



**PROVISION OF 7 No. UNITS
AT
GRANARD
COUNTY LONGFORD**

SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

July 2024

Longford County Council,
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LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL**SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT****CONTENTS**

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1	AUTHOR'S QUALIFICATION AND EXPERTISE	1
1.2	REGULATORY CONTEXT	1
1.3	THE STAGES IN AN APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT	3
1.4	SCREENING METHODOLOGY	3
2.	PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	4
2.1	THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	4
2.2	PROJECT SITE DESCRIPTION.....	5
2.3	IS THE PROJECT NECESSARY FOR THE CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT OF EUROPEAN SITES.....	8
3.	THE PROJECT & EUROPEAN SITE BASELINE.....	8
3.1	IDENTIFICATION OF EUROPEAN SITES.....	8
4.	SCREENING ASSESSMENT	14
4.1	CUMULATIVE IMPACTS	14
5.	CONCLUSION	15
6.	REFERENCES.....	15

APPENDIX A: DRAWINGS

Drawing SL01: Existing Site Survey

Drawing 5201: Site Location Map

Drawing 5202: Proposed Site layout

Drawing 5203: Proposed Site layout and boundary treatments

Drawing 5204: Proposed Site elevations

Drawing 5205: Proposed 3D Site Overview

Drawing 5206: House type 2 bedroom, 2 storey dwellings

Drawing 5209: Access Road Sight Lines

Drawing 5210: Site Sections

Drawing 5211: Proposed Site Services Layout

1. INTRODUCTION

Jennings O'Donovan & Partners Limited have been commissioned by Longford County Council to carry out a Stage I Appropriate Assessment Screening under Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive) for the proposed 6 No. Units at Granard, County Longford hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development'.

This Screening Report for Appropriate Assessment forms Stage 1 of the Habitats Directive Assessment process and is being undertaken in order to comply with the requirements of the Habitats Directive Article 6(3). The function of this Screening Report is to identify the potential for the project to result in likely significant effects to European Sites and to provide information so that the competent authority can determine whether a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required for the project.

1.1 AUTHOR'S QUALIFICATION AND EXPERTISE

This Stage I Appropriate Assessment Screening has been prepared by Sarah Jones and Sarah Moore of Jennings O'Donovan & Partners Limited.

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1.2 REGULATORY CONTEXT

Under Section 177U (1) of the Planning Acts, a Screening for AA of the Proposed Development shall be carried out by the competent authority (in this case, Longford County Council) to assess in view of best scientific knowledge, if that Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect(s) on any European sites.

Collectively, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are referred to as the Natura 2000 Sites. The legal basis on which SACs are selected and designated is the EU Habitats Directive, 92/43/EEC transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), as amended. The designation features of

SACs are referred to as Qualifying Interests (QI) and include both species (excluding birds) and habitats. Similarly, Special Protection Areas (SPA's) are legislated in the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC. The designation features of SPAs are referred to as Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) which comprise bird species as well as wetland bird habitats.

In general terms, SACs and SPAs are considered to be of exceptional importance in terms of rare, endangered or vulnerable habitats and species within the European Community.

Article 6, paragraph 3 of the Habitats Directive states that:

“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”.

The statutory agency responsible for the European sites is the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

This report has been prepared in accordance with current guideline documents:

- Assessment of plans and projects significantly effecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2001)
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (DEHLG 2009, Revised February 2010)
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG, 2009, revised 2010)
- OPR Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, March 2021, Office of the Planning Regulator
- Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, (EC, 2000a)
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No.477 of 2011).
- Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats. Version EUR 28. European Commission (EC, 2013).
- EU Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC (EC, 2007)
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2018)
- Strict Protection of Animal Species, NPWS, 2021

The following European Court and Irish High Court rulings have been considered:

- C-127/02 Waddenzee v Staatssecretaris
- C-258/11 Sweetman v An Bord Pleanála
- C-512/12 Briels

- C-387/12 & C388/15 Orleans and others v Vlaams Gewest
- C-142/15 Moorbug
- C-323/17 People Over Wind and Peter Sweetman v Coillte
- C-162/17 Grace and Sweetman
- C-883/18 Holohan and others v An Bord Pleanála
- IEHC 84 (2019) - Kelly v An Bord Pleanála

Relevant plans from national to local scales are critical to inform a robust assessment of in-combination impacts; these are listed below:

- National Biodiversity Action Plan, for the period 2017-2021
- River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021
- Longford County Development Plan 2021 – 2027

1.3 THE STAGES IN AN APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

There are 4 stages in an Appropriate Assessment as outlined in the European Commission Guidance document (2001). The following is a brief summary of these steps:

Stage 1 - Screening: This stage examines the likely effects of a project either alone or in- combination with other projects upon a European site and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these effects will not be significant.

Stage 2 - Appropriate Assessment: In this stage, the impact of the project on the integrity of the European site is considered, with respect to the conservation objectives of the site and to its structure and function.

Stage 3 - Assessment of Alternative Solutions: Should the Appropriate Assessment determine that adverse impacts are likely upon the European site, this stage examines alternative ways of implementing the project that, where possible, avoid these adverse impacts.

Stage 4 - Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain: Where imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) exist, an assessment to consider whether compensatory measures will or will not effectively offset the damage to the European site will be necessary.

As part of this Screening for Appropriate Assessment, a desk-based study of the European site within the zone of influence (Zol) of the Proposed Development is required.

1.4 SCREENING METHODOLOGY

This Screening Report has been prepared in order to comply with the legislative requirements outlined in Section 1.1 above and aims to establish whether or not the proposed project, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, would be likely to have significant effects on European Sites in view of best scientific knowledge and the Site's conservation objectives. In this context "likely" refers to the presence of doubt with regard to the absence of significant effects (ECJ case C-127/02) and "significant" means not trivial or inconsequential but an effect that has the potential to undermine the site's conservation objectives (ECJ case C-127/02). In other words, any effect that compromises the functioning and

viability of a site and interferes with achieving the conservation objectives for the site would constitute a significant effect. In the event that land use activities result in effects that do not have the potential to compromise the conservation objectives of a European Site, and that the judgement of such an effect has been made in the absence of reasonable scientific doubt, then such an effect is considered to be representative of a de minimise effect and can be screened out for the need for Appropriate Assessment. This approach is supported by ECJ Case C/258/11 which states that:

“the requirement that the effect in question be ‘significant’ exists in order to lay down a de minimis threshold. Plans or projects that have no appreciable effect on a European site are thereby excluded. If all plans or projects capable of having any effect whatsoever on the site were to be caught by Article 6(3), activities on or near the site would risk being impossible by reason of legislative overkill”.

The nature of the likely interactions between the project and the integrity of a European Site will depend upon the sensitivity of the European Site's qualifying features to potential impacts arising from the project; the current conservation status of the European Site and its qualifying features; and any likely changes to key environmental indicators (e.g. water quality) that underpin the conservation status of European Sites and their qualifying features, in-combination with other plans and projects.

The European Commission (2018) Guidelines outline the stages involved in undertaking a Screening Assessment of a project that has the potential to have likely significant effects on European Sites. The methodology adopted for this Screening Assessment is informed by these guidelines and was undertaken in the following steps:

1. Define the project and determine whether it is directly connected with or necessary for the conservation management of European Sites
2. Identify other plans or projects that, in-combination with the project, have the potential to effect European Sites
3. Assess whether or not the project is likely to have significant effects on European Sites in the view of its conservation objectives.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

It is proposed to construct a new housing development of 7 no. houses with associated services, access roads and car parking at the proposed site. The site is currently a greenfield site. The proposed construction is envisaged to consist of conventional foundations and pavement make up, with some local excavations for services and plant.

The proposal is for a residential development on a net site area of c. 0.345 ha. The proposal consists of the following:

- Construction of 5 no. 2 bedroom, 2 storey dwellings, & 2 no. 3 bedroom 2 Storey dwellings.
- All associated site development works including landscaping, boundary treatments, public lighting, site services, drainage works and all associated infrastructure.

All units will have a nap plaster and grey brick finish with a Zinc Porch. Windows and doors will be dark grey in colour, single opening windows will be sash. All units will include heat pumps with underfloor heating to ground floors and radiators to first floors.

Key construction activities will include;

Stripping topsoil

Placing foundations

Building works

Boundary erection

Connection to existing services

Hard surfaces and roads

Finishes

Landscaping

The site is located to the rear of an existing housing development 'Cnoc na Greine', which is approximately 0.345 Hectares, is in the ownership of Longford County Council. The Development will be accessed via the existing road to the Cnoc na Greine housing development.

The layout of the development was designed using best practice principles to enhance the durability and function of the site, while minimising its visual intrusion where possible.

2.2 PROJECT SITE DESCRIPTION

The Proposed Development (0.345 hectares) is located in the townland of Carragh, approximately 800m from the town centre of Granard, County Longford and 500m from National Road N55 (**Figure 2.1**).

The site already has planning permission in place under planning reference PL19/193 to build 3 no. 3-bedroom and 1 no. 2-bedroom houses. Planning permission was originally sought for 6 no. houses, however 4 no. were granted due to a requirement to maintain an 18m buffer zone from the edge of the future Relief Road and the nearest houses. The current plans incorporate a redesign to allow for the construction of 8 no. dwellings within the previously approved footprint.

The site is zoned for residential development in the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, and Granard is defined, as a self-sustaining growth town;

"Granard is a Key Employment Centre with a regional element acting as an important driver for local economies in the area, with well-established economic, administrative and social functions. The town performs an important retail, residential, service and amenity functions for local rural hinterlands and supports the principal town of Longford."

The site is currently a vacant space between developments and contains grass and scrub growth. The site is relatively flat ranging from 132m in the north to 133m elevation in the south.

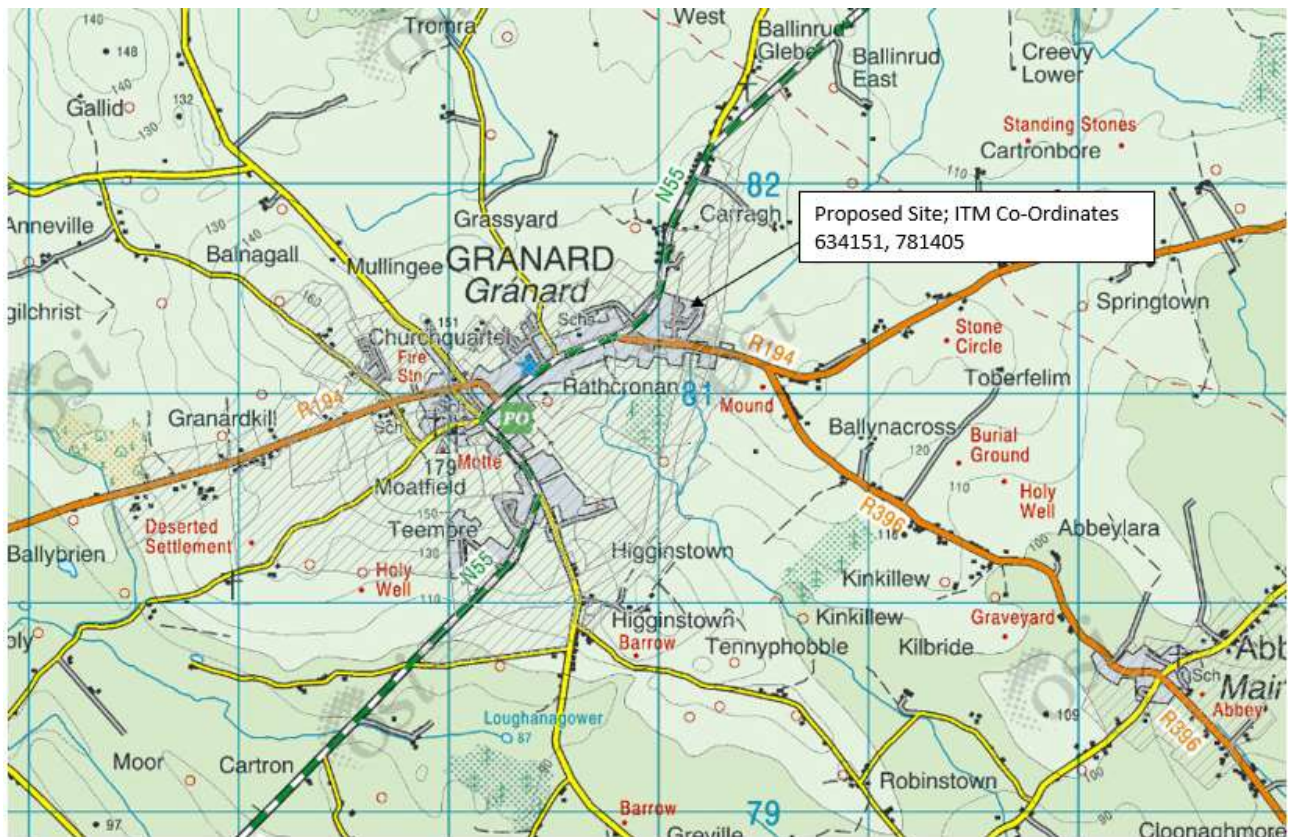


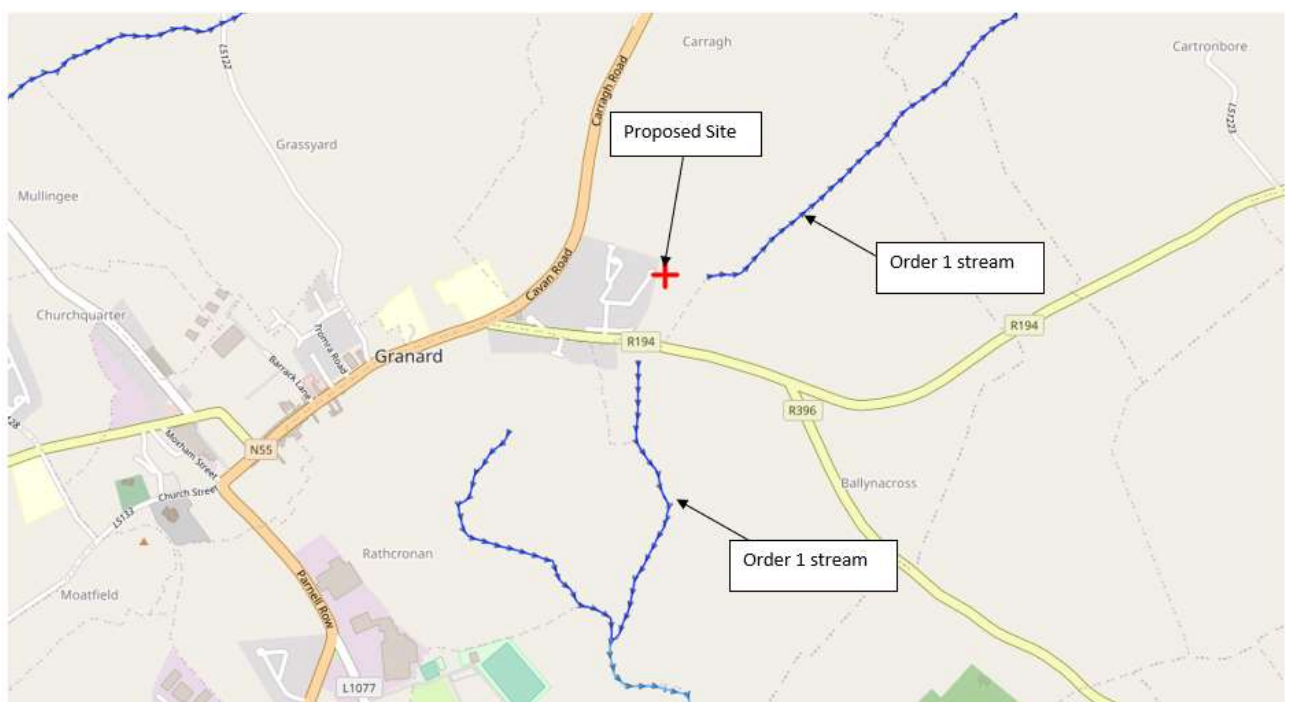
Figure 2.1 Location of the Proposed Development Site



Figure 2.2 Site location

To the east of the development is a housing development of 30 no. dwelling houses, planning application no 08252, permitted in 2008. A naturally occurring drainage ditch lies perpendicular to this housing development, 0.8km from the Site, both are shown in **Figure 2.2**.

The site overlies bedrock which is classified as a '*Poor Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive except for Local Zones*'. The groundwater vulnerability at the site is classified as 'High'. Currently, the groundwater in the area has no significant underlying pressures, including waste abstraction, agriculture, anthropogenic, aquaculture, atmospheric, extractive industry, hydro morphology, invasive species, urban runoff or otherwise (EPA Water Maps, accessed July 11th, 2024).



Office of Public Works (OPW) website and the CFRAM study were accessed (February 2024) to determine flood areas within and near the Project. **Figure 2.4** shows the probability of flooding at and in the vicinity of the Project, along with records of past flood events. The mapping service shows that the Proposed Development site is well outside of any areas of flooding.

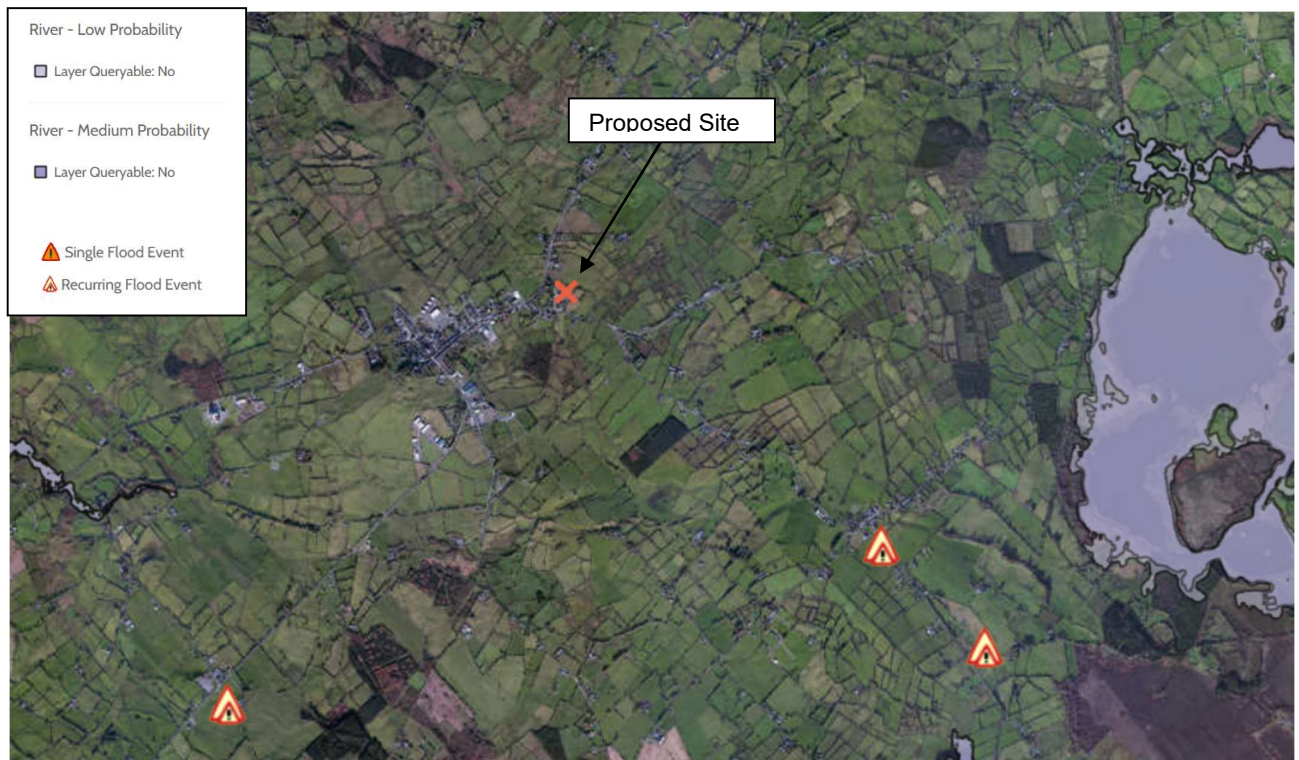


Figure 2.4 Flooding probability map of the surrounding area

Given the absence of watercourses on the site and the site being outside of areas likely to flood there is no hydrological impact pathway connecting the project site to European Sites in the surrounding area.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

The quaternary sediments at the site of the Project are classified as 'Till derived from Lower Palaeozoic sandstones and shales'.

The Proposed Development is located within the Slieve Glah Formation. This bedrock formation is described by the Geological Survey of Ireland as 'Siltstone, mudstone & thin turbidite'. The EPA Maps indicate that the subsoil onsite is characterised as Sandstone and shale till (Lower Paleozoic). The soil type found onsite is classified as 'well-drained mineral soils'. Corine 2018 denotes this area as Agricultural Areas.

2.3 IS THE PROJECT NECESSARY FOR THE CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT OF EUROPEAN SITES

The project is not directly connected with or necessary for the future conservation management of any European Sites.

3. THE PROJECT & EUROPEAN SITE BASELINE

3.1 IDENTIFICATION OF EUROPEAN SITES

Current guidance informing the approach to screening for Appropriate Assessment defines the zone of influence of a Proposed Development as the geographical area over which it could affect the receiving

environment in a way that could have significant effects on the Qualifying Interests of a European site. It is recommended that this is established on a case-by-case basis using the Source-Pathway-Receptor (SPR) framework.

Given that the project is very small in scale and duration it is considered that only those European Sites occurring in the immediate vicinity of the project will be located within its potential zone of influence.

As can be seen on **Figure 3.1**, two European sites are located within the area surrounding the project site. These are;

- Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough Special Protection Area:
- Derragh Bog Special Area of Conservation:

The nearest point of the Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA is 3.88km to the east, Derragh Bog SAC is 4.78km southeast.

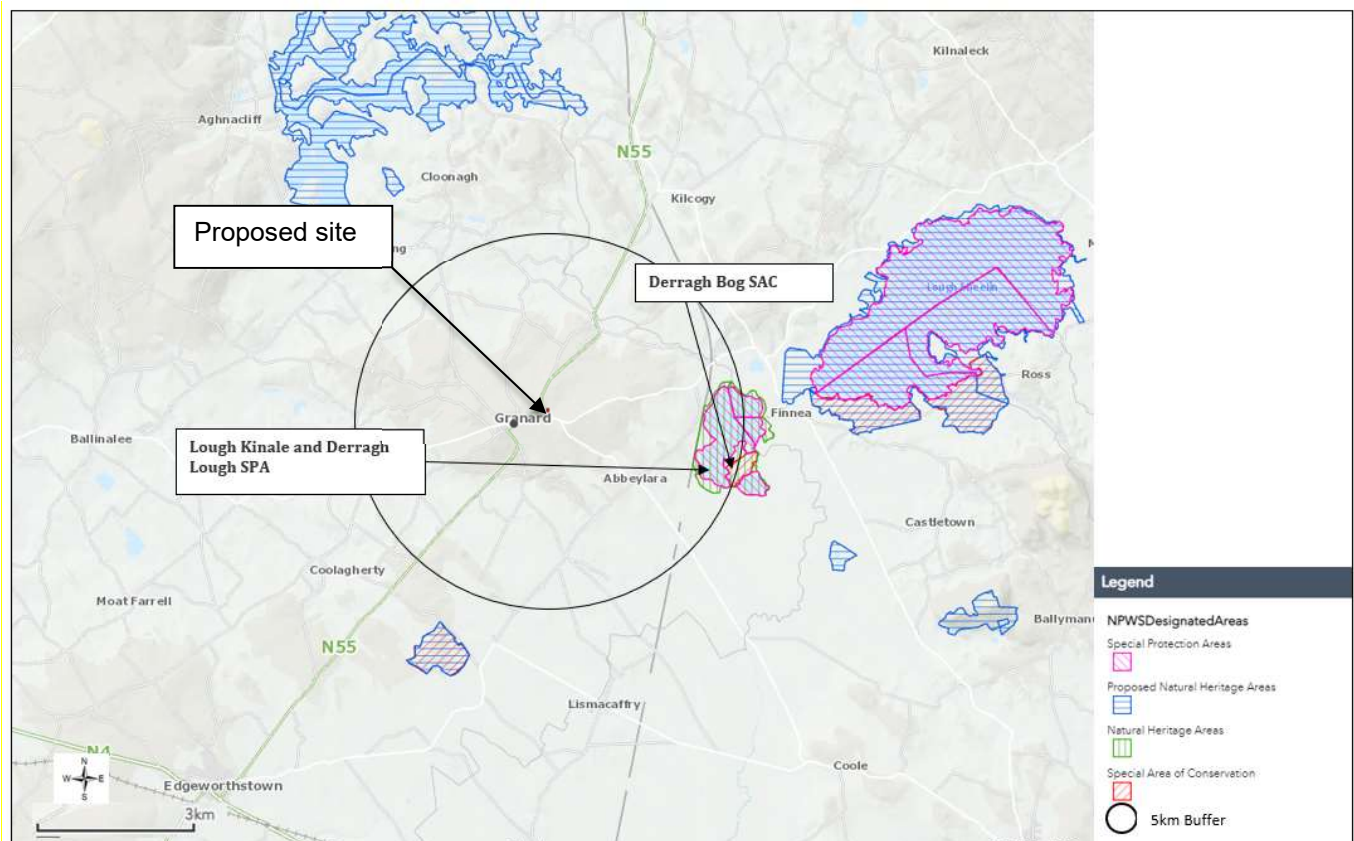


Figure 3.1 European sites within 5km buffer of Proposed Development

3.1.1 Overview of Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough Special Protection Area

Lough Kinale is a relatively small lake that is situated immediately downstream of Lough Sheelin, a main tributary of the River Shannon. The trophic status of the lake has varied greatly since the 1970s due to pollution. Between 1998-2000 it was classified as a highly eutrophic system. The lake was formerly an important Trout fishery. Despite very variable water quality in recent decades, Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough remain an important site for wintering waterfowl, especially diving duck.

Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough is an important site for wintering waterfowl, especially diving duck. It supports nationally important populations of two species; Pochard (951) and Tufted Duck (449).

The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands and, as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of Special Conservation Interest for the following species:

- Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061]
- Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) [A059]
- Wetland & Waterbirds [A999]

3.1.2 Overview of Derragh Bog SAC

Derragh Bog SAC is a site of conservation significance comprising raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. It is a small raised bog of 37.62 ha (8.33 ha of high bog, 20.29 ha of open cutover and 9 ha of birch woodland on cutover grading into fen and swamp on the lake shores). 80% of the original bog has been used for peat harvesting to varying extents. Due to its small size, the remaining high bog cannot rewet sufficiently to support Active Raised Bog.

This bog is an example of a floodplain raised bog which borders two lakes, Lough Kinale to the west and Derragh Lough to the south, the River Inny to the east and wet agricultural grassland to the north. To the west and south there is a full transition from high bog to cutover bog to semi-natural birch woodland, fen and swamp to Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough. This Coillte owned site was never afforested and the main conservation problem for the bog was drying out due to drainage associated with peat cutting in the past and possibly the arterial drainage of the River Inny. The drainage also has facilitated the spread of birch and the invasive conifer Lodgepole Pine onto the bog. However, drain blocking projects since 2013 have raised water levels and the cutover bog is rewetting and vegetation is improving.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

- [7110] Active Raised Bog*
- [7120] Degraded Raised Bog

Table 3.1 shows the qualifying interests for the two sites.

European Site	Qualifying Habitats	Qualifying Species	Species of Conservation Interest (SCI)
Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA	Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	NA	Pochard (<i>Aythya ferina</i>) [A059] Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) [A061]

European Site	Qualifying Habitats	Qualifying Species	Species of Conservation Interest (SCI)
Derragh Bog SAC	Active Raised Bog [7110] Degraded Raised Bog [7120]	Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	

**Table
3.1****European Sites within 5km to the Proposed Development**

3.1.3 Documented Threats & Pressures to European Sites

The threats and pressures to the Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA and Derragh Bog SAC have been documented by the NPWS in the latest Natura 2000 Standard Data Return form for these SPAs and SAC (dated October 2020). Table 5.1 lists these threats and pressures.

Table 3.2: Threats and Pressures to European Sites

Site	Threat Code	Threat	Threat Rank
Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA	F02.03	Leisure fishing	Medium
Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA	A05.01	Animal breeding	Medium
Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA	A08	Fertilisation	High
Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA	F03.01	Hunting	Medium
Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA	B	Sylviculture, forestry	Medium
Derragh Bog SAC	I02	Problematic native species	Low
Derragh Bog SAC	J02.15	Other human induced changes in hydraulic conditions	Low
Derragh Bog SAC	J01.01	burning down	Low
Derragh Bog SAC	I01	Invasive non-native species	Low

3.1.4 Conservation Objectives for European Sites within the zone of influence of the Strategy

Generic Conservation Objectives have been published for all European Sites occurring in Ireland.

The generic Conservation Objectives for SACs and SPAs and their features of interest are:

To maintain the features of interest, for which the SAC/SPA has been designated, at favourable conservation status.

Favourable Conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- Its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are 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; and
- The conservation status of its typical species is “favorable”.

Favorable 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; and
- There is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

In addition to the published generic Conservation Objectives for all European Sites, Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) have been published for a number of individual European Sites across Ireland. These SSCOs identify the attributes that underpin the conservation status of qualifying features of interest/special conservation interests and provide targets for ensuring that their favourable status is maintained and/or restored.

The Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA has the following conservation objectives;

“To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA”

and

“To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat at Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA as a resource for the regularly-occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise it.”

The Derragh Bog SAC has the following conservation objectives;

“To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected”

A source-pathway-receptor (SPR) model was used to assess if any of the European Sites located within 5km of the proposed development were actually within the Zone of Influence (Zoi) for impacts from the Proposed Development. This assessment is outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 SPR assessment of the European Sites located with 5km of the Proposed Development

European Site	Distance from Proposed Development Site	Hydrological Pathway	Do Qualifying Habitats occur within the Zoi of the Project	Does the project have the potential to interact with Qualifying Species	Is the European Site within the Project Zone of Influence
Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA	3.88km	No. There is no hydrological link between the Proposed Development and this SPA.	No. There is no hydrological pathway.	No. The distance between the proposed works and this SPA and no hydrological link means there is no potential for the proposed works to impact the SCI of this SPA. The Proposed Development site does not contain the habitats to support the two SCI. Therefore, there is no potential for the proposed works to negatively impact the SCI.	No. This SPA is not located within the zone of influence of the project.

European Site	Distance from Proposed Development Site	Hydrological Pathway	Do Qualifying Habitats occur within the Zol of the Project	Does the project have the potential to interact with Qualifying Species	Is the European Site within the Project Zone of Influence
Derragh Bog SAC	4.78km	No. There is no hydrological link between the Proposed Development and this SAC	No. There is no hydrological pathway.	<p>No. The distance between the proposed works and this SAC and no hydrological link means there is no potential for the proposed works to impact the qualifying species (grey seal) of this SAC.</p> <p>The Proposed Development site does not contain the qualifying habitats of this SAC.</p> <p>Therefore, there is no potential for the proposed works to negatively impact the QI of this SAC.</p>	No. This SAC is not located within the zone of influence of the project.

4. SCREENING ASSESSMENT

This section will examine the likelihood of significant effects on European Sites within the project's Zol and the possibility that the project alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, would undermine the conservation objectives of the European Sites.

There are two European Sites within 5km of the Proposed Development. However, none of these sites are within the Zol of the Proposed Development.

4.1 CUMUMLATIVE IMPACTS

As part of Stage 1 Screening, in addition to the Project, other relevant projects and plans which may interact with the proposal must also be considered. This step aims to identify at this early stage any possible significant effects on the European Sites from the Project in-combination or cumulatively with other plans and projects. This includes an assessment of those plans and projects which would have the potential to interact or impact on any designated European Site, resulting in a cumulative or in-combination effect, either temporally or spatially/geographically, with respect to the sensitive qualifying interests or conservation objectives of such designations.

The Longford County Council on-line planning application portal was used to search planning applications close to the Project (July 2024). A five-year search timeframe was assessed; Retention,

refused and withdrawn planning applications were excluded. **Table 4.1** shows the planning applications in close proximity to the Project (circa 1000m).

Table 4.3: Planning applications in close proximity to the Project.

Planning Reference	Description of Development	Site Address	Decision Date	Distance from Site
22188	the proposed construction of a single storey type extension to the rear of an existing single storey type dwelling house together with the proposed construction of a domestic garage and all ancillary site works.	Granard, Co Longford	01/11/2022	approx. 230m from the project site
2360092	Proposed alterations, renovations & extension to existing two storey type dwelling house together with the proposed construction of a pitched roof over existing detached garage servicing the above mentioned dwelling house and all ancillary works	Carragh, Granard, Co. Longford, N39 Y1F6	02/11/2023	approx. 222m from the project site

Given the scale, nature and limited duration of the proposed works themselves, there is no potential for the Project to give rise to significant effects 'alone'; and therefore, no potential for the scheme to interact with any other project to contribute to cumulative impacts on any European Site.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be objectively concluded that there are not likely to be significant effects on any European Site as a result of the proposed works at Carragh, Granard Co. Longford. Therefore, an Appropriate Assessment is not required.

6. REFERENCES

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