



APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

FOR

N55 BALLYMAHON - IMPROVEMENT
WORKS

AT

AT ATHLONE ROAD JUNCTION

ON BEHALF OF

LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL

Prepared by
Enviroguide Consulting

 *Dublin*
3D Core C, Block 71, The Plaza,
Park West, Dublin 12

 *Kerry*
19 Henry Street
Kenmare, Co. Kerry

 *Wexford*
M10 Wexford Enterprise
Centre, Strandfield Business
Park, Rosslare Road, Wexford

 www.enviroguide.ie
 info@enviroguide.ie
 +353 1 565 4730



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Enviroguide Consulting was commissioned by the Longford County Council to carry out an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (the 'Report') in relation to the improvement works at Athlone road junction (the 'Proposed Development') along the N55 Ballymahon, Co. Longford (the 'Site'). This report contains information to enable the competent authority to undertake Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening in respect of the Proposed Development.

1.2 Legislative Background

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) seeks to conserve natural habitats and wild fauna and flora by the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) seeks to protect birds of special importance by the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The Habitats Directive has been transposed into Irish law through the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI 477 of 2011).

SACs and SPAs are collectively known as Natura 2000 or European sites, and make up a network of protected sites throughout the European Community. It is the responsibility of each member state to designate SPAs and SACs. SACs are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats (including priority types which are in danger of disappearance) and Annex II species (other than birds). SPAs are selected for the conservation of Annex I birds and other regularly occurring migratory birds and their habitats. The annexed habitats and species for which each site is selected correspond to the qualifying interests of the sites; from these the conservation objectives of the site are derived.

An AA is a required assessment to determine the likelihood of significant effects, 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 conservation objectives.

A competent authority must determine that an AA is required in respect of any European site where, following the screening, it cannot be excluded that the plan or project will have a significant effect on the European site, in view of its conservation objectives.

This AA Screening Report has been prepared to determine whether the Proposed Development is likely to have a significant effect, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, on any European site, in view of their conservation objectives.

1.2.1 Legislative Context

An AA is required under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive where a project or plan may give rise to significant effects upon a European site. Paragraph 3 states that:

“6(3) 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.”

These obligations in relation to AA have been implemented in Ireland under Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (“the 2000 Act”), and in particular Section 177U and Section 177V thereof. The relevant provisions of Section 177U in relation to AA screening have been set out below:

“177U.— (1) A screening for appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or application for consent for proposed development shall be carried out by the competent authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if that Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the European site.

(2)...

(3)...

(4) The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or a proposed development, as the case may be, is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the draft Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

(5) The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or a proposed development, as the case may be, is not required if it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the draft Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.”

1.2.2 Stages of AA

This AA Screening Report (the ‘Screening Report’) considers whether the Proposed Development is likely to have a significant effect on a European site and whether a Stage 2 AA is required.

The AA process is a four-stage process. Each stage requires different considerations, assessments, and tests to ultimately arrive at the relevant conclusion for each stage. An important aspect of the process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required.

Overview of Screening and Appropriate Assessment

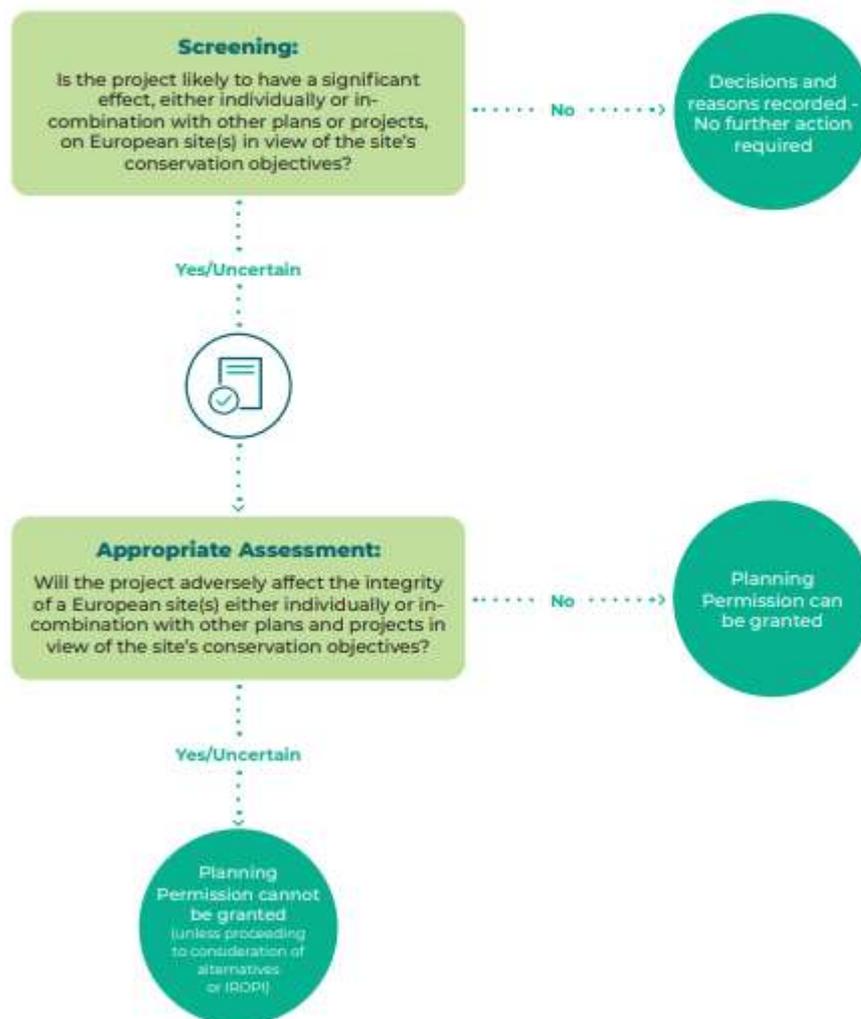


Figure 1. Overview of Screening and Appropriate Assessment (OPR, 2021).

The four stages of an AA, can be summarised as follows:

- Stage 1: *Screening*. This addresses:
 - whether a plan or project is directly connected to or necessary for the management of the site, or
 - whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European site in view of its conservation objectives.
- Stage 2: *Natura Impact Statement (NIS)*. The second stage of the AA process assesses the impact of the project or plan (either alone or in combination with other projects or plans) on the integrity of the European site, having regard to the

conservation objectives of the site and its ecological structure and function. The applicant must provide a NIS to the competent authority to inform the AA, which is a statement, for the purposes of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive of the implications of a Proposed Development, on its own or in combination with other plans or projects, for one or more than one European site, in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites. It must include a Report of a scientific examination of evidence and data, carried out by competent persons to identify, and classify any implications for one or more than one European site in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites. The competent authority must consult with the public in relation to any plan or project that requires AA. If the competent authority determines that the plan or project would have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site, it can only grant consent after proceeding through steps 3 and 4.

- *Stage 3: Assessment of alternative solutions.* If the outcome of Stage 2 is negative i.e. adverse impacts to the sites cannot be scientifically ruled out, despite mitigation, the plan or project should proceed to Stage 3 or be abandoned. This stage examines alternative solutions to the proposal.
- *Stage 4: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain.* The final stage is the main derogation process examining whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for allowing a plan or project to adversely affect a European site, where no less damaging solution exists.

The Competent Authority must determine that an NIS is required where the project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European site and if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information following screening, that the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Guidance

This AA Screening has been undertaken in accordance with the following guidance:

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities.* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision).
- *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities.* Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.
- *Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle* (European Commission, 2000).
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2019).

- *Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC Brussels, 28.9.2021 C (European Commission, 2021);*
- *Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, OPR Practice Note PN01, Office of the Planning Regulator March 2021; and*
- *Amendments to section 42 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended and associated Planning and Development Regulations 2001. Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government. (2021). Circular Letter: EUIPR 01/202A1.*

2.2 Screening Steps

Screening for AA involves the following:

- Establish whether the plan is directly connected with or necessary for the management of a European site:
- Description of the plan or project and the description and characterisation of other projects or plans that in combination have the potential for having significant effects on the European site:
- Identification of European sites potentially affected:
- Identification and description of potential effects on the European site:
- Assessment of the likely significance of the impacts identified on the European site; and
- Exclusion of sites where it can be objectively concluded that there will be no significant effects.

2.3 Desk Study

A desktop study was carried out in January 2023 to collate and review available information, datasets and documentation sources relevant for the completion of this Screening Report. The desktop study relied on the following sources:

- Information on the network of European sites, boundaries, qualifying interests and conservation objectives, obtained from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) at www.npws.ie;
- Text summaries of the relevant European sites taken from the respective site Synopses available at www.npws.ie;
- Information on species records and distributions, obtained from the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) at www.maps.biodiversityireland.ie;
- Information on waterbodies, catchment areas and hydrological connections obtained from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at www.gis.epa.ie;
- Information on surface water, storm water and sewage infrastructure within and surround the site provided by the applicant and their design team;

- Information on bedrock, groundwater, aquifers and their statuses, obtained from Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) at www.gsi.ie;
- Satellite imagery and mapping obtained from various sources and dates including Google, Digital Globe, Bing and Ordnance Survey Ireland; And
- Information on the existence of permitted developments, or developments awaiting decision, in the vicinity of the Proposed Development from Longford County Council's online planning database at <https://longfordcoco.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=19502a11070f4f278d82912cc9a9d43d> and the National Planning Application Database at <https://myplan.ie/>.

For a complete list of the specific documents consulted as part of this assessment, see *Section 5 References*.

2.4 Assessment of Impacts

The potential for significant effects that may arise from the Proposed Development was considered through the use of key indicators, namely:

- Habitat loss or alteration.
- Habitat/species fragmentation.
- Disturbance and/or displacement of species.
- Changes in population density.
- Changes in water quality and resource.
- The potential for spread of invasive plant species.

In addition, information pertaining to the conservation objectives of the European sites, the ecology of the designated habitats and species and known or perceived sensitivities of the habitats and species were considered.

2.5 Zone of Influence

The 'zone of influence' (ZOI) for a project is the area over which ecological receptors may be affected by changes as a result of the Proposed Development and associated activities. This is likely to extend beyond the Site, for example where there are ecological or hydrological links beyond the Site boundaries (CIEEM, 2018).

In order to identify the European sites that potentially lie within the ZOI of the Proposed Development, a Source-Path-Receptor (S-P-R) method was adopted, as described in 'OPR Practice Note PN01 - Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management' (OPR, 2021), a practice note produced by the Office of the Planning Regulator, Dublin. This note was published to provide guidance on Screening for AA during the planning process, and although it focuses on the approach a planning authority should take in screening for AA, the methodology is also applicable to the preparation of AA Screening Reports such as this.

The guidance document published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (then DEHLG) 'Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland -

Guidance for Planning Authorities' (2009) recommends an arbitrary distance of 15km as the precautionary ZOI for a plan or project being assessed for likely significant effects on European sites, stating however that this should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

In truth, the ZOI of a project at the scale of the Proposed Development is unlikely to result in likely significant effects on European sites located 15km away. Therefore, due to the small scale nature of this project, a 10km precautionary ZOI was adopted, with the S-P-R model used to identify any relevant European sites for AA screening.

The methodology used to identify relevant European sites comprised the following:

- Use of current GIS spatial datasets for European designated sites and water catchments – downloaded from the NPWS website (www.npws.ie) and the EPA website (www.epa.ie) to identify European sites which could potentially be affected by the Proposed Development;
- The catchment data were used to establish or discount potential hydrological connectivity between the Project Boundary and any European sites.
- All European sites within the ZOI (within 10 km of the Proposed Development Site) were identified and are shown in 4.
- The potential for connectivity with European sites at distances greater than 10 km from the Proposed Development was also considered in this initial assessment. In this case, there is no potential connectivity between the Proposed Development Site and European sites located at a distance greater than 10 km from the Proposed Development based on the S-P-R model.
- **Error! Reference source not found.** provides details of all relevant European sites as identified in the preceding steps. The potential for pathways between European sites and the Proposed Development Site was assessed on a case-by-case basis using the S-P-R framework as per the OPR Practice Note PN01 (March 2021). Those European sites where a pathway has been identified are highlighted in green. Pathways considered included:
 - a. Direct pathways e.g., proximity or location within the European site, water bodies, air (for both air emissions and noise impacts).
 - b. Indirect pathways e.g., disruption to migratory paths, 'Sightlines' where noisy or intrusive activities may result in disturbance to shy species.
- The site synopses and conservation objectives of these sites, as per the NPWS website (www.npws.ie), were consulted and reviewed at the time of preparing this Report.
- There is absolutely no reliance placed in this Screening Report on measures intended to avoid/reduce harmful effects on the European sites.

3 STAGE 1 SCREENING

3.1 Management of European sites

The Proposed Development at N55 Ballymahon, Co. Longford is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European sites.

3.2 Description of Proposed Development

3.2.1 Site location

The Proposed Development Site is located at Athlone Road Junction, on the N55 in Ballymahon, Co. Longford (Figure 2). The Inny River intersects the Proposed Development, leading to Lough Ree SAC (Site code:000440) and Lough Ree SPA (Site code: 004064) (Figure 4).



Figure 2. Site Location

3.2.2 Description of Development

Longford County Council proposes to amend the previously approved scheme as follows:

- Provide appropriate cycle facilities across the Athlone Road junction and on the approaches thereto (Figure 3).
- Omit the previously approved roundabout and instead construct a signalised priority junction at the Athlone Road Junction.
- Provide controlled crossing facilities at the Athlone Road junction for pedestrians and cyclists.

3.2.3 Construction Phase Details

The works to construct the amended scheme will comprise:

- Site clearance;
- Overlay / reconstruction of the existing pavement and paved areas;
- Construction of new pavement and paved areas and embankments where required to support the new areas;
- Removal of existing wall on northern side of the junction;
- Changes to existing drainage infrastructure as required for amended kerb locations and installation of bypass hydrocarbon separators on existing surface water outfall pipes;
- Ancillary fencing, walls, gates and guardrails.

The construction period for the Proposed Development has been estimated to be in the region of 12 weeks.

The hours of construction activity will avoid unsociable hours and will be agreed with the local authority in advance of construction works. It is anticipated that working hours at the Site during the Construction Phase to be limited to working hours of 07:00 to 19:00 Monday to Friday and 07:00- 13:00 Saturday inclusive. Work on Sundays or public holidays will only be conducted in exceptional circumstances and subject to prior notification insofar as possible with the surrounding residents. Several best practice measures to ameliorate noise, dust, litter and other environmental nuisances associated with the construction phase are outlined in the construction and environmental management plan (CEMP).

Machinery to be used on Site will be selected by the contractor appointed to construct the Scheme. It is expected this machinery will include:

- Excavators;
- Site dump trucks (typically 6 tonne);
- Rigid body haul trucks for import / disposal of materials;
- Compacting rollers;
- Pavement machines.

3.2.4 Proposed Drainage

3.2.4.1 Surface water drainage

The Proposed Development will rely on the existing surface water drainage infrastructure. Existing gullies will be removed and new gullies installed as required to match the amended kerb lines proposed as part of the development. NSB Class 1 discharge bypass hydrocarbon separators will be installed on existing surface water outfall pipes.

3.2.4.2 Foul drainage

The Proposed Development requires minimal intervention with respect to foul water collection. The function of the new development is primarily to provide controlled crossing facilities, and as such no new WCs, sinks or similar foul water-generating facilities are to be provided.

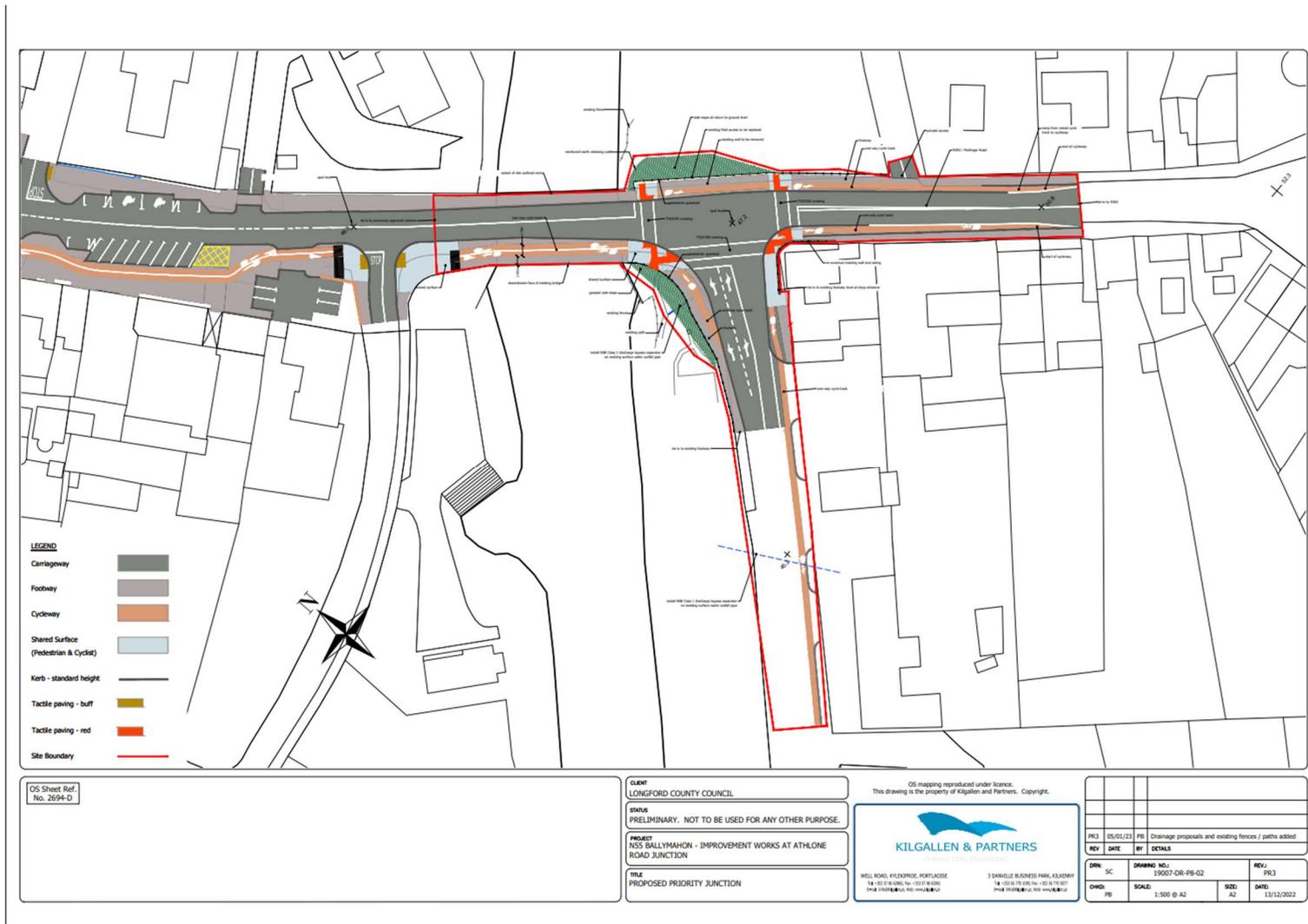


Figure 3: PROPOSED SITE PLAN (KILGALLEN&PARTNERS, 2023)

3.3 Existing Environment

3.3.1 Surface Water

The Site of the Proposed Development is located within the Upper Shannon catchment.

The River Inny intersects the Site of the Proposed Development. Water quality in the River Inny is classed as *Unpolluted* with a *Good* WFD status (EPA,2022). The River Inny flows in a south westerly direction, flowing into *Lough Ree SAC (000440)* and *Lough Ree SPA (004064)* (8.2 and 8.6 river km from Proposed Development respectively)

3.3.2 Geology and Hydrogeology

The Site of the Proposed Development is situated on the Inny groundwater body (IE_EA_G_008), which is classified as having “*Good*” status (WFD Status 2013-2018).

The aquifer type in the area is a “*Locally Important Aquifer - Bedrock which is Moderately Productive only in Local Zones*”. The bedrock units underlying the Site are classified as “*Locally important gravel aquifer* (GSI, 2023) while the quaternary sediments classified as “*Gravels derived from Limestones*” (GSI, 2023). The level of vulnerability to groundwater contamination from human activities at the Site is classed as “*Moderate*” (EPA, 2023). The subsoil beneath the Site is *Man made* (EPA, 2023). The SIS National Soils database classified the soil beneath the Site as “*Urban*” (GSI, 2023).

3.4 Identification of Relevant European sites

The result of this preliminary screening concluded that there is a total of one SAC and one SPA located within the ZOI of the Proposed Development. The distances to each site listed are taken from the nearest possible point of the Proposed Development Site boundary to the nearest possible point of each European site.

Potential impact pathways between the Proposed Development Site and the European sites within the ZOI were identified (Table 2).

TABLE 1. EUROPEAN SITES WITHIN THE 10KM PRECAUTIONARY ZONE OF INFLUENCE OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AND POTENTIAL PATHWAYS BETWEEN THEM. THOSE EUROPEAN SITES FOR WHICH A S-P-R LINK WAS IDENTIFIED ARE HIGHLIGHTED IN GREEN.

Site Name	Qualifying Interests (*= priority habitats)	Distance to Site	Source Pathway-Receptor
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)			
Lough Ree SAC (000440) Lough Ree SAC National Parks & Wildlife Service (npws.ie)	Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 NPWS. (2016) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150] - Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (* important orchid sites) [6210] - Active raised bogs [7110] - Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] - Alkaline fens [7230] - Limestone pavements [8240] - Bog woodland [91D0] - Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0] - <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] 	5.0 km west	<p>Yes: There is a potential indirect hydrological pathway via potential inadvertent surface water discharges from the Site during the Construction Phase of the Proposed Development into the River Inny which flows into this SAC.</p> <p>The intervening distance between the Site and this SAC is deemed sufficient to exclude the possibility of significant effects on this SAC arising from: emissions of noise, dust, airborne pollutants and/or vibrations emitted from the Site during the Construction Phase; potential increased lighting emitted from the Site during Construction Phase; and increased human presence at the Site during Construction/Operational Phase.</p>
Special Protected Area (SPA)			
Lough Ree SPA (004064) Lough Ree SPA National Parks & Wildlife Service (npws.ie)	Conservation Objectives Version 1.0 NPWS. (2022) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little Grebe (<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>) [A004] - Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038] - Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) [A050] - Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) [A052] 	5.2 km west	<p>Yes: There is a potential indirect hydrological pathway via potential inadvertent surface water discharges from the Site during the Construction Phase of the Proposed Development into the River Inny which flows into this SPA.</p> <p>The intervening distance between the Site and this SPA is deemed sufficient to exclude the possibility of significant effects on this SPA arising from: emissions of noise, dust, airborne pollutants and/or vibrations emitted from the Site during the Construction Phase; potential increased</p>

Site Name	Qualifying Interests (*= priority habitats)	Distance to Site	Source Pathway-Receptor
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>) [A053] - Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>) [A056] - Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) [A061] - Common Scoter (<i>Melanitta nigra</i>) [A065] - Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala clangula</i>) [A067] - Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) [A125] - Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] - Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142] - Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193] - Wetland and Waterbirds [A999] 		<p>lighting emitted from the Site during Construction Phase; and increased human presence at the Site during Construction/Operational Phase.</p>

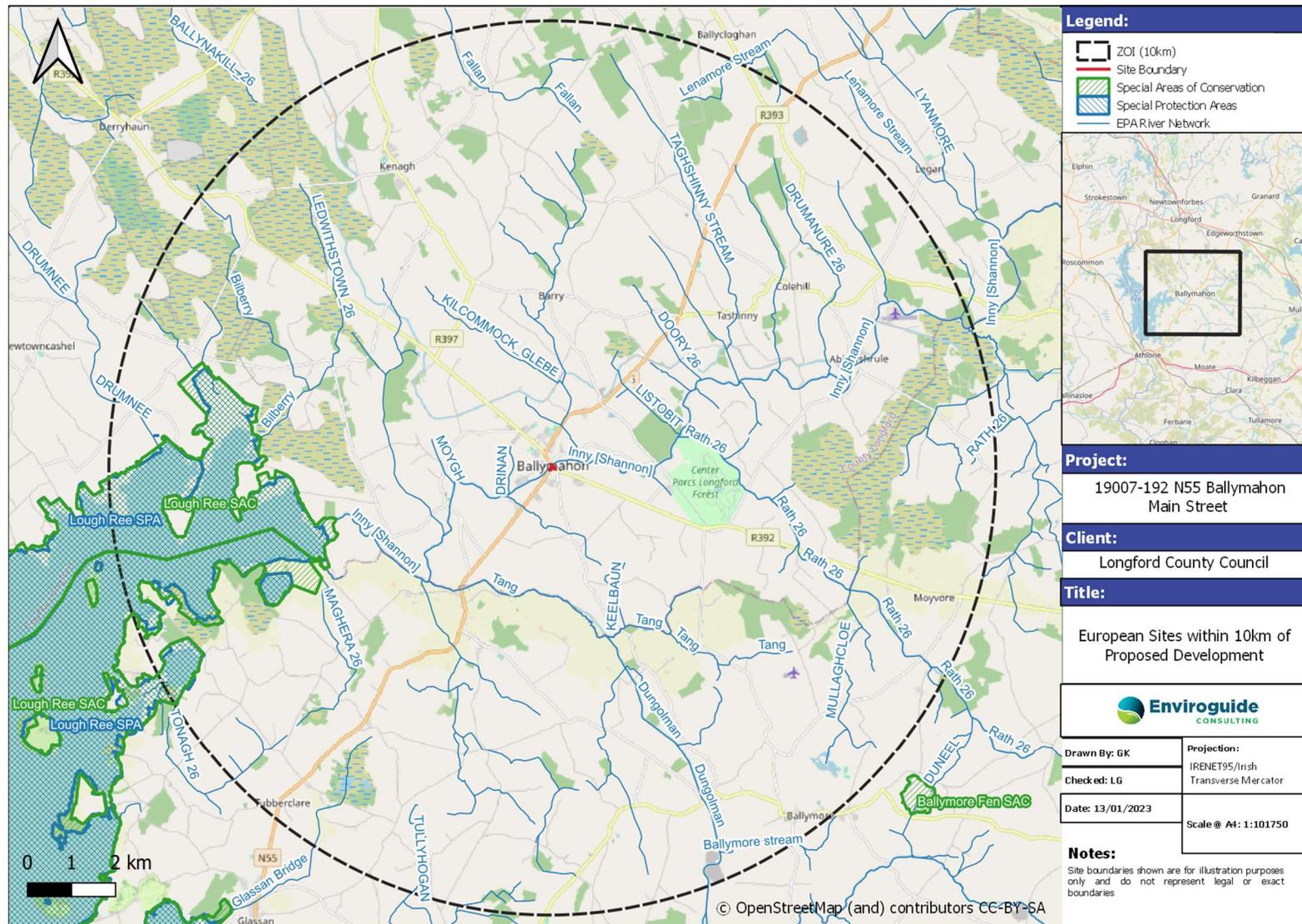


Figure 4. EUROPEAN SITES WITHIN 10KM OF THE PROPOSED SITE

3.5 Conservation Objectives

A European site will only be at risk from likely significant effects where a S-P-R link exists between the Proposed Development and the European site. As such, the remainder of this AA Screening report will focus on the European sites for which a S-P-R link was identified, namely:

- Lough Ree SAC (000440)
- Lough Ree SPA (004064)

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and SACs and SPAs are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them.

Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO) have been compiled for the European sites listed above. SSCO's aim to define favourable conservation condition for habitats or species at a site.

The maintenance of habitats and species within European sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing.
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future.
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats.
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future.
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

3.6 Identification and Assessment of Potential Impacts

The conservation objectives of the European sites within the ZOI were reviewed and assessed to establish whether the construction and operation of the Proposed Development has the potential to have a negative impact on any of the qualifying interests and/or conservation objectives of the European sites listed above.

The following elements of the Proposed Development were assessed for their potential for likely significant effects on European sites.

- **Construction Phase (Estimated duration 12 weeks)**
 - Surface water run-off containing silt, sediments and/or other pollutants into nearby waterbodies.

- Surface water run-off containing silt, sediments and/or other pollutants into the surface water drainage network.
 - Surface water run-off containing silt, sediments and/or other pollutants into the local groundwater.
 - Increased noise, dust and/or vibrations as a result of construction activity.
 - Increased dust and air emissions from construction traffic.
- **Operational Phase**
 - Surface water run-off containing silt, sediments and/or other pollutants into the surface water drainage network.
 - Increased lighting in the vicinity emitted from the Proposed Development.

3.6.1 Habitat Loss and Alteration

The Proposed Development is not located within any European site and therefore there will be loss or alteration of habitat as a result of the Proposed Development.

3.6.2 Habitat / Species Fragmentation

Habitat fragmentation has been defined as the 'reduction and isolation of patches of natural environment' (Hall *et al.*, 1997 cited in Franklin *et al.*, 2002) usually due to an external disturbance such that an alteration of the spatial composition of a habitat occurs that alters the habitat and 'create[s] isolated or tenuously connected patches of the original habitat' (Wiens, 1989 cited in Franklin *et al.*, 2002). This results in spatial separation of habitat units which had previously been in a state of greater continuity.

As there will be no habitat loss or alteration within any European site, no habitat fragmentation will arise as a result of the Proposed Development.

3.6.3 Disturbance and / or Displacement of Species

In the case of *Lough Ree SAC (000440)*, listed QI species such as Otter (*Lutra lutra*) [1355] can be susceptible to noise disturbance as a result of construction activities.

In the case of *Lough Ree SPA (004064)*, there are several bird species listed as QI species that can be susceptible to noise disturbance (Table 2).

The disturbance effects from construction activities effects would not be expected to extend beyond a distance of c.300m, as noise levels associated with general construction activities would attenuate to close to background levels at that distance (Cutts *et al.*, 2009). As the above site is \geq 5km from *Lough Ree SAC (000440)* and *Lough Ree SPA (004064)*, the Proposed Development will not result in the disturbance/displacement of QI/SCI species due to emissions of noise or any other environmental nuisance which may be generated during the Construction Phase (dust, vibrations or increased human presence).

Should Otter be using the stretch of the River Inny in the vicinity of the works during its construction, it is not envisaged that any significant disturbance effects have the potential to occur; due to the existing baseline noise levels that would accompany a busy urban road setting, the short duration of the Proposed Development, and the small-scale nature of the proposed works relative to the extent of the River Inny. Otter are also relatively accustomed to urban settings and are predominantly nocturnal in nature and so will avoid the times that construction will be largely conducted (Highways England, 2001; NIEA, 2011).

In addition, the Site is not deemed to provide any *ex-situ* habitat for SCI species due to its urban built-up nature.

3.6.4 Changes in Population Density

For the same reasons as outlined in section 3.6.3 above, the Proposed Development does not have the capacity to cause any significant changes in the population density of any species within any European Site.

3.6.5 Changes in Water Quality and Resource

There is no hydrological connection between the Site and *Lough Ree SAC (000440)* and *Lough Ree SPA (004064)* via foul water drainage during the Construction and/or Operational Phase.

There is a weak hydrological connection between the Site, *Lough Ree SAC (000440)* and *Lough Ree SPA (004064)* via potential inadvertent surface water discharges from the Site during the Construction Phase. The potential for surface water generated at the Site of the Proposed Development to reach the above European Sites and cause significant effects, during both the Construction Phase and the Operational Phase is negligible due to the following:

- The potential for dilution in the surface water network. *Lough Ree SAC (000440)* and *Lough Ree SPA (004064)* are located 8.2 and 8.6 respectively river km from the closest point of the Inny River where it passes the Proposed Development;
- The insignificant change in the area of impermeable surfaces or runoff volume as a result of the Proposed Development;
- The relatively small size of the Proposed Development and the short duration of the Construction Phase (12 weeks).

The Proposed Development will rely on the existing surface water drainage infrastructure. Existing gullies will be removed, and new gullies installed as required to match the amended kerblines proposed as part of the development. NSB Class 1 discharge bypass hydrocarbon separators will be installed on existing surface water outfall pipes.

Taking into account the Proposed Development at the Site in the context of the receiving water environment, it is considered that there will be no significant negative impacts on receiving groundwater or surface water quality, and no potential for surface water generated at the Site of the Proposed Development to reach a European site and cause significant adverse effects, during both the Construction and Operation phase.

There is a significant intervening distance between the Site of the Proposed Development and the European sites within its precautionary ZOI (TABLE 1). It is therefore deemed that the Proposed Development will not cause any changes in the water quality and resource associated with any European site.

3.7 Potential for In-combination Effects

3.7.1 Existing Planning Permissions

There are several existing planning permissions on record in the area ranging from small-scale extensions and alterations to existing residential properties to larger-scale developments. The larger-scale developments identified within 500m of the Proposed Development are identified below (Table 2) and the potential for possible in-combination effects with the Proposed Development are assessed.

Table 2. Assessment of potential in-combination effects of the Proposed Development and other developments pending or granted permission in the last 5 years (2017-2022) within 500m of the Site.

Planning Application	Development Description	Distance to Proposed Development	Potential for in-combination effects?
Cunningham Design & Planning Limited Application ref: 21176	(1) alterations to previously granted planning permission reference 13/148 (extended under planning reference 18/67) to include the omission of the proposed storage building and car wash building, (2) installation of a car wash facility and, (3) construction of all ancillary site features including container compound, drainage, service bay, parking bays, line marking and e-charge points. Decision date: 01/11/2021, planning permission granted by Longford County Council	Adjacent south east	No: This application is for the installation of a relief vent. Due to the small scale nature of the Proposed Development and a the lack of a common S-P-R linkage it can be concluded that the Proposed Development will not act in combination with this development to significantly impact European sites.
Cunningham Design & Planning Limited Application ref: 2061	Retention of an existing yard which stores vehicles for sale purposes. This yard is currently serviced with a car sales building & perimeter fencing both of which was previously granted full planning permission under planning reference PL15/225 and all ancillary works. Decision date: 17/08/2020, planning permission granted by Longford County Council	Adjacent north west	No: This application is for the construction of an extension. Due to the small scale nature of the Proposed Development and a the lack of a common S-P-R linkage it can be concluded that the Proposed Development will not act in combination with this development to significantly impact European sites.
Cunningham Design & Planning	(A) proposed construction of a residential development of 37	306.8m north east	No: An AA Screening report as submitted with this

Planning Application	Development Description	Distance to Proposed Development	Potential for in-combination effects?
<p>Limited Application ref: 2074</p>	<p>no. dwelling houses which comprises the following: (i) 9 no. three bedroom two storey detached type dwelling houses of which there are two different designs (ii) 7 no. three bedroom storey & a half detached type dwelling houses (iii) two blocks of 4 no. two storey terraced type dwelling houses consisting of 1 no. three bedroom two storey terraced type dwelling house & 3 no. two bedroom two storey terraced type dwelling houses in each block, ie 8 no. two storey terrace type dwelling houses in total (iv) 3 no. four bedroom two storey detached type dwelling houses (v) 5 no. two bedroom single storey type dwelling houses, (vi) 5 no three bedroom single storey type dwelling houses (vii) proposed continuation of existing estate road network together with the proposed connection to the existing foul sewer, surface water & watermain networks currently servicing the existing housing estate known as Dunaras which was previously granted full planning permission by An Bord Pleanala under planning reference number PL.14.212595 (viii) construction of green open spaces, boundary fence/walls (B) proposed construction of a pedestrian footpath and cycle lane to link the existing internal footpath which services phase 1 of the existing estate known as Dunaras and the adjoining public road (public rd no. L-52182) which services Marian Tce/Marian Villas housing estate so as to provide connectivity for the existing occupied dwelling houses in phase 1 of the existing</p>		<p>application with a finding of no significant effects. No in-combination effects involving the Proposed Development are expected.</p>

Planning Application	Development Description	Distance to Proposed Development	Potential for in-combination effects?
	estate known as Dunaras together with the proposed development to which this application relates and the main street of the town of Ballymahon. It is proposed as part of this planning permission application to upgrade the existing footpaths, car parking bays and carriageway that services Marian Tce/MarianVillas housing estate so as to create a shared surface in accordance with the guidance and recommendations outlined in "The Design Manual For Urban Roads and Streets" (DMURS) and complete the pedestrian footpath, cycle lane and shared surface prior to the commencement of any of the proposed dwellings to which this application relates (C) proposed construction of a 2.5 high capped & plastered wall along the boundary which separates the site to which this planning permission application relates & the property known as the Longford/Westmeath farmers mart. (Full description scanned/attached) (COVID 19b)		

On examination of the above, it is considered that there is no potential for the Proposed Development to act in-combination with other developments in the vicinity that may cause likely significant effects on the above European sites.

3.7.2 Relevant Policies and Plans

The following policies and plans were reviewed and considered for possible in-combination effects with the Proposed Development:

- Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027
- Fingal County Heritage Plan 2021-2024

On examination of the above it is considered that there are no means for the Proposed Development to act in-combination with any plans or projects, that would cause any likely significant effects on any European site.

4 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING CONCLUSION

The Proposed Development at N55 Ballymahon Main Street, Co. Longford has been assessed taking into account:

- the nature, size and location of the Proposed Development and possible impacts arising from the Construction and/or Operational Phase.
- the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of the European sites.
- the potential for in-combination effects arising from other plans and projects.

In carrying out this AA screening, mitigation measures have not been taken into account. Standard best practice construction measures which could have the effect of mitigating any effects on any European sites have similarly not been taken into account.

The following table summarises the findings of this AA Screening in terms of the potential for likely significant effects on European Sites for which an S-P-R impact pathway to the Proposed Development has been identified.

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON EUROPEAN SITES AS A RESULT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.

Site	Habitat Loss / Alteration	Habitat or Species Fragmentation	Disturbance and/or Displacement of Species	Changes in Population Density	Changes in Water Quality and/or Resource	In-combination effects	Stage 2 AA Required
SAC's							
Lough Ree SAC (000440)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
SPA's							
Lough Ree SPA (004064)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

In conclusion, upon the examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information and applying the precautionary principle, it is concluded by the authors of this report that, on the basis of objective information; **the possibility may be excluded** that the Proposed Development will have a significant effect on any of the European sites listed below:

- **Lough Ree SAC (000440)**
- **Lough Ree SPA (004064)**

Further to the screening exercise carried out above, it can be concluded, on the basis of the best scientific knowledge available, that the possibility of any significant effects on any European sites, whether arising from the project itself, or in combination with other plans and projects, can be excluded. This, there is no requirement to process to Stage 2 of the AA process; and the preparation of a NIS is not required.

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