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HABITATS DIRECTIVE SCREENING FOR A PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT (PART VIII) IN BALLYMAHON, CO. LONGFORD



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Article 6 of the EU Habitat's Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) requires that all plans and projects be screened for potential significant effects upon Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The aim of this screening process is to establish whether or not a full Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Statement) of the proposed plan or project is necessary.

A comprehensive assessment of the potential significant effects of a proposed development on European designated sites was carried out in March 2024 by Noreen McLoughlin, MSc, MCIEEM of Whitehill Environmental. This assessment will allow the Competent Authority, i.e., Longford County Council, to undertake an Appropriate Assessment determination, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. These works will be carried out under Part VIII of the Planning and Development Act.

The location of the proposed works are within 15km of sites designated under European Law. As such and in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitat's Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) regarding Appropriate Assessment, this screening exercise for Appropriate Assessment was carried out in order to identify whether any significant impacts on designated sites are likely. This exercise will also determine the appropriateness of the proposed project, in the context of the conservation status of the designated sites.

1.2 REGULATORY CONTEXT

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The Birds Directive (Council Directive 2009/147/EC) recognises that certain species of birds should be subject to special conservation measures concerning their habitats. The Directive requires that Member States take measures to classify the most suitable areas as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the conservation of bird species listed in Annex 1 of the Directive. SPAs are selected for bird species (listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive), that are regularly occurring populations of migratory bird species and the SPA areas are of international importance for these migratory birds.

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires that Member States designate and ensure that particular protection is given to sites (Special Areas of Conservation) which are made up of or support particular habitats and species listed in annexes to this Directive.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of this Directive also call for the undertaking of an Appropriate Assessment for plans and projects not directly connected with or necessary to the management of, but which are likely to have a significant effect on any European designated sites (i.e. SACs and SPAs).

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000/60/EC), which came into force in December 2000, establishes a framework for community action in the field of water policy. The WFD was transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. 722 of 2003). The WFD rationalises and updates existing legislation and provides for water management on the basis of River Basin Districts (RBDs). RBDs are essentially administrative areas for coordinated water management and are comprised of multiple river basins (or catchments), with cross-border basins (i.e. those covering the territory of more than one Member State) assigned to an international RBD. The aim of the WFD is to ensure that waters achieve at least good status by 2027 and that status does not deteriorate in any waters.

Appropriate Assessment and the Habitats Directive

Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora – the ‘Habitats Directive’ - provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Article 2 of the Directive requires the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species of European Community interest, at a favourable conservation status. Articles 3 - 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as *Natura 2000*. *Natura 2000* sites are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC).

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive sets out the decision-making tests for plans or projects affecting *Natura 2000* sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment:

“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.”

Article 6(4) deals with the steps that should be taken when it is determined, as a result of appropriate assessment, that a plan/project will adversely affect a European site. Issues dealing with alternative solutions, imperative reasons of overriding public interest and compensatory measures need to be addressed in this case.

Article 6(4) states:

“If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, the Member States shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.

Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species, the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.”

The Appropriate Assessment Process

The aim of Appropriate Assessment is to assess the implications of a proposal in respect of a designated site’s conservation objectives.

The ‘Appropriate Assessment’ itself is an assessment which must be carried out by the competent authority which confirms whether the plan or project in combination with other plans and projects will have an adverse impact on the integrity of a European site.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment shall be carried out by the competent authority as set out in Section 177U(1) and (2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) as follows:

‘(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) A competent authority shall carry out a screening for appropriate assessment under subsection (1) before—

(a) a Land use plan is made including, where appropriate, before a decision on appeal in relation to a draft strategic development zone is made, or

(b) consent for a proposed development is given.'

The competent authority shall determine that an Appropriate Assessment is not required if it can be excluded, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or project will have a significant effect on a European site.

Where the competent authority cannot exclude the potential for a significant effect on a European site, an Appropriate Assessment shall be deemed required.

Where an Appropriate Assessment is required, the conclusions of the Appropriate Assessment Report (Natura Impact Statement (NIS)) should enable the competent authority to ascertain whether the plan or proposed development would adversely affect the integrity of the European site. If adverse impacts on the integrity of a European site cannot be avoided, then mitigation measures should be applied during the appropriate assessment process to the point where no adverse impacts on the site remain. Under the terms of the Habitats Directive consent can only be granted for a project if, as a result of the appropriate assessment either (a) it is concluded that the integrity of any European sites will not be adversely affected, or (b) after mitigation, where adverse impacts cannot be excluded, there is shown to be an absence of alternative solutions, and there exists imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project should go ahead.

Section 177(V) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) outlines that the competent authority shall carry out the Appropriate Assessment, taking into account the Natura Impact Statement (amongst any other additional or supplemental information). A determination shall then be made by the competent authority in line with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive as to whether the plan or proposed development would adversely affect the integrity of a European site, prior to consent being given.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

This Statement of Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1) has been prepared with reference to the following:

- European Commission (2018). Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC.
- European Commission (2021). 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.
- European Commission (2006). Nature and Biodiversity Cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice.
- European Commission (2007). Clarification of the Concepts of: Alternative Solution, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence, Opinion of the Commission.
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009). Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities.

The EC Guidance sets out a number of principles as to how to approach decision making during the process. The primary one is 'the precautionary principle' which requires that the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 should prevail where there is uncertainty.

When considering the precautionary principle, the emphasis for assessment should be on objectively demonstrating with supporting evidence that:

- There will be no significant effects on a Natura 2000 site;
- There will be no adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site;
- There is an absence of alternatives to the project or plan that is likely to have an adverse effect to the integrity of a Natura 2000 site; and
- There are compensation measures that maintain or enhance the overall coherence of Natura 2000.

This translates into a four stage process to assess the impacts, on a designated site or species, of a policy or proposal.

The EC Guidance states that "each stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required". Consequently, the Council may not need to proceed through all four stages in undertaking the Appropriate Assessment.

The four-stage process is:

Stage 1: Screening – The process which identifies the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether or not these impacts are likely to be significant;

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment – The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts;

Stage 3: Assessment of Alternative Solutions – The process which examines alternative ways of achieving objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site;

Stage 4: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain – An assessment of the compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

In complying with the obligations set out in Articles 6(3) and following the guidelines described above, this screening statement has been structured as a stage by stage approach as follows:

- Description of the proposed project;
- Identification of the Natura 2000 sites close to the proposed development;
- Identification and description of any individual and cumulative impacts on the Natura 2000 sites likely to result from the project;
- Assessment of the significance of the impacts identified above on site integrity. Exclusion of sites where it can be objectively concluded that there will be no significant effects.

2.1 STATEMENT OF COMPETENCY

This AA Screening report was carried out by Noreen McLoughlin, BA, MSc, MCIEEM. Noreen has an honours degree in Zoology and an MSc in Freshwater Ecology from Trinity College, Dublin and she has been a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management for over eighteen years. Noreen has over 20 years' experience as a professional ecologist in Ireland.

2.2 DESK STUDIES & CONSULTATION

Information on the site and the area of the proposed development was studied prior to the completion of this statement. The following data sources were accessed in order to complete a thorough examination of potential impacts:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service - Aerial photographs and maps of designated sites, information on habitats and species within these sites and information on protected plant or animal species, conservation objectives, site synopses and standard data forms for relevant designated sites.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)- Information pertaining to water quality, geology and licensed facilities within the area;
- Myplan.ie – Mapped based information;
- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) – Information pertaining to protected plant and animal species within the study area;
- Bing maps & Google Street View – High quality aerials and street images;
- Kenny Lyons Associates Architects – Plans and Information pertaining to the Development.
- Longford County Council – Plans and Information Pertaining to the Development. Information on planning history in the area for the assessment of cumulative impacts.

2.3 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The proposed development was assessed to identify its potential ecological impacts and from this, the Zone of Influence (Zoi) of the proposed development was defined. Based on the potential impacts and their Zoi, the Natura 2000 sites potentially at risk from direct, indirect or in-combination impacts were identified. The assessment considered all potential impact sources and pathways connecting the proposed development to Natura 2000 sites, in view of the conservation objectives supporting the favourable conservation condition of the site's Qualifying Interests (QIs) or Special Conservation Interests (SCIs).

The conservation objectives relating to each Natura 2000 site and its QIs/SCIs are cited generally for SACs as “to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected”, and for SPAs “to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA”.

As defined in the Habitat’s Directive, the 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 favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- The 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.

Where site-specific conservation objectives (SSCOs) have been prepared for a European site, these include a series of specific attributes and targets against which effects on conservation condition, or integrity, can be measured. Where potential significant effects are identified, then these SSCO should be considered in detail.

3 SCREENING

3.1 DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

Longford County Council have indicated their intention to undertake a new community development in the townlands of Drinan and Ballymahon, Ballymahon, Co. Longford. The proposed works will consist of the following:

- The demolition of existing rear extension, construction of new rear extension, and refurbishment of the Dean Egan Library
- The construction of rear extension and refurbishment of Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille and segregation of dedicated access adjacent to Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille to the lands to the South.
- The construction of a new community workshop facility, yard space and parking to the rear of Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille
- The refurbishment of the Convent of Mercy NIAH Reg. No. 13316005, demolition of existing side extension, construction of new extensions to the South West and North East of the Convent of Mercy.
- The construction of a new community hall, parking and set down area on the grounds of the Convent of Mercy
- The construction of public realm improvement works including shared surfaces, landscaping, widening of existing lane adjacent to the Dean Egan Library and associated realignment of existing boundary wall.
- The provision of all groundworks, service connections, site drainage, internal paths, paving, parking, public lighting, public open space; and all associated site development works to complete the development.

The proposed development is within the curtilage of protected structures LCC RPS No. 103 NIAH Reg. No. 13316028 and LCC RPS No. 255 NIAH Reg. No. 13316003.

An outline of the proposed works is shown below in Figure 1.



Figure 1 – Proposed Site Plan prepared by Kenny Lyons Associates Architects

Foul Water Proposals

Details on the proposed foul water management of the site have been presented in the Engineering Services Report prepared by Tobin. Uisce Eireann’s records indicate the presence of an existing 150mm Concrete pipe traversing underneath the R392 road. Presently both the school house and library discharge foul and surface water runoff to the foul pipe located within the R392 road. The convent building from review of the GPR maps, discharges both its foul and surface water through the boundary wall located at the Northeast corner and possibly discharges into the 150mm foul concrete pipe located within Mercy Secondary School’s land.

It is proposed to lay new collector and carrier pipes internally on all sites. These new pipes will only collect wastewater discharge from the buildings. Once collected, the underground pipes will convey the wastewater effluent into the existing discharge manhole on the site and will reuse the existing foul connection pipe, thus discharging the wastewater into the existing Uisce Eireann infrastructure, with the exception of the Convent House. It is proposed to construct a new discharge public pipe along the Church View road for the Convent House to discharge the wastewater effluent into the 150mm Concrete pipe located in the R392. With the exception of the library building, it is not proposed to discharge surface water into the Uisce Eireann infrastructure. There is no public surface water infrastructure within the vicinity of the library site. Surface water will be collected separately

internally on the library site but it will discharge into the final manhole on the site before discharging to Uisce Eireann's infrastructure.

A pre-connection enquiry will be made to Uisce Eireann to confirm there is capacity in the existing infrastructure for the rehabilitation of the sites. As these will be communal buildings and wastewater discharge will be low, this is not foreseen as a risk to the project.

Surface Water Proposals

Details on the proposed surface water management of the site have also been presented in the Engineering Services Report prepared by Tobin. Longford County Council's records indicate the presence of a 300mm Concrete public surface water pipe traversing through the existing garage across from the School House site and appears to continue falling Northeasterly. The records also indicate a 225mm uPVC pipe traversing along church View, which continues falling Northeasterly.

The design and management of the Surface Water for the proposed development will comply with the policies and guidelines outlined in the following:

- The Greater Dublin Strategic Drainage Study (GDSDS).
- Longford County Council's Development Plan, 2021-2027
- Recommendations for Site Development Works for Housing Areas published by the Department of the Environment.
- Greater Dublin Regional Code of Practice for Drainage Works.
- The SuDs Manual (2015).

The key design principles of the Surface Water drainage are as follows:

1. The flow from the development to the existing Surface Water Infrastructure is designed to equal the natural greenfield runoff in accordance with the GDSDS and sustainable drainage best practice.
2. The flow of surface water from the sites will be reduced compared to the current brownfield site runoff.
3. The site will incorporate the use of soft SuDs measures to slow the flow of surface water from the site.

It is proposed to construct new collector and conveyance pipes internally on all sites. The infrastructure will be entirely separate from the wastewater system and will only cater for the surface water runoff from rainfall events.

It is proposed to discharge the School House site into the existing 300mm concrete public pipe located in the R392 road.

It is proposed to discharge the Convent house site into the existing 225mm uPVC pipe, located within the Church View road.

It is proposed to construct a discharge surface water manhole on the Library site, with a pipe extended out past the manhole for connection into a future public surface water pipe. The surface water will however temporarily discharge into the foul pipe located in the R392 road until such time as a connection can be made.

SuD's Proposals

A number of SuD's features have been proposed as part of the surface water drainage system in accordance with the GDSD's. SuD's are incorporated to attenuate runoff and volumes; reduce pollutant concentrations in surface water and to replicate the natural characteristics of surface water run off for the site in its pre-developed state.

The following SuD's features are proposed:

- Permeable Paving - It is proposed to install permeable surfacing within the car parking areas of the sites. The water, once permeated into the pavement, will be allowed to infiltrate into the ground. The inclusion of the permeable paving will slow the surface water run off at source, treat the surface water runoff and provide storage.
- Petrol Interceptor - It is proposed to flow all the surface water collected on the convent site through a petrol interceptor before discharging to the existing infrastructure to ensure a certain level of treatment is provided to the runoff and to act as a final treatment process before discharge.
- Soakaway - It is proposed to construct soakaways on the School house and Library sites, which will cater for surface water runoff from half of the existing roof and the entire front hardstanding areas. The surface water will be collected through downpipes, underground pipes and directed to a perforated pipe within the soakaway. The collected water will be allowed to infiltrate into the groundwater.

3.2 SITE LOCATION AND SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT

The application site is 1.04ha in area, and it is situated in Ballymahon town, within the townlands of Drinan and Ballymahon. The site encompasses two separate areas of land that lie to the south and north of Main St, the R392. The site includes the Dean Egan Library and which lie to the south of the R392, and the Convent of Mercy and its access road, which is to the north of the R392.

The land use surrounding the site is mixed. The urban / sub-urban lands of Ballymahon town largely surround the immediate area of site. These areas generally consist of residential and commercial uses and the dominant habitats associated with them include buildings and artificial surfaces and amenity grasslands and gardens. Beyond the urban / sub-urban areas of Ballymahon town and in the rural lands outside of the town, agriculture is the dominant land use. The main habitat associated with this use is improved agricultural grasslands. Other habitats represented locally include semi-improved and wet grasslands, hedgerows, treelines and watercourses, including the River Inny main channel which is 565m south of the application site. The location of the site is shown in Figures 2 and 3, whilst an aerial photo of the site and its surrounding habitats is shown in Figure 4.

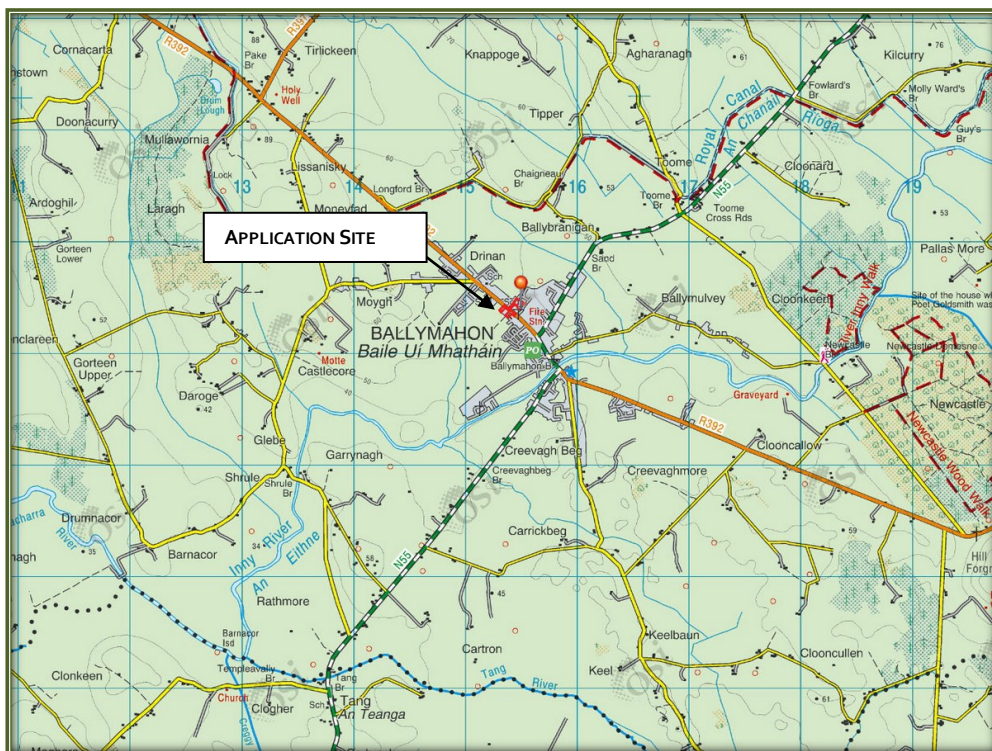


Figure 2 – Site Location Map (Sites Pinned)



Figure 3 – Site Location Map. Application Site Outlined in Red.

HABITATS WITHIN THE SITE

No part of the proposed work site lies within or immediately adjacent to any area that has been designated for nature conservation purposes. The proposed works will be undertaken within an existing built and highly modified site where the dominant habitat is Buildings and Artificial Surfaces (BL3). There are small pockets of unmanaged / amenity grasslands surrounding the Dean Egan Library, the schoolhouse and the Convent of Mercy. It is considered that there are no habitats of biodiversity value within the application site.



Figure 4 – Aerial Photograph of the Work Locations (Outlined in Red) and its Surrounding Habitats © Google

WATER FEATURES AND QUALITY

The application site is within the Upper Shannon Hydrometric Area (26) and Catchment (26F), the Inny Sub-Catchment (080) and the Inny Sub-Basin (100). There are no drains or watercourses within or adjacent to any part of the application site. There is a land drain approximately 330m west of the Dean Egan Library site and this connects to the Drinan Stream, which is 535m west of the site. The Drinan Stream flows in a southerly direction until its confluence with the River Inny. The River Inny is 565m south of the site. There is no hydrological connectivity between the application site and the River Inny or any other watercourse. The River Inny continues to flow in a west / south-westerly direction until it flows into Lough Ree near Annagh.

The EPA have classified the ecological status of the River Inny and its tributaries at points upstream and downstream of Ballymahon as moderate ecological status. Under the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, this is unsatisfactory and good status must be achieved here within the current WFD cycle (by 2027).

The site is within the Inny groundwater body and the current status of this waterbody is noted to be good. Within the application site itself, groundwater vulnerability is noted to be moderate.

3.3 NATURA 2000 SITES IDENTIFIED

In accordance with the guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, a list of Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the proposed development have been identified and described according to their site synopsis, qualifying interests and conservation objectives. In addition, any other sites further than this, but potentially within its zone of interest were also considered. The zone of impact may be determined by an assessment of the connectivity between the application site and the designated areas by virtue of hydrological connectivity, atmospheric emissions, flight paths, ecological corridors etc.

For significant effects to arise, there must be a potential impact facilitated by having a source, i.e., the proposed development and activities arising out of its construction or operation, a receptor, i.e., the European site and its qualifying interests and a subsequent pathway or connectivity between the source and receptor, e.g., a water course. The likelihood for significant effects on the European site will largely depend on the characteristics of the source (e.g., nature and scale of the construction works), the characteristics of the existing pathway and the characteristics of the receptor, e.g., the sensitivities of the Qualifying Interests (habitats or species) to changes in water quality.

There are five Natura 2000 designated sites within 15km of the application site. These designated areas and their closest points to the application site are summarised in Table 1 and a map showing their locations relative to the application site is shown in Figure 5. A full description of this site can be read on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (npws.ie).

Site Name & Code	Distance	Qualifying Interests	Potential Significant Effects
Lough Ree SAC 000440	4.7km south-west	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) • Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i>-type vegetation • Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco Brometalia</i>) • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration • Alkaline fens • Limestone pavements • Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in 	<i>Screened Out – There are no watercourses on the site therefore the source-pathway-receptor model between the application site and this SAC does not exist and significant effects upon this SAC and its QIs will not arise.</i>

		British Isles • Bog woodland	
Lough Ree SPA 004064	5km south-west	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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>) • Little Grebe (<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>) • Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) • Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) • Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) • Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) • Wetlands 	<i>Screened Out – There are no watercourses on the site therefore the source-pathway-receptor model between the application site and this SPA does not exist and significant effects upon this SPA and its QIs will not arise.</i>
Ballymore Fen SAC 002313	11.4km south-east	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition mires and quaking bogs 	<i>Screened Out – There is no ecological or hydrological connectivity (source-pathway-receptor) linkage between the application site and this SAC, therefore significant effects upon this SAC and its QIs can be ruled out.</i>
Mount Jessop Bog SAC 002202	12.1km north	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration • Bog woodland 	<i>Screened Out – There is no ecological or hydrological connectivity (source-pathway-receptor) linkage between the application site and this SAC, therefore significant effects upon this SAC and its QIs can be ruled out.</i>
Fortwilliam Turlough SAC 000448	14.5km north-west	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turloughs 	<i>Screened Out – There is no ecological or hydrological connectivity (source-pathway-receptor) linkage between the application site and this SAC, therefore significant effects upon this SAC and its QIs can be ruled out.</i>

Table 1 – Natura 2000 Sites Within 15km of the Proposed Site

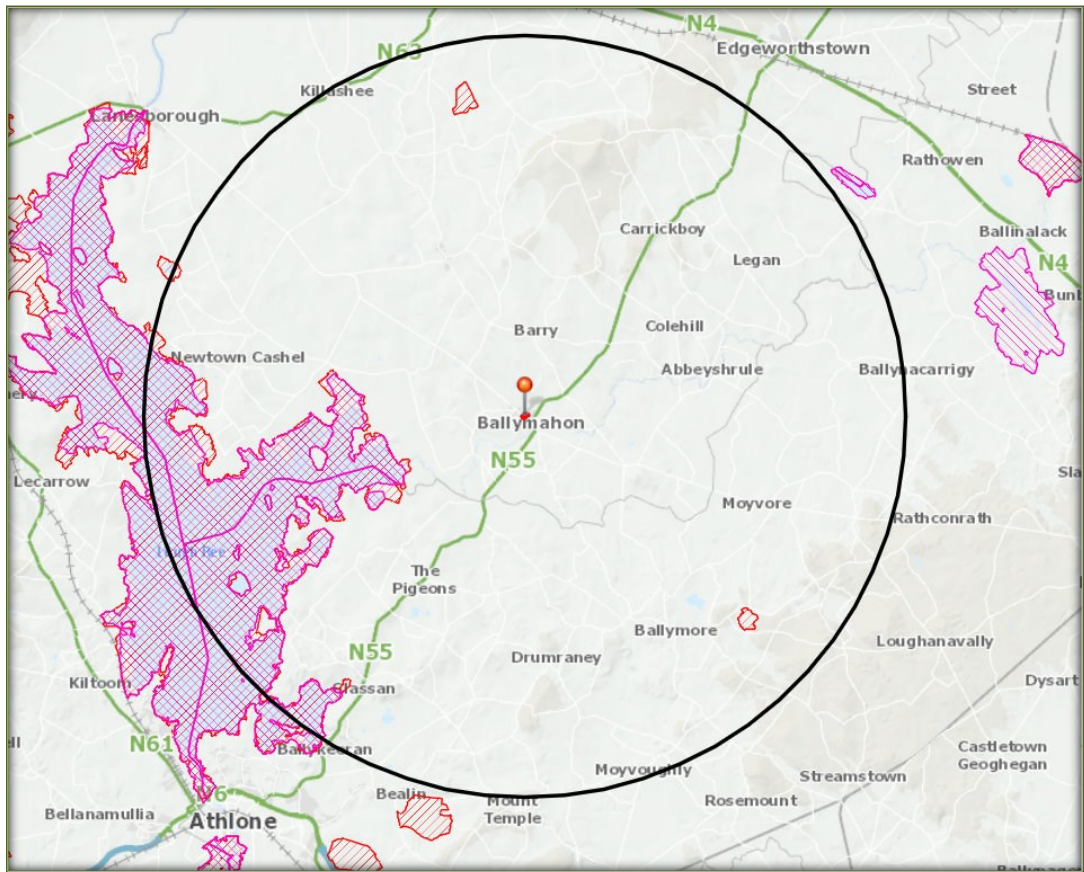


Figure 5 – The Application Site (Pinned) in relation to the Natura 2000 Sites Within 15km (SACs – Red Hatching, SPAs – Pink Hatching).

4 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The potential significant effects of the proposed works upon the Natura 2000 sites identified in Table 1 are described below.

Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give rise to impacts on nearby Natura 2000 site:

The proposed development of the new community facilities at the Dean Egan Library, the Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille and the Convent of Mercy in Ballymahon will have no significant effects upon the designated sites identified as being within 15km or the Zone of Influence of the proposed works. There are no individual elements of the proposed works that are likely to give rise to significant negative effects on these aforementioned sites. There will be no significant effects upon the conservation condition of any QI in the designated sites identified. There will be no potential direct, indirect or cumulative effects upon any designated sites arising from the proposed works when considered in-combination with other developments. In this instance, mitigation measures are not required to specifically address potential impacts upon any Natura 2000 site.

Describe any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the nearby Natura 2000 sites by virtue of:

Size and scale: Having regards to the small size and scale of the works in relation to the overall size of the Natura 2000 sites identified, the likelihood of any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on these designated sites arising from the construction and operation of the proposed works are low.

Land-take: There will be no land-take from any designated site. There will be no interference with the boundaries of any designated site.

Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site: There are five Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the proposed works. The closest sites include the Lough Ree SAC and SPA, which are 4.7km and 5km south-west of the application site respectively. In this instance, having regards to the lack of hydrological connectivity and the small size and scale of works, significant effects upon the QIs of these sites will not arise.

Resource requirements (water abstraction etc.): No resources will be taken from any Natura 2000 site and there are no resource requirements that will impact upon any designated site.

Emissions: The construction and operation of the proposed Part VIII development will not give rise to any emissions that could lead to significant effects upon the designated sites within the Zone of Influence. The separation distance between the application site and all Natura 2000 sites is considered sufficient to ensure that emissions such as noise, dust, airborne pollutants, and vibrations generated during the construction phase will not have significant effects on these designated sites.

Excavation requirements: All vegetation and soil that will be generated during works will be

transported off site by a registered contractor and disposed of or used at a location to be agreed with Longford County Council prior to removal. It will not be disposed of within any area of biodiversity value.

Transportation requirements: There will be no additional transportation requirements resulting from the proposed development and associated works that will have any impact upon the Natura 2000 sites identified.

In-Combination / Cumulative Impacts: The proposed application was considered in combination with other developments or proposed developments in the Ballymahon area and potential cumulative impacts were considered. Any individual application that has the potential to impact upon a Natura 2000 site will be subject to Appropriate Assessment as required under Articles 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. The application will have no cumulative impacts upon any designated site when considered in combination with other developments that have been properly screened for AA, or where an NIS has been completed and mitigation measures are included as part of that development.

Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning etc: Once the works begin, they will be complete within one year.

Describe any likely changes to the nearby Natura 2000 sites arising as a result of:

Reduction of habitat area: The proposed works lie outside the boundaries of the Natura 2000 sites identified in Section 3.3. There will be no reduction of designated habitat area. There will be no interference with the boundaries of any designated site. There will be no reduction of designated habitat area within any SAC/SPA.

Disturbance to key species: There will be no disturbance to any species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive or Annex II of the Habitats Directive.

Habitat or species fragmentation: There will be no habitat or species fragmentation within any SAC or SPA. No ecological corridors between the application site and any Natura 2000 site will be damaged or destroyed.

Reduction in species density: There will be no reduction in species density within any Natura 2000 site.

Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.): There will be no negative impacts upon surface or ground water quality within any water courses that are close to the application site. There will be no negative impacts upon the water quality in any designated site.

Describe any likely impacts on the nearby Natura 2000 sites as a whole in terms of:

Interference with the key relationships that define the structure or function of the site: It is not considered likely that there will be any impacts on the key relationships that define the structure or

function of the Natura 2000 sites identified.

Provide indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of:

Loss - Estimated percentage of lost area of habitat: None

Fragmentation: None

Disruption & disturbance: None

Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality etc.): None

4.1 FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

Finding of No Significant Effects Report Matrix	
Name of project	Community Development (Part 8) in Ballymahon, Co. Longford. Works proposed at the Dean Egan Library, Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille and the Convent of Mercy.
Name and location of Natura 2000 site	There are five Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the proposed works. The closest sites include the Lough Ree SAC and SPA, which are 4.7km and 5km south-west of the application site respectively. In this instance, having regards to the lack of hydrological connectivity and the small size and scale of works, significant effects upon the QIs of these sites will not arise.
Description of project	Part VIII Development in Ballymahon, Co. Longford
Is the project directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site?	No
Are there other projects or plans that together with project being assessed could affect the site?	No
The Assessment of Significance of Effects	
Describe how the project is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site	Having regard to the location, nature and scale of the proposed development, it is considered that there is no potential for significant effects either from the proposed development on its own or in combination with other plans and projects.
Explain why these effects are not considered significant	Not applicable as there is no potential for negative impacts
Describe how the project is likely to affect species designated under Annex II of the Habitats Directive.	No impacts likely
Data Collected to Carry out the Assessment	
Who carried out the assessment	Noreen McLoughlin, MSC, MCIEEM. Consultant Ecologist
Sources of data	NPWS, EPA, National Biodiversity Data Centre, Longford County Council
Level of assessment completed	Stage1 Appropriate Assessment Screening
Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed	Full results included

5 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION

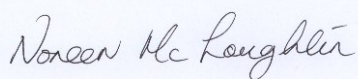
In accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the relevant case law, established best practice and the precautionary principle, this AA Screening Report has examined the details of the project in relation to the relevant Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the application site.

At this stage of the AA process, it is for the competent authority, i.e., Longford County Council, to carry out the screening for AA and to reach one of the following determinations:

a) AA of the proposed development is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European sites;

b) AA of the proposed development is *not* required if it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European sites.

It is of the opinion of the author that an AA of the proposed development is not required as it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information provided in this report, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European sites.



Noreen McLoughlin, MSc, MCIEEM.
Ecologist.

(PI Insurance details available on request)