced in the ECJ ruling against Ireland in Case 418/04. Specifically, Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states:

Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.

In summary, an AA screening is an evaluation of the potential significant effects of a plan/project on the conservation objectives of a European site. In a situation where it is not possible to fully demonstrate that significant effects on the site would not occur, an Appropriate Assessment is required. Plans/projects that require an AA can only then be permitted after having ascertained that there will be no adverse effect on the site integrity of a European site¹.

The aim of this report is to ascertain if the proposed measures are likely to significantly affect a European site and therefore require an "appropriate assessment" under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. An appropriate assessment is a further step in the analysis process to determine the impacts on the integrity of European sites

Stages of AA

The European Commission's (2001) Methodological Guidance recommends a 4 stage approach in undertaking assessments under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive:

Stage 1 Screening: Determining whether the project/plan 'either alone or in combination with other plans or projects' is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. There are four steps in the Screening process (see next section)

¹ Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland -- Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009)

Stage 2 : Appropriate Assessment: Determining whether, in view of the site’s conservation objectives, the plan/project ‘either alone or in combination with other plans or projects’ would have an adverse effect (or risk of this) on the integrity of the site. If not, the project/plan can proceed.

Stage 3: Assessment of Alternative Solutions: Where it has not been proven that measures considered will not avoid or mitigate the adverse affect on the European site, then an assessment of the alternatives will be required; and if none are acceptable then stage 4 is required to be considered.

Stage 4 : Assessment where no Alternative Solutions Exist and where Adverse Impacts Remain This will involve assessment where the plan/project is considered to result in adverse impacts on the European site and no alternative solutions remain – the imperative reasons of over-riding public interest (IROPI) test must be met before authorisation, permission or adoption of the plan/project is agreed. This includes the agreement of compensatory measures.

Stage One Screening – 4 Steps

The screening stage is used to identify whether the project, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site. This report follows the European Commission (2001) guidance which recommends that AA screening should follow a four step process as outlined below.

Step one: Determine whether the project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European Site. If it is, then no further assessment is necessary. (As the traffic calming project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site, this assessment will proceed to step two of the process)

Step two: Describe the project and other projects that, ‘in combination’, have the potential to have significant effects on a European site.

Step three: Identify the potential effects on the European site.

Step four: Assess the significance of any effects on the European site.

3. Assessment Methodologies

Constraints and limitations

The assessment screening for the Project in this report is based on the information in the Part 8 Planning Report, prepared by OCSC Engineers, and associated technical drawings. This Planning Report describes and outlines the design and works for this project and was made available to us at the time of writing (April, 2019).

a. Desk Study

A desk study was carried out to collate available information on the site's natural environment. This comprised a review of the following sources and datasets:

- OSI Aerial photography and 1:50000 mapping;
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS);
- BirdWatch Ireland;
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- Upper Shannon Catchment datasets (Water Framework Directive)
- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) online map viewer
- Longford County Council website (Planning section)
- An Bord Pleanála website
- DiscoverIreland.ie and fishingireland.info

b. Consultation

Consultation (by phone and email) was undertaken with National Parks and Wildlife Services Conservation Ranger for Longford, Ms Susan Moles on 4 April 2019.

c. Site Survey

A site survey was conducted by an ecologist on the 7 April 2019.

d. Guidance and reference

In the preparation of this assessment reference has been made to the following documents:-

European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018. No. 296/2018 .

Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment, August 2018.

Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009).

European Commission's: *Managing Natura 2000 Sites. The provisions of Article 6, of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC .*

European Commission: *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*

Guidance document on Article 6(4) of 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC

Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) Circular letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08 dated 15 February, 2008.

Department of the Environment (1994). *Planning and Policy Guidance: Nature Conservation (PPG9)* (HMSO).

The European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, SI 94/1997, amended by the Birds and Habitats Regulation SI No 477 of 2011.

Conservation Objectives: Lough Ree SAC 000440. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. NPWS (2016)

Conservation objectives for Lough Ree SPA [004064]. Generic Version 5.0. Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. NPWS (2016)

In accordance with the guidelines and Regulations, any project/plan must be screened for significant effects on areas designated as European sites (normally called Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or collectively as European sites). This screening should be based on any ecological information available to the authority and an adequate description of the project and its likely significant effects. The results of the screening should be recorded and made available to the public. In any case where, following screening, it is found that the project may have a significant effect on the conservation objectives of a European site or that such a significant effect cannot be ruled out, adopting a precautionary approach an appropriate assessment of the project must be carried out.

e. Assessment of Impacts – Indicators

Once the potential impacts that may arise from the proposal are identified, the significance of these is assessed through the use of key indicators:

- Habitat loss;
- Habitat alteration;
- Water quality and resource.

4. Screening

Introduction

This step (step 2 of the 4 steps) of the Stage One Screening process provides a description of the project, the site and other projects that, 'in combination', have the potential to have significant

effects on a European site. In this Report the objective is to assess the impact on the European sites, if any. European sites are those located less than 15 km from the proposed project or linked hydrologically to the project.

Description of the Project

Newcastle Road is located in a rural area of high amenity value. It serves as an unofficial by-pass of Ballymahon Town between the N55 and the R392. Given the increased tourist activity levels envisaged as a result of Center Parcs and other amenity improvements in the Ballymahon Area, Longford County Council, as documented in its County Development Plan, propose to introduce improved traffic management in the area. This is to include traffic calming measures along the local road and at Newcastle Bridge. This will enhance the amenity value of the road, discourage its use by passing traffic, and control traffic speeds.

The road width varies between 5 and 5.5m with the exception of a section between Cloncallow Junction and Newcastle Bridge where the road width is less than 5m. Newcastle Bridge represents a pinch point on this section with approximately 4.2m clear distance between parapets, which effectively allows one vehicle at a time. The yielding currently works by courtesy as both directions have right of way. The length of roadsides where lining and signage will take place is 2.8km. On the southern approach to the bridge, 60 m of the road will be widened.

Work to be carried out:

- Provision of a coloured surface on Newcastle Bridge at road level to demarcate a pedestrian designated area.
- Minor repair works to the parapets of Newcastle Bridge including removal of vegetation, localized repair to parapets and parapet capping's.
- Repairs to the masonry retaining walls on the south east approach to Newcastle Bridge for the extent of the road widening including removal of vegetation and repairs to the existing masonry walls.
- Minor ancillary and accommodation works related to the above listed works.

No additional land-take is foreseen and the project does not involve extraction from or drainage of, or discharge into the River Inny. For this reason, the aquatic environment will not be affected by discharge or runoff and sediment from any soils or subsoils.

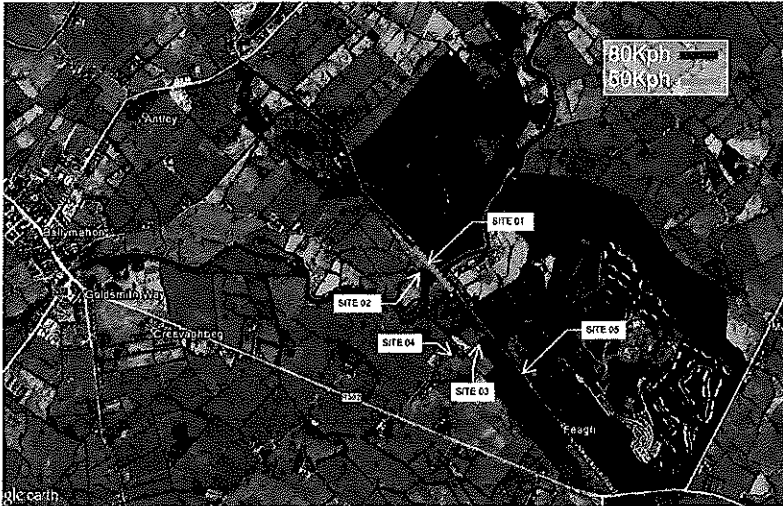


Figure 2. The Bridge over the river Inny is highlighted in green

Description of the Site

The location of the traffic calming project is shown in Figure 2. above.

A site visit to survey the project area for ecological features was undertaken on 7 April, 2019. The survey informed the assessment of any direct, indirect and cumulative ecological implications or impacts of the proposed works presented in this report.

The River Inny, which flows under Newcastle Bridge forms part of the Upper Shannon Catchment area under the Water Framework Directive. The River rises in Lough Sheelin and flows from the north east through Lough Derravaragh and drains west into the Shannon at Lough Ree. The river is 89 km long from source. The proposed project crosses the river at 9km distance from its outflow to Lough Ree. The river is fast-flowing at the project location. The river bank slopes gently on either side of the bridge permitting easy pedestrian access. A car park and concrete steps down to the river edge are located at northern side of the bridge adjacent to the entrance to Newcastle forest. The River is of high amenity value particularly for coarse fishing and recreational activities. Both kayaking, coarse fishing and walking groups were active and present at the bridge and on the assessable banks on the day of the site survey.

The survey covers 50 m of riverbank on either side of the bridge where assess was possible (pathway on north bank and grassy slope on southern bank).

Although no evidence was found on the day of the site visit, Otters are likely to use the riparian habitat along the River Inny. Kingfishers are also likely to be present although none were observed. While Daubenton's Bat have been recorded in the area, this species is unlikely to use the area around

the bridge as they prefer slower flowing rivers or canals where insect prey is likely to be more abundant.

Trees species along the river bank and roadside were mainly, Alder, Ash, Beech, Birch, Laurel, Holly and Spruce. The vegetation around the bridge was sparse with more abundant vegetation closer to the entrance to Center Parcs.

Other Plans/Projects Alone or In-Combination that have a potential for significant effects.

'In combination' is taken to refer to the cumulative effect of influences acting on European Sites from all plans and projects in the context of prevailing environmental conditions. Underlying environmental trends such as sea level rises, climate change and increased flood risk can also be taken into account. The EU Commission's 1999 *Guidelines for the Assessment of Indirect and Cumulative Impacts as well as Impact Interactions* defined cumulative impacts in the context of EIA as impacts *that result from incremental changes caused by other past, present or reasonably foreseeable actions together with the project.*² The EU Commission's guidance also notes cumulative effect is the combined effect of all developments taken together³. In this context cumulative effect is not just the sum of the effects of one project plus the effect of another - it may be more, it may be less.

DoEHLG (2009) guidelines state that in combination effects should be considered and should include *ex situ* and *in situ* projects/developments. In the context of this report the aim of this section is to identify any other projects/plans that may alone or in-combination have a potential for significant effects on European sites.

Center Parcs is due to be launched in July 2019. It is also noted that Longford County Council are pursuing a number of high amenity infrastructural schemes in the area that will entice more pedestrians and cyclists into the area including the Green Route along the Royal Canal and the Newcastle Forest to Ballymahon proposed cycle scheme. See Longford County Development plan and County Council website.

The traffic calming measures which are the subject of this assessment may, at a technical level, be characterised as an incremental "in combination" factor with impact on the European site. However, the small scale, surface level and non-invasive character of the measures are such to rule out any accumulative or "in-combination" impact on the integrity of the European sites at Lough Ree. The purpose and effect of the proposed project is to reduce traffic and control the speed. The impacts of the traffic calming measures should, over time, contribute to reduced traffic volume and reduced CO2 emissions.

Planning applications which have been granted in the environs of the project predominately relate to domestic houses and agricultural buildings. All granted planning applications have already been assessed for significant effects on the environment as part of the planning process and are only granted if they adhere to proper planning and sustainable development.

² *Guidelines for the Assessment of Indirect and Cumulative Impacts as well as Impact Interactions*, EU Commission 1999.

Commented [1]:

Further to this assessment, no in-combination effects from other projects are considered likely. Taking account of existing and other reasonably foreseeable developments in the area, it is considered that the proposal in conjunction with those developments does not give rise to a negative cumulative impact. Therefore, the cumulative impacts of the proposal are considered to be negligible, if any. Both direct and indirect effects on the European sites are considered to be negligible, if any.

Characteristics of the European Sites and potential impacts

Introduction

This is the third step of Stage One Screening, the purpose of which is to describe the information available on all European sites within or immediately adjoining the proposed project and to assess the linkage or connectivity to the European sites. A summary in tabular form is given below.

Table 1 Assessment of European sites within 15km of the proposed project.

Designation	Code	Distance	Pathway/Stepping stone/ linkage
SAC Lough Ree (habitats and Otter)	000440	8.km	Yes Hydrological connection to habitats. Otter requires unhindered passage along waterway to Lough Ree
SPA Lough Ree (water birds)	004064	8. km	Yes Hydrological connection to habitats. But project is not a stepping stone for these species
SPA Glen Lough SPA [Whooper Swan]	004045	13 km	No – project site is not either a foraging, roosting or nesting area considering the qualifying bird interests (Whooper Swan) .
SAC Ballymore Fen [Quaking Fen and Transition mires]	002313	9 km	No–considering the qualifying interests of the site no significant effects likely and no hydrological connectivity.
SAC Mount Jessop Bog [Bog Woodland and Degraded raised bog]	002202	12 km	No–considering the qualifying interests of the site no significant effects are likely. There is no hydrological connectivity.

Further to the screening process undertaken in Table above, given the hydrological connection, the European sites considered most likely to be potentially significantly affected by the proposal are:

- Lough Ree SAC
- Lough Ree SPA

These are the only sites considered in the remainder of this report. The qualifying interests and conservation status are described in site synopses which are available on www.npws.ie and are summarised in Table 2.

Conservation Objectives for European sites.

Under Article 4(4) and Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive appropriate measures must be undertaken within each European site to ensure the habitats and species, i.e. the qualifying interests, for which the site was designated, are maintained in a *favourable conservation status*.

In relation to habitats, Article 1(e) of the Habitats Directive states favourable conservation status is achieved when:

- its natural range and the areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing,
- the specific structure and function which are necessary for its long-term maintenance are present and are likely to continue to exist in the foreseeable future,
- the conservation status of typical species that live in these habitat types is favourable as well.

In relation to species, Article 1(i) of the Habitats Directive states favourable conservation status is achieved when:

- populations are maintaining themselves over the long term and are no longer showing signs of continuing decline,
- their natural range is not being reduced,
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Achieving *favourable conservation status* requires each European site to have site specific conservation objectives. These are a statement of the overall nature conservation requirements of each site, expressed in terms of the favourable condition required for the habitats and/or species (i.e. the qualifying interests) for which the site was selected.

For some European sites more detailed management plans are required. If there are no specific plans, maintaining the favourable conservation status of the qualifying interests (annexed habitats and species) is required for the sites. Therefore, this screening process will focus on assessing the likely significant effects of implementing the proposed project relative to these qualifying interests (habitats and species) and the objective to maintain favourable conservation status.

European sites which may be potentially affected by the Plan

This section aims to look in more detail at the European sites potentially affected by the proposed project. Direct and indirect impacts have to be considered. Indirect impacts or secondary impacts are those that are not a direct result of the project⁴. Rather they are often produced away from the project as a result of a complex pathway. The likelihood for indirect impacts to significantly affect European sites will be relative to the "linkage" between an impact source and a specific site. The classic source-pathway-receptor model (SPR) applies in this context. Here the source refers to the confined or discrete point from which pollutants may be discharged into the environment, the pathway is the route by which the particular pollutant then travels through the environment and the receptor is the location where the pollution event occurs.⁵ In the context of this assessment it is important to note that pathways are determined by natural hydrogeological characteristics and the nature of the pollutant, but can also be influenced by the presence of features resulting from human activities⁶. Indirect impacts in relation to this project and European sites can include those caused by:

- Physical proximity to European sites,
- Non-physical factors such as noise, lights etc,
- Interference with hydrological processes, and
- Pollution, particularly water pollution.

The assessment in Table 2 below uses this SPR model to assess potential indirect impacts judged to be most prevalent to this project - physical proximity; interference with hydrological process and disturbances to mobile species.

⁴ *Guidelines for the Assessment of Indirect and Cumulative Impacts as well as Impact Interactions*, EU Commission ,1999.

⁵ *Guidance on the Authorisation of Discharges to Groundwater Version 1*, December 2011. EPA

⁶ *Ibid*

Table 2 Assessment of likely impacts to qualifying interests or threats to conservation objectives

Site name and Code	Qualifying Interest	Conservation Objectives	Threats and Impacts
SAC Lough Ree 000440	Otter Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration Alkaline fens Limestone pavements Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum Bog woodland	To restore or maintain the favourable conservation conditions for all these habitats and species	Highly unlikely that the small scale and nature of project will have any effect on the conservation objectives or pose a threat to the integrity of the site and its qualifying habitats. Waterway and river bank will not be altered or impeded therefore there will be no effect or disturbance on the Otters of Lough Ree . No significant effects are likely.
SPA Lough Ree 004064	Whooper Swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i> Teal <i>Anas crecca</i> Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i> Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i> Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i> Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i> Coot <i>Fulica atra</i> Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat at Lough Ree SPA as a resource for the regularly-occurring migratory waterbirds	The project will not interfere with hydrological processes or affect the condition of the wetland habitat or threaten the integrity of the site as habitat for waterbirds . No significant effects are likely

Identification of Potential Effects

In this section we consider the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans and projects) against the following metrics:

- ***Size and scale***

The project is of small scale and size. The length of roadsides where lining and signage will take place is 2.8km. On the southern approach to the bridge, 60 m of the road will be widened. The small scale and simple non-invasive nature of the works will not give rise to impacts on the European site.

- ***Distance from the European site or key features of the site***

The hydrological connection to the European sites is evident but the project works will not give rise to any hydrological change (levels, physical or bio- chemical). The distance is such that will not give rise to disturbance to the water birds of Lough Ree.

- ***Resource requirements***

No water will be extracted from the River Inny.

- ***Emissions (disposal to land, water or air)***

There will be no discharge or disposal of substances to the waterway.

- ***Excavation requirements***

No excavation will be required apart from permitted vegetation clearance

- ***Transportation requirements***

Works will be carried out in situ and no additional transport will be required

- ***Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning***

The works will be once off, of short duration. There will be no operational or decommissioning

Assessment of the significance of any impacts on European Sites

Introduction

This is the fourth and final step of Stage One Screening and involves an assessment of the significance of any significant effects, identified in the previous section, on European sites.

Defining Likely Significant Effects

The European Commission guidelines state that in order to assess the likely effects on Natura 2000 sites all elements of the project or plan must be identified. This section aims to identify elements of the project that have the potential or are likely to affect a Natura 2000 sites. Likely effects are considered at construction and operational phases and are assessed according to short-term, medium term, long-term and cumulative effects in combination with other plans and projects identified.

The definition of “likely effects” needs to be addressed in the context of European sites’ integrity. If these effects are seen as significant then an appropriate assessment is required. Significance factors have been identified and adapted from the European Commission’s *Assessment of Plans and Projects significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites, Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* as:

- Loss/alteration of habitat
- Fragmentation of key species or habitats
- Disturbance and/or displacement of key species
- Water resource and quality

Further to this classification of significance factors, this section will assess the proposals relative to the factors listed above. The aim is to identify potential for significant effects on the qualifying interests of the European sites listed in Table 1 above.

Loss/alteration of habitat

Table 2 lists the qualifying annexed habitats considered likely to be significantly affected by the proposed project.

No significant effects are considered likely on the habitat of the European sites from the proposed traffic calming project. The habitat is not considered further in this report.

Further to the above screening process, it has been determined there will be no direct loss or alteration of annexed habitat from the project.

Fragmentation of key species or habitats

The qualifying annexed habitats and species were assessed for likely significant effects by the proposed project. As noted above no direct impacts on annexed habitat is considered likely and no direct fragmentation is therefore expected to occur.

Of the species listed for Lough Ree SPA, all the birds listed are water or estuarine birds and are highly unlikely to use the roadside or riparian habitat around the bridge over the river. Foraging habitat utilised by the species is associated with the wetlands. Considering the species for which the SPA is designated, the nature and scale of the habitat along the road and under the bridge, no significant effects on these bird species are considered likely. There will be no effect on the riparian habitat

under the bridge and no change to the riverbank structure. Otters, if they occur will have unimpeded passage along the waterway. The species are not considered further in this report.

Disturbance and/or displacement of key species

It is not expected that the volume of traffic utilising the road will increase as a result of the proposed project – rather the aim is reduce the volume and make the road safer for users. The area around the bridge is of high amenity value and there is already considerable human activity. It is not expected that there will be an increase in traffic noise and human disturbance from the project. There are a limited number of car parking spaces at the bridge which already has a limiting effect. Otters, which forage at night time, are not likely to be affected by the short duration daytime construction activity around the bridge. Waterfowl are unlikely to be disturbed by any noise during construction given the distance from the SPA.

No effects on waterbirds or Otters are likely to occur.

Water Resource and quality

The project does not involve extraction from the River Inny or discharge to the river. Site management will ensure that any spills or runoff will be contained and removed appropriately.

5. Conclusion

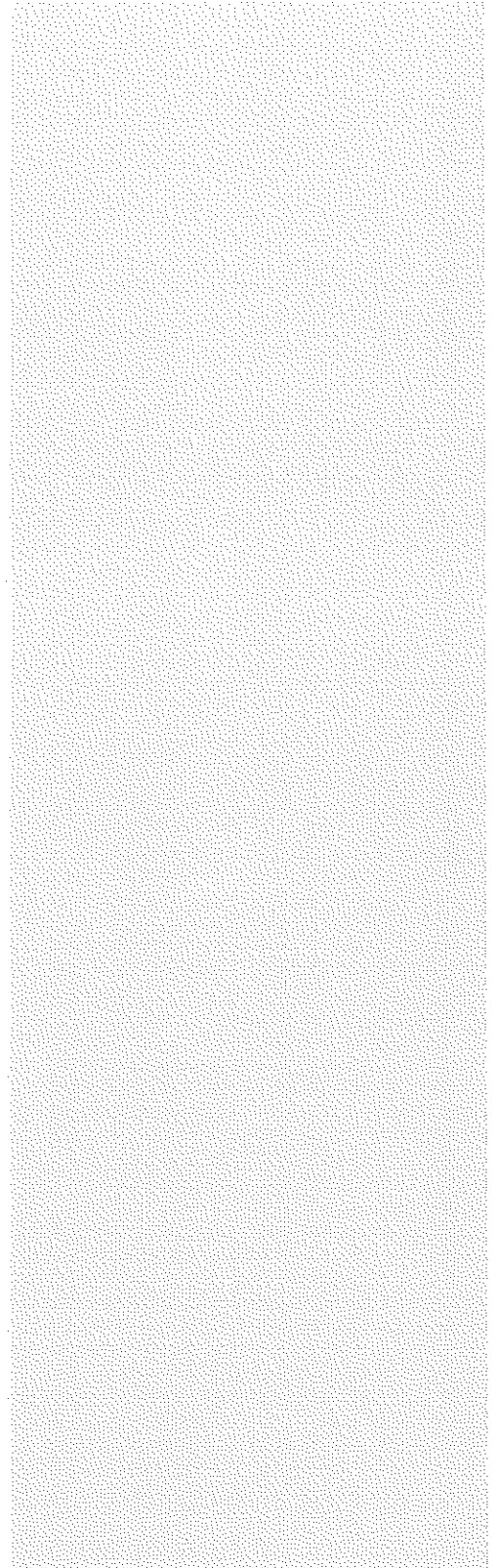
Conclusion Statement

In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the objective information provided in this report, it is concluded that the proposal to carry out traffic calming works at Newcastle Road, Ballymahon, Co. Longford on its own or in combination with other plans/projects is not likely to have a significant effect on the nearby European sites. An appropriate assessment, under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), is not required.

The reasons for the above conclusion are detailed in this report but are summarised as follows:

The size, scale and nature of the project is deemed to be small enough to conclude that the effects on the European sites, if any, would not be significant. The project is to be contained within the existing land take and no drainage of or extraction from the watercourse at River Inny is foreseen. The nature and scale of the works required to facilitate the works are not complex and are in the nature of surface works not requiring excavation. The contractor will undertake to comply with the highest standards of site management to avoid spills and inappropriate disturbance/removal of vegetation or fauna. The contractor will be subject to spot checks by a qualified

ecologist during the period of the works to ensure compliance. The ecologist will also advise on measures to control the spread of invasive species. None were recorded at the site and care will be taken to ensure that none are imported to the site from construction activities.



6. Finding of No Significant Effects Report (FONSE)

Introduction

This Findings of No Significant Effects Report (FONSE) documents the conclusions of the screening process for an Appropriate Assessment screening of the proposal to introduce traffic calming measures on the Newcastle Road at Ballymahon.

Is this project or plan directly connected with or necessary to the management of the sites (provide details)?

The proposed development is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of European sites.

Are there other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the sites

Further to the assessment detailed in this report, no in-combination effects from other projects are considered likely with the project screened in this report. Taking account of existing and other reasonably foreseeable developments in the area, it is considered that the proposal in conjunction with those developments does not give rise to a negative cumulative impact.

Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect European sites

Following an Appropriate Assessment screening of the project as outlined in this report, no likely affects to European sites were identified.

Explain why these effects are not considered significant

Following the screening of the proposed works for possible significant effects on the European sites detailed in this report, no significant affects were identified. The details of that assessment are provided in this report.

Level of assessment completed - AA Screening.

Where the full results of the assessment can be accessed and viewed?

The full results of the assessment are contained within this document.

Overall Conclusions

This report concludes that no significant effects on European sites are likely, an appropriate assessment is not required.

Explain how the overall conclusion that there are no significant effects on the European site was arrived at .

The overall conclusion that no significant effects on European sites are likely was determined following a methodological assessment carried out having regard to the following guidance documents:-

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009).
- European Commissions: *Managing Natura 2000 Sites. The provisions of Article 6, of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC*
- European Commission: *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*
- Guidance document on Article 6(4) of 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC
- Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) Circular letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08 dated 15 February, 2008.
- Department of the Environment (1994). *Planning and Policy Guidance: Nature Conservation (PPG9)* (HMSO).

In identifying the potential issues which could significantly affect these sites a range of factors were taken into account, including the possibility of effects manifesting themselves in the short, medium and long-term, in combination effects and the potential impacts of climate change. In addition, the precautionary principle was adhered to in the carrying out of this assessment. Relevant consultation and site survey took place.

Conclusion

Conclusion Statement

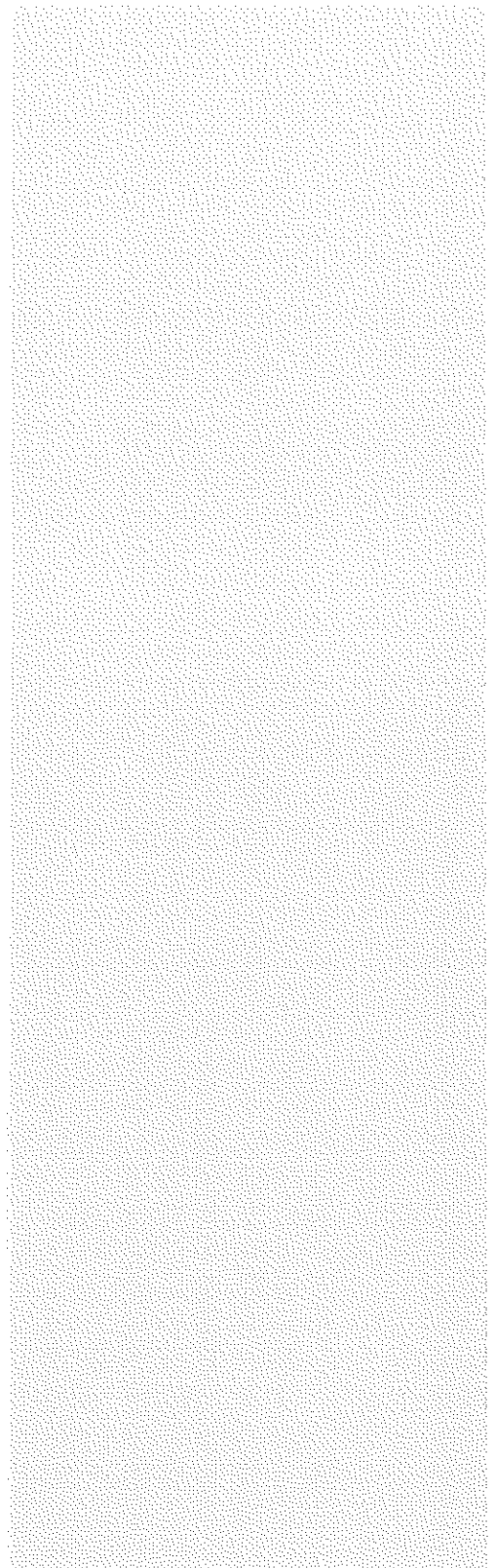
In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the objective information provided in this report, it is concluded that the project, individually or in combination with other plans/projects is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site (Natura 2000 site). An appropriate assessment, under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), is not required.

Reasons for Conclusion

The reasons for the above conclusion are detailed in this report but are summarised as follows:

The size, scale and nature of the project is deemed to be small enough to conclude that the effects on the European sites, if any, would not be significant. The project is to be contained within the existing land take and no drainage of or extraction from the watercourse at Inny River is foreseen. The nature and scale of the works required to facilitate the works are not complex and are in the nature of surface works not requiring excavation. The contractor will undertake to comply with the highest standards of site management to avoid spills and inappropriate disturbance/removal of vegetation or fauna. The contractor will be subject to spot checks by a qualified ecologist during the period of the works to ensure compliance. The ecologist will also

advise on measures to control the spread of invasive species None were recorded at the site and care will be taken to ensure that none are imported to the site from construction activities.



Appendices and Photographs



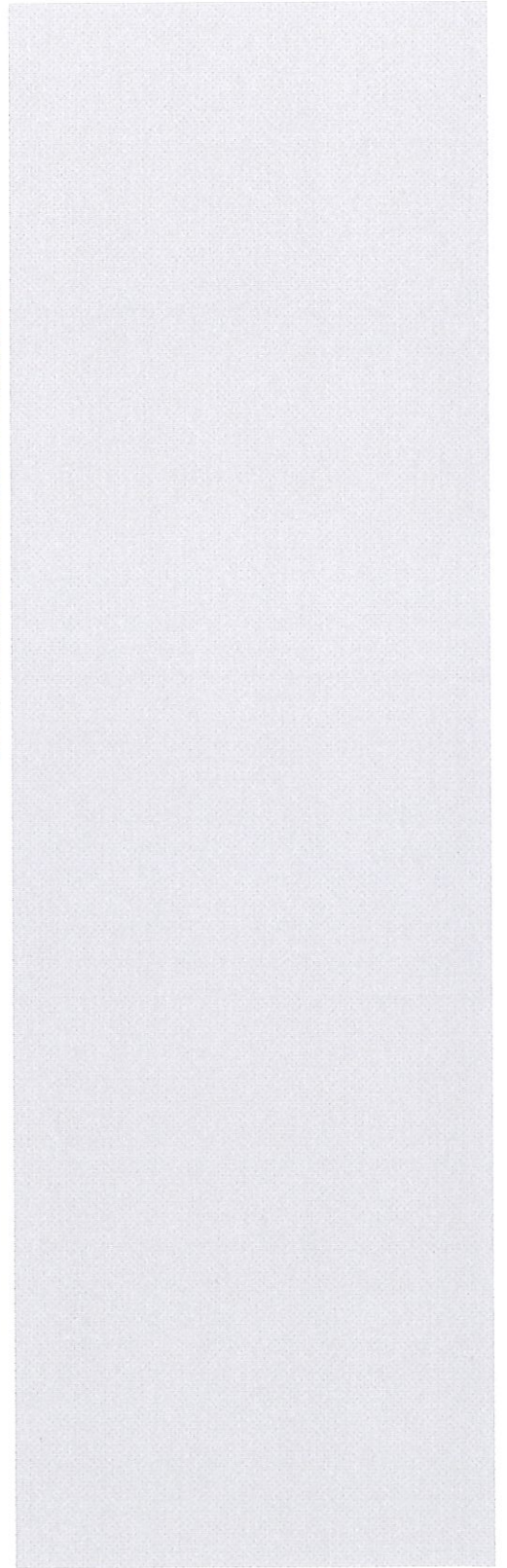
Kayaking around Newcastle Bridge



Newcastle Bridge and concrete steps descending to river edge

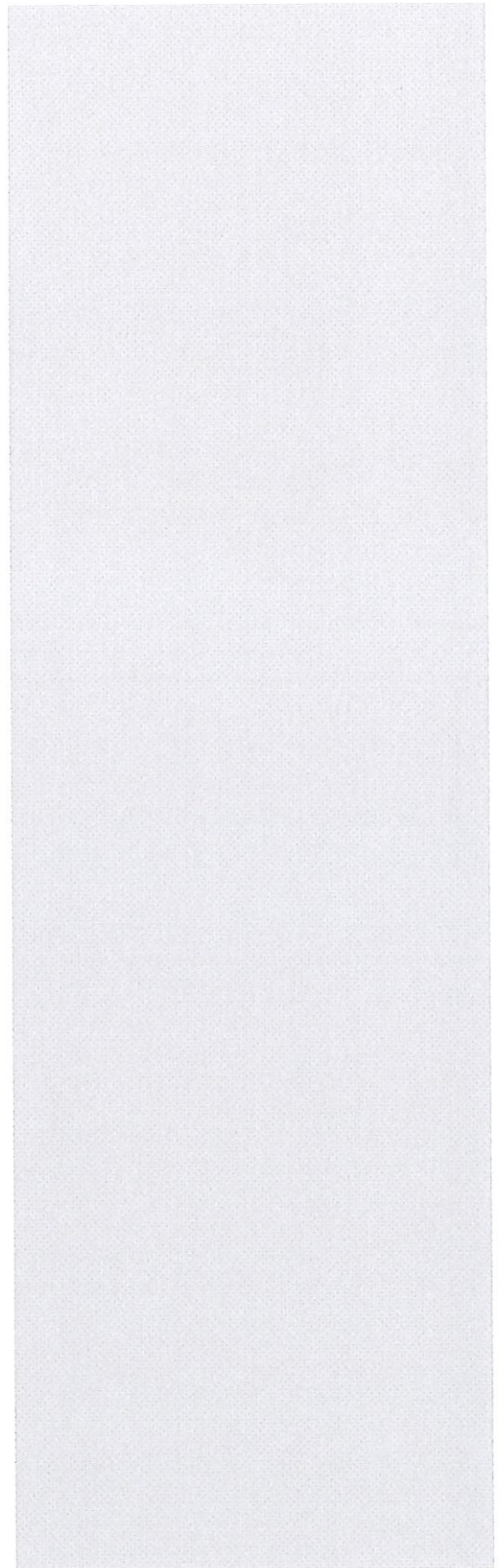


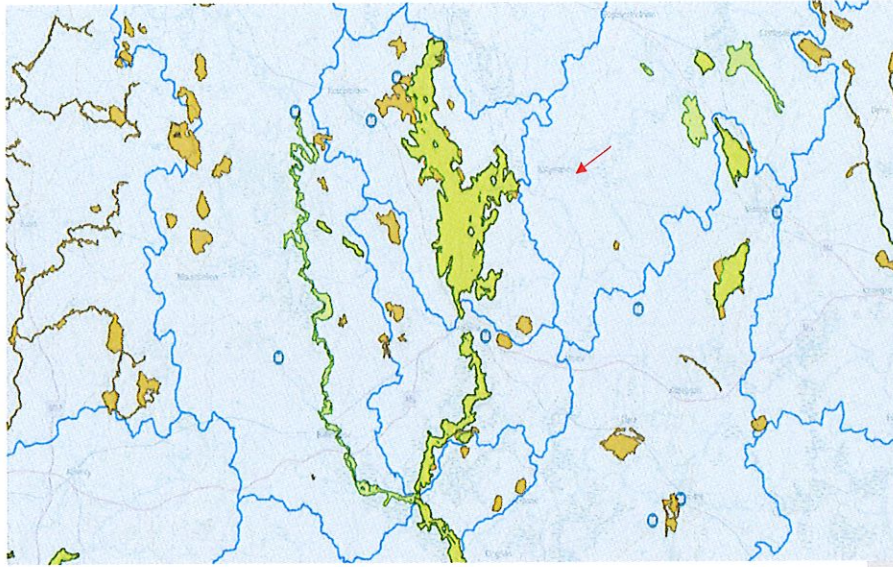
The carpark at Newcastle Bridge





The roadside vegetation from Newcastle Bridge to Center Parcs





Upper Shannon Catchment showing SACs (habitats and species) and SPAs (Birds)
Ballymahon indicated at red arrow.