

Noreen McLoughlin, MSc

Environmental Consultant

Whitehill
Edgeworthstown
Co. Longford
☎ (087) 4127248 / (043) 6672775
✉ noreen.mcloughlin@gmail.com

HABITATS DIRECTIVE SCREENING OF A PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT (PART 8) DEVELOPMENT AT THE MALL COMPLEX, TEMPLEMICHAEL AND ABBEYCARTON, LONGFORD TOWN, CO. LONGFORD



*Longford County Council
Áras an Chontae
Great Water Street
Longford*

March 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
1.1	Background	3
1.2	Regulatory Context	3
2	METHODOLOGY	7
2.1	Statement of Competency	9
2.2	Desk Studies & Consultation	9
2.3	Assessment Methodology	10
3	SCREENING	11
3.1	Development Description	11
3.2	Site Location and Surrounding Environment	13
3.3	Natura 2000 Sites Identified	16
4	IMPACT ASSESSMENT	22
4.1	Finding of No Significant Effects	25
5	APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION	26

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 impacts 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 of the proposed plan or project is necessary.

A comprehensive assessment of the potential significant effects of a proposed Part 8 development at the Mall Complex in Abbeycartron / Templemichael in Longford town 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. Permission for these works will be sought under Part 8 of the Planning Process.

The location of the proposed development is 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;
- 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 upgrade works to the existing sports and leisure facilities at the Mall Complex, Longford Town. The proposed project will consist of the following:

- Increase existing Astro pitch from (95m x 61m) to (100m x 66m), to include new 3G surface, new fencing, ball stop nets, dugouts and spectator area/shelter.
- Construction of new walking loop around the pitch.
- Upgrade existing pitch floodlights to LED.
- Relocation of 3 no. existing 10m high floodlights.
- Installation of 2 new 10.0m high LED floodlights.
- Installation of 6 new 6.0m high LED floodlights.
- Extension of existing car park to include rainwater gardens for drainage.
- Installation of new Strength and Conditioning Studio (10m x 12m).

Permission for these works will be sought under Part VIII of planning process. Extracts from the plans are shown in Figures 1 a and 1 b.

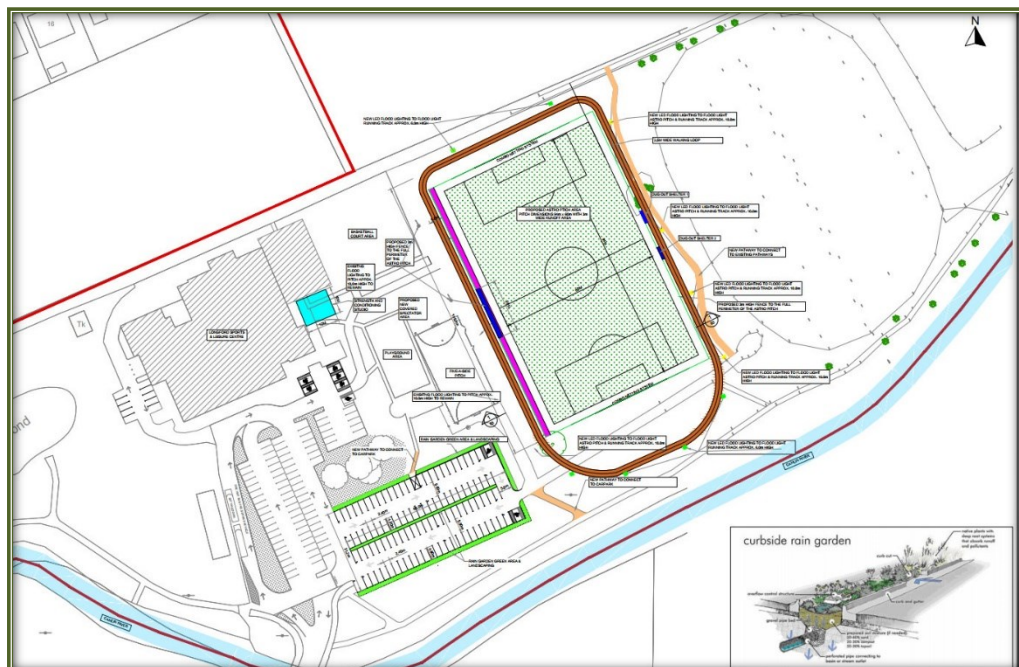


Figure 1a – Extract from Planning Drawings

Surface Water

Excess surface water from the extended car park will be managed using rainwater gardens. The existing gulleys currently located in the car park will remain and act as overflows for the rain water garden system as necessary.

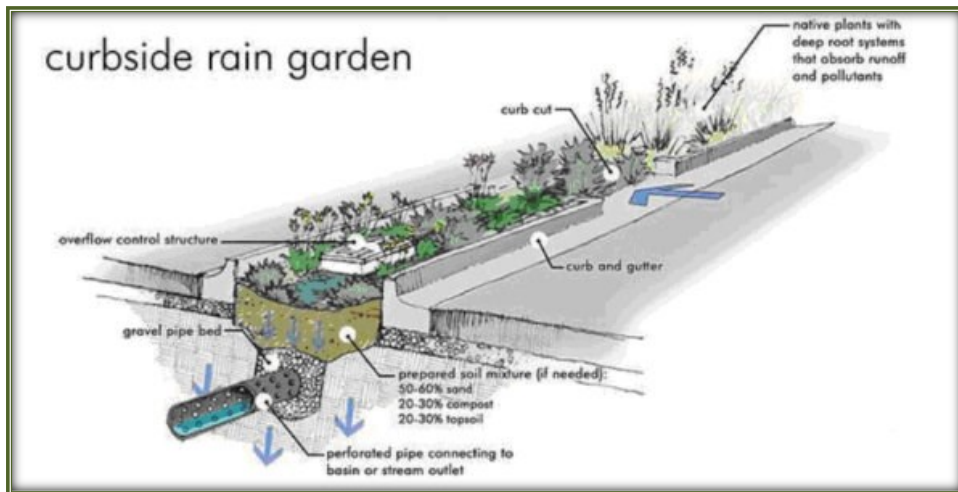


Figure 1b – Schematic of a Rain Garden

3.2 SITE LOCATION AND SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT

The application site is circa 5ha and it is situated within the townlands of Abbeycarton (to the north of the River Camlin) with a small section included in the townland of Templemichael (to the south of the River Camlin). The site encompasses the entire area known as the Mall, which is a public amenity area that includes an indoor sports and leisure centre, outdoor basketball courts, an astro turf pitch, a car park, a playground and a riverside walk. The Mall Complex is approximately 500m north of Longford town centre, and it is accessed via an existing entrance that is just off the College Park road.

The land use surrounding the site is mixed. The sub-urban lands of Longford town largely surround the site. These areas generally consist of industrial and residential use and the dominant habitats associated with them include buildings and artificial surfaces and amenity grasslands and gardens. Beyond the sub-urban areas of Longford 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 Camlin main channel which flows along the southern boundary of the Mall. 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.

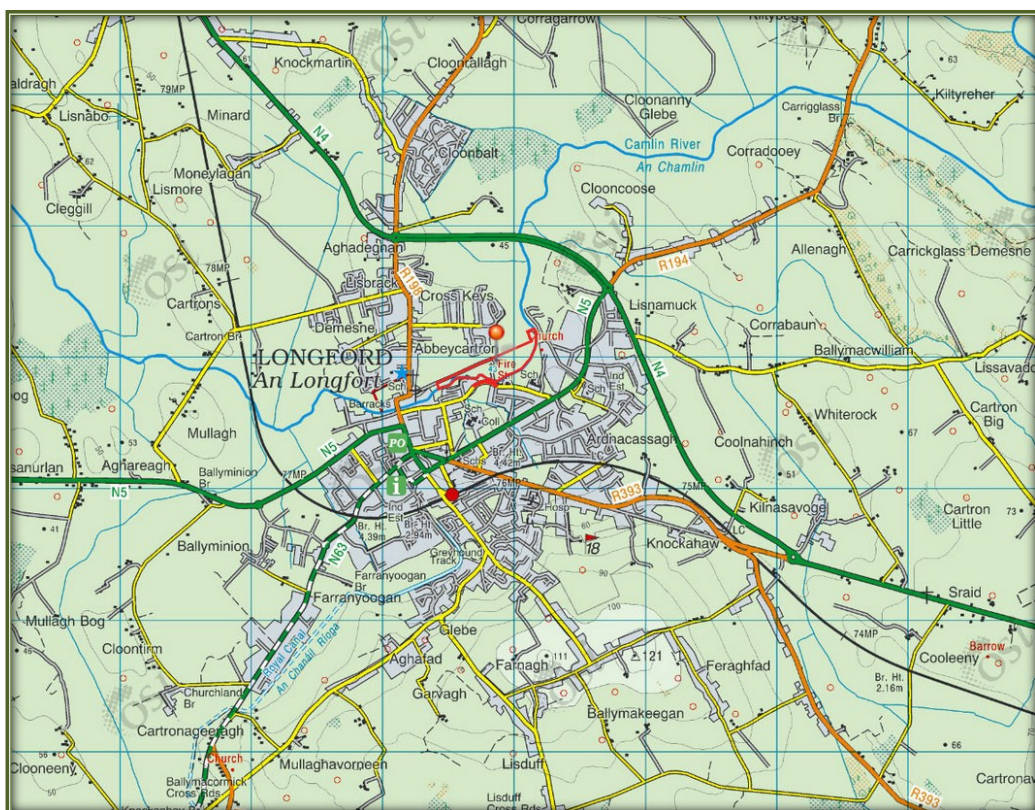


Figure 2 – Site Location Map (Site Pinned)

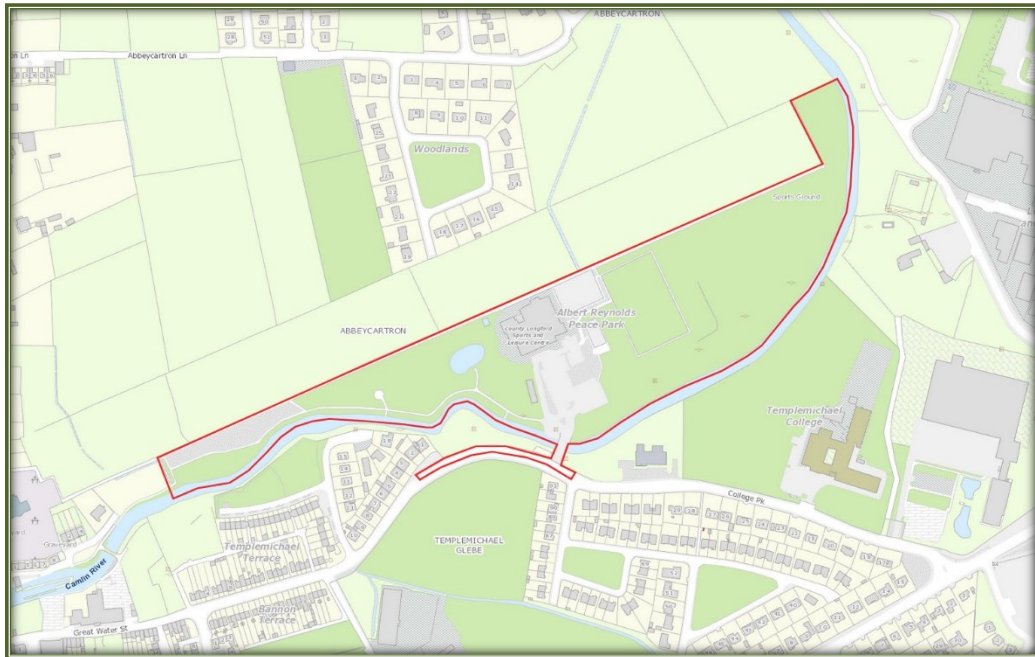


Figure 3 – Site Location Map. Application Site Outlined in Red.

HABITATS WITHIN THE SITE

No part of the site lies within or adjacent to any area that has been designated for nature conservation purposes. The site encompasses the entire Mall Complex and all proposed works will occur on existing highly modified / built areas. The dominant habitats within the site include Buildings and Artificial Surfaces (Habitat Code BL₃), Amenity Grasslands (GA₂) and Scattered Trees and Parkland (WD₅). The southern boundary of the Mall is defined by the River Camlin and its riparian margins.

WATER FEATURES AND QUALITY

The application site is within the Upper Shannon Hydrometric Area (26) and Catchment (26c), the Upper Shannon Sub-Catchment (o6o) and the Camlin Sub-Basin (o6o). The River Camlin flows along the southern boundary of the Mall Complex.

The River Camlin rises in lands to the south of Granard. It flows in a south-westerly direction, though Longford town and on towards its confluence with the River Shannon near Cloondara.

The EPA have classified the ecological status of the River Camlin as good status at points upstream of the bridge at the Mall, and moderate status downstream of the bridge. In 2023, the EPA recorded a biological Q-rating of 3-4 from the bridge at the Mall. A Q₃₋₄ is indicative of moderate ecological status. Further downstream of Longford town, the ecological status of the River Camlin disimproves further to poor status. Under the

requirements of the Water Framework Directive, good status must be achieved and maintained within all watercourses within the current WFD cycle (3rd cycle by 2027).



Figure 4 – Aerial Photograph of the Site (Outlined in Red) and its Surrounding Habitats © Google. Proposed Location of Works Outlined in Yellow.

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. Sites beyond 15km but also hydrologically connected to the application site were also considered. These designated areas and their closest points to the proposed development site are summarised in Table 1 and a map and aerial photograph showing their locations relative to the application site are shown in Figures 5 and 6. A full description of these sites can be read on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (npws.ie).

Site Name & Code	Distance	Qualifying Interests	Potential Effects?
Brown Bog SAC 002346	3.4km west	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active raised bogs Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion 	<i>Screened Out - There is no hydrological or ecological connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore significant effects upon this site are not likely to arise from the construction and operation of the proposed development.</i>
Lough Forbes Complex SAC 001818	5.1km west / ~6km downstream via the River Camlin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition-type vegetation 	<i>Having regards to the fact that the works are upstream of this SAC (7km), then the potential for significant effects to arise on this SAC and its QIs will be considered further.</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active raised bogs • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration • Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion • Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> 	
Ballykenny – Fisherstown Bog SPA 004101	5.1km west / 6km downstream via the River Camlin	Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>)	<i>Having regards to the fact that the works are upstream of this SPA (7km), then the potential for significant effects to arise on this SPA and its QI will be considered further.</i>
Mount Jessop Bos SAC 002202	5.3km south	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration • Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion • Bog woodland 	<i>Screened Out - There is no hydrological or ecological connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore significant effects upon this site are not likely to arise from the construction and operation of the proposed development.</i>
Clooneen Bog SAC 002348	9.3km north-west	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration • Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion • Bog woodland 	<i>Screened Out - There is no hydrological or ecological connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore significant effects upon this site are not likely to arise.</i>
Lough Ree SAC 000440	15.3km south-west / 21km downstream via the River Camlin	<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 • Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) • Bog woodland 	<i>Screened Out - Having regards to the extensive hydrological separation distance between the application site and this SAC, it is considered that significant effects upon this SAC and its QIs will not arise.</i>
Lough Ree SPA 004064	14.7km south-west / 21km downstream via the River Camlin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus Cygnus</i>) • Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) 	<i>Screened Out - Having regards to the extensive hydrological separation distance between the application site and this</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>SAC, it is considered that significant effects upon this SAC and its QIs will not arise.</p>
--	--	--	---

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

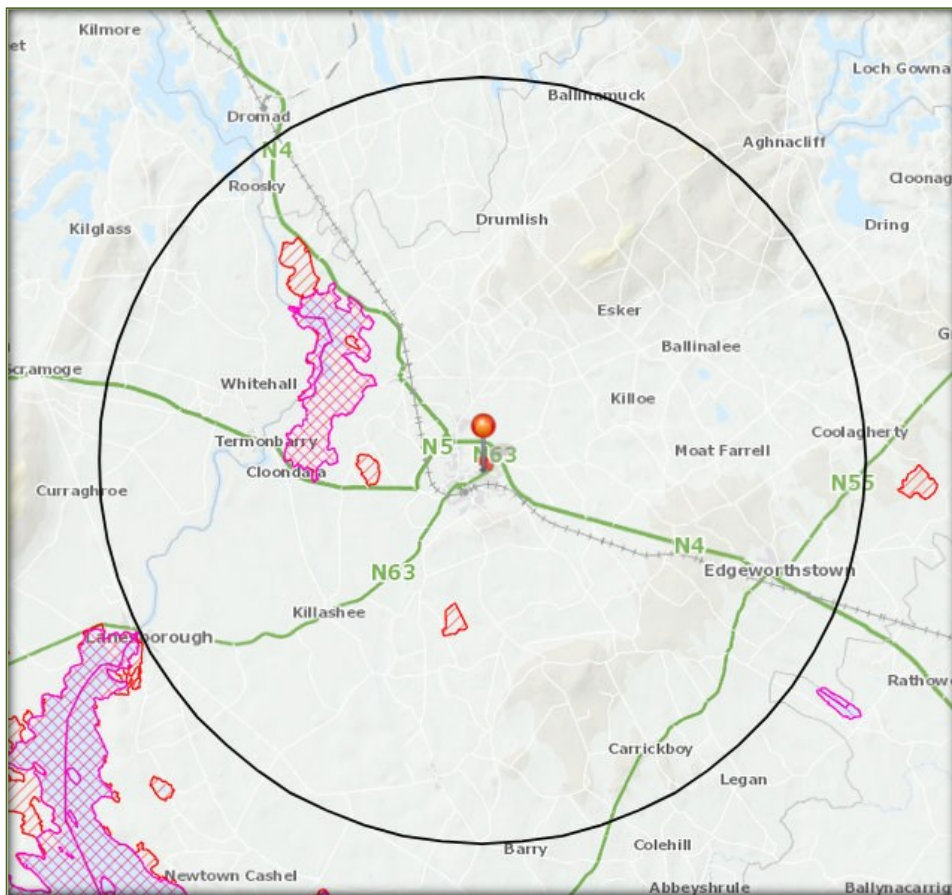


Figure 5 – The Application Site (Pinned) in relation to the Natura 2000 Sites Within 15km (SACs – Red Hatching, SPAs – Pink Hatching).

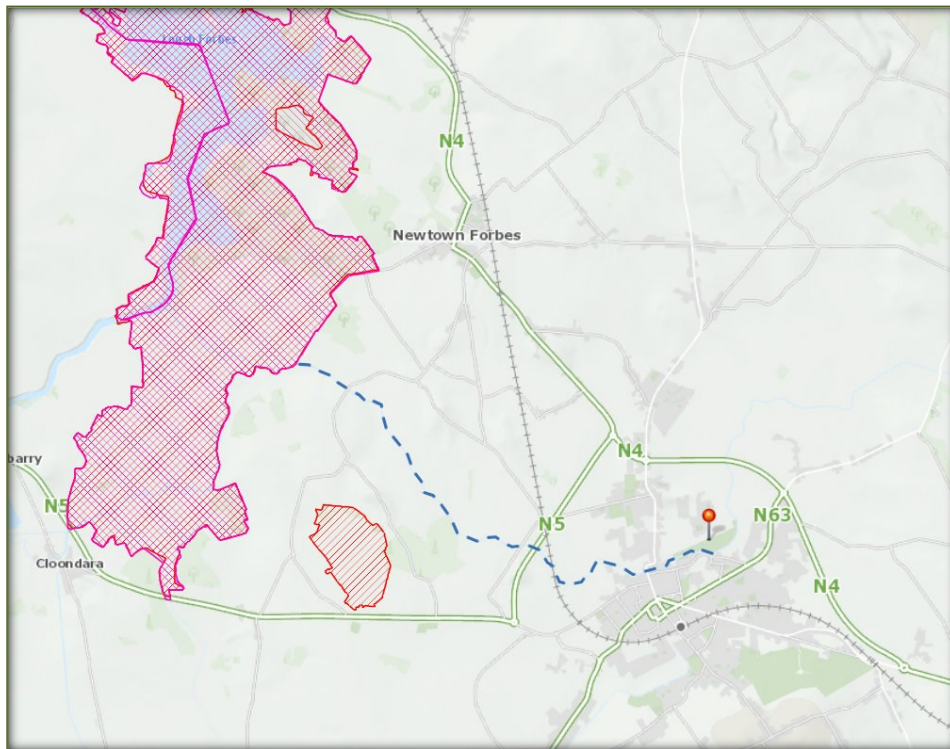


Figure 6 – The Application Site (Pinned) in relation to the Lough Forbes SAC and the Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA. Hydrological Connectivity is Shown (6.3km)

LOUGH FORBES SAC 001818

NPWS Site Summary

Lough Forbes SAC is a complex of naturally eutrophic lake, fed by the River Shannon and Rinn River, with extensive reed bed development, and natural transitions to flooded grasslands, marsh and two active raised bogs. The Castle Forbes estate on the eastern shore of the lake is extensively planted with mature semi-natural woodland, including some stands of old oak wood.

Lough Forbes Complex is an extensive and important midland site which contains significant examples of the Annex I habitats natural eutrophic lake, active raised bog, alluvial woodlands, degraded raised bog and Rhynchosporion vegetation. Other habitats of note occurring include mixed ash/oak woodland, dry grassland and cutover raised bog. In many areas there are good examples of relatively undisturbed transitions from lake and river to adjoining terrestrial habitats such as wet grassland and raised bog. The lake, callow and raised bog areas provide feeding and roosting sites for a flock of wintering *Anser albifrons flavirostris*. The site is within a breeding territory of *Falco columbarius*.

Site Specific Conservation Objectives

In 2016, the NPWS published Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) for this SAC. These conservation objectives were also supported by a number of other documents relating to the bogland habitats of this SAC. For the Lough Forbes SAC, these SSCO's can be downloaded on the NPWS website. The NPWS Qualifying Interests and SSCO's of Lough Forbes are listed below in Table 2.

Habitat [Code]	Name	SSCO	Attributes	Significant Effects
	Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i> -type vegetation) [3150]	To <i>restore</i> the favourable conservation condition of this habitat in Lough Forbes SAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Area • Habitat Distribution • Typical Species • Vegetation Composition • Vegetation Distribution • Hydrological Regime • Lake Substratum • Water Quality • Acidification Status • Water Colour • Dissolved Organic Carbon • Turbidity • Fringing Habitat 	There will be no significant effects upon this QI arising from the proposed works. The works will take place close to the River Camlin, which is a tributary of the River Shannon. The confluence of the River Shannon and Camlin is downstream of Lough Forbes itself and therefore the application site is not directly upstream of this habitat within the SAC and significant effects will not arise.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active raised bogs • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion 	To <i>restore</i> the favourable conservation condition of this habitat in Lough Forbes SAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Area • Habitat Distribution • High Bog Area • Hydrological Regime • Transitional Areas • Vegetation Quality • Typical Active Raised Bog Species • Elements of Local Distinctiveness • Negative physical indicators • Vegetation composition • Air quality • Water quality 	The works are upstream of the peatland habitats that are listed as QIs of the SAC. However, there will be no direct or indirect habitat loss or fragmentation of these habitats within the SAC. There will be no atmospheric emissions from the development which could affect the sensitive peatland vegetation of this SAC. There will be no changes to the hydrology of the bog. There will be no deteriorations in water quality in the high bog and transitional bog areas that could lead to negative effects upon these QIs.
	Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i> [91E0])	To <i>restore</i> the favourable conservation condition of this habitat in Lough Forbes SAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Area • Habitat Distribution • Woodland Size • Woodland Structure • Hydrological Regime • Vegetation Composition 	There will be no loss or fragmentation of any area of this QI within the SAC. There will be no changes to hydrology or water quality which could lead to negative effects upon this QI.

Table 2 – SSCO's of the Lough Forbes SAC

BALLYKENNY-FISHERSTOWN BOG SPA

NPWS Site Summary

The lake and callow grasslands provide good habitat for a range of wintering waterfowl species, including regionally important flocks of *Cygnus cygnus*, *Anas crecca* and *Anas penelope*. Species such as *Phalacrocorax carbo* and *Aythya fuligula* are also represented but in low numbers. The bogs were formerly used by wintering Greenland White-fronted goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris* but these appear to have been now abandoned in favour of grassland sites elsewhere. *Falco columbarius* has been recorded and may breed in the site. *Lagopus lagopus* occurs on the bogs. A full description of this SPA can be read online on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Site Specific Conservation Objectives

The NPWS has not yet prepared any SSCOs for the Lough Forbes SPA; however, the specific objectives of other SPAs with the similar qualifying interests were consulted. In general, for all Annex I bird species within an SPA, the main attributes for consideration are population trends and distribution. These targets are summarised below.

Parameter	Attribute	Measure	Target
Population	Population trend	Percentage change as per population trend assessment using water bird count data collected through the Irish Wetland Bird Survey and other surveys.	Long term population trend stable or increasing
Range	Distribution	Number and range of areas used by water birds as determined by regular low tide and other water bird surveys	No significant decrease in the range, timing or intensity of use of areas by the QI, other than that occurring from natural patterns of variation

Table 3 – Conservation Objectives of the Conservation Interests of the SPA (Species)

Potential Effects upon the QIS of the Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA

The potential significant effects of the proposed development at Abbeycartron / Templemichael on the Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA have been considered. There is only one QI for this SPA, i.e., the Greenland White-Fronted goose. This species has not been recorded from the SPA since 1990 / 1991. The proposed development will not give rise to significant effects upon this species, or any other non-QI bird species that regularly use the lands within this SPA/

4 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The potential impacts of the proposed development upon the Lough Forbes Complex SPA and the Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA 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 amenity works in the Mall Complex, Longford will have no significant effects upon the designated sites identified, in particular the sites that are downstream, i.e., Lough Forbes SAC and the Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA. There are no individual elements of the proposed works that are likely to give rise to significant negative effects on these aforementioned sites. The application site is 6km upstream of these sites, however no significant effects on the QIs of these sites are anticipated as the QIs of these SACs/SPAs are all upstream of the confluence of the River Camlin with Lough Forbes and the River Shannon.

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 development 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 development 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 5 Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the application site. The closest site is Brown Bog SAC which is 3.4km west of the site. The Lough Forbes Complex SAC / Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA is 5.1km west and ~6km downstream of the application site. In this instance, this distance is sufficient to ensure that significant effects upon these sites do 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: There will be no emissions from the proposed works into any Natura 2000 site. There will be no hydrological or atmospheric emissions from the proposed development that could give rise to significant effects upon the QIs of the Lough Forbes Complex SAC / Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA or any other designated site. 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.

The works within the Mall Complex will be sufficiently removed from the River Camlin (in excess of 20m) to ensure that run-off into the River Camlin will not arise. The existing 10m riparian buffer along the River Camlin in the Mall Complex will be retained as it currently is.

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 Longford 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 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 development of the site begins, it should be complete within months.

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

Reduction of habitat area: The proposed development lies 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. The habitat qualifying interests of Lough Forbes SAC include:

- Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition-type vegetation
- Active raised bogs
- Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration
- Depressions on peat substrates
- Alluvial woodlands

None of these habitats occur within or adjacent to the application site. The proposed development will have no impacts upon any of the habitat qualifying interests of the Lough Forbes SAC.

Disturbance to key species: There will be no direct disturbance to any species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive or Annex II of the Habitats Directive. There will be no reduction in water quality in any designated site arising from the proposed development, therefore any indirect impacts upon listed species will be avoided. There will no loss of habitat associated with the protected bird species of the

Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA.

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

Reduction in species density: There will be no reduction in species density within the SAC and SPA.

Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.): There will be no negative impacts upon surface or ground water quality within the Lough Forbes SAC / Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA. 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	Extension to AstroTurf Pitch, New Walking Loop, Additional Floodlighting, Extension of Carpark and New Fitness Studio at the Mall Complex, Longford.
Name and location of Natura 2000 site	There are 5 Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the application site. The closest site is Brown Bog SAC which is 4km west. The Lough Forbes Complex SAC / Ballykenny-Fisherstown SPA is 3.4km west and ~6km downstream of the application site.
Description of project	A Part 8 Development for Longford County Council
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	Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening
Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed	Full results included

5 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION

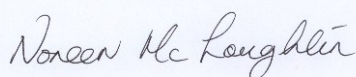
In accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the relevant case law, established best practice and the precautionary principle, this AA Screening Report has examined the details of the project in relation to the relevant Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the application site.

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)