

Appropriate Assessment Screening

Lime Quarry Theatre, Lanesborough, Co Longford

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1. Introduction

This report comprises information in support of screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) in line with the requirements of Article 6[3] of the EU Habitats Directive (EC 92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora; the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010; and the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended, for the development of an outdoor amphitheatre in a disused limestone quarry in Lanesborough, Co. Longford.

This screening exercise aims to determine whether the proposed works have the potential to significantly impact upon the conservation objectives and overall integrity of any Natura 2000 sites. This assessment is based upon a desk study and field work carried out by suitably qualified ecologists. Also included is a general assessment of the ecological status of the site and the potential impacts of the proposed works on the ecology of the surrounding area, including Designated Sites.

The following definitions are used for the terms "impact" and "effect":

Impact – Actions resulting in changes to an ecological feature, e.g., the construction activities of a development removing a hedgerow.

Effect – Outcome to an ecological feature from an impact, e.g., the effects on an animal population from loss of a hedgerow.

The Competent Authority is obliged to examine the likely significant effects individually or in combination, of the proposed development on European Designated Sites in light of their specific Qualifying Interests (QIs) and Conservation Objectives (COs). If AA screening determines that there is likely to be significant effects on one or more of these sites, or the impacts are uncertain, then full AA must be carried out for the proposed development, including the compilation of a Natura Impact Statement to inform the decision making.

For the purposes of this assessment, a "significant effect" is:

"...an effect that either supports or undermines biodiversity conservation objectives for 'important ecological features' ... or for biodiversity in general. Conservation objectives may be specific (e.g. for a designated site) or broad (e.g. national/local nature conservation policy) or more wide-ranging (enhancement of biodiversity).

Effects can be considered significant at a wide range of scales from international to local. A significant effect is an effect that is sufficiently important to require assessment and reporting so that the decision

maker is adequately informed of the environmental consequences of permitting a project.

In broad terms, significant effects encompass impacts on structure and function of defined sites, habitats or ecosystems and the conservation status of habitats and species (including extent, abundance and distribution)."

- CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (2018)

Sections 4 and 5 of the report comprises the AA Screening that specifically focuses on the potential for impacts on Natura 2000 sites deemed to be at risk from the proposed development.

2. Background to Screening for Appropriate Assessment

2.1. European Designated Sites

Sites designated for the conservation of nature in Ireland include:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs);
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and;
- Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)

SPAs and SACs form the Natura 2000 network of sites. It is these sites that are of relevance to the screening process for this Appropriate Assessment Screening.

SPAs and SACs are prime wildlife conservation areas in the country, considered to be important on a European as well as Irish level. SPAs and SACs are designated under EU Habitats Directive, transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), as amended.

Natural Heritage Area (NHA) is the basic designation for wildlife in Ireland. These are areas considered important for their habitats or species of plants and animals whose habitat requires protection and are protected by the Wildlife (Amendment) Act of 2000.

All European Designated Sites (henceforth simply referred to as "Designated Sites") that are connected to the proposed development were considered during the desktop study in order to assess the potential for significant effects upon their QIs and COs. This stage of the process is used to determine whether any of the Designated Sites can be regarded as not being relevant to the process of Appropriate Assessment of the project, having no potential to be significantly affected.

2.2. Legislative Context

The methodology for this screening statement is clearly set out in a document prepared for the Environment DG of the European Commission entitled 'Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6 paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC' (Oxford Brookes University, 2001). This report and contributory fieldwork were carried out in accordance with guidelines given by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009, amended February 2010).

The assessment process is given in Articles 6[3] and 6[4] of the Habitats Directive and is commonly referred to as "Appropriate Assessment" or AA.

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive sets out provisions which govern the conservation and management of Natura 2000 sites. Article 6[3] and 6[4] of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites (Annex 1.1). Article 6[3] establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment:

"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implication 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] continues:

"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 social or economic nature, the Member State 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.

It is the responsibility of the proponent of the plan or project to provide the relevant information (ecological surveys, research, analysis etc.) for submission to the 'competent national authority'. If satisfied that the information is complete and objective, the competent authority will use this information to screen the project, i.e. to determine if an AA is required and to carry out the AA, if one is deemed necessary. The competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned."

The appropriate assessment process has four stages. Each stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required. If, for example, the conclusions at the end of Stage One are that there will be no significant impacts on the Natura 2000 site, there is no requirement to proceed further. The four stages are:

- 1. Screening to determine if an appropriate assessment is required;
- 2. Appropriate Assessment;
- 3. Consideration of alternative solutions, and;
- 4. Imperative reasons of overriding public interest/derogation.

Stage 1: Screening for AA

This report provides a stage one Screening for Appropriate Assessment. It aims to establish whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of Designated Sites; or in view of best scientific knowledge, if the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a Designated Site. This is done by examining the proposed plan or project and the COs of any Designated Sites that might potentially be affected.

The study is based on a preliminary impact assessment using both publicly available data and data collected during site surveys. This is followed by a determination of whether there is a risk that the effects identified could significantly impact any Natura 2000 sites, and if so an Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required. The need to apply the precautionary principle in making any key decisions in relation to the tests of AA has been confirmed by European Court of Justice case law. Therefore, where significant effects are likely, possible or uncertain at screening stage, a stage two AA will be required.

3. Methodology

3.1. Desk Study

A desktop study was carried out as part of this screening process to gain an understanding of the surrounding human and natural environments. This included a review of available data from a range of sources on the site and its immediate environs.

3.2. Data Used to carry out the Assessment

The following sources of data were employed:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Appropriate Assessment Tool;
- EPA Maps (to identify watercourses, hydrology and Natura 2000 site boundaries);
- NPWS protected species database and online mapping;
- The Geological Survey of Ireland hydrological and lidar data and map viewer;
- The National Biodiversity Data Centre archives;
- Inland Fisheries Ireland, and;
- An Bord Pleanála's online database

3.3. SPR Model

This assessment was carried out using the source-pathway-receptor (SPR) approach, a standard tool in environmental assessment. The SPR concept in ecological impact assessment relates to the idea that for the risk of an impact to occur, a source is needed (e.g. a development site); an environmental receptor is present (a lake); and finally there must a pathway between the source and the receptor (a watercourse linking the development site to the lake). Even though there might be a risk of an impact occurring, it does not necessarily mean that it will occur, and in the event that it does occur, it may not have significant effects on the receiving environment. Identification of a risk means that there is a possibility of ecological or environmental damage occurring, with the level and significance of the impact depending upon the nature and exposure to the risk and the characteristics of the receivor.

In this instance, the most relevant receptors are any relevant Natura 2000 sites with connectivity of the proposed works. These were considered during the desktop study stage of this screening assessment in order to assess the potential for significant effects upon their QIs and COs.

3.4. Field Survey

The field survey was carried out on 2nd March 2022. Baseline ecological conditions were assessed. Habitats were classified according to A Guide to Habitats in Ireland (Fossitt, 2000). Where applicable, the habitat types and species usage were recorded (Smith et al. 2011; Scannell and Synnott, 1987; Wyse Jackson et al. 2016). Habitats were classified and dominant plant species noted according to the guidelines given by the JNCC (2010) with reference to best practice guidance for habitat survey and mapping (Smith et al., 2011) and Census Catalogue of the Flora of Ireland (Scannell & Synnott, 1987).

3.5. Stakeholder Consultations

Table 1 Summary of stakeholder consultations

Stakeholder	Nature of Consultation	Outcome
De Blacam and	Telephone and email consultation: Scope	
Meagher	and scale of project discussed.	This report generated and submitted
Architects (the	Necessity for an Appropriate Assessment	to Longford County Council.
client)	Screening Report agreed.	
Longford County Council	Discussion of original draft of screening report, amendments and additions requested	This report generated and submitted to Longford County Council.
Brian Burke (BirdWatch Ireland)	Discussion of project and request for I-WeBS data to inform the assessment of the impact of disturbance on the SCI species for which Lough Ree SPA is designated	Provision of data for the last 5 years
Ciaran Kearney (Allegro Acoustics)	Discussion of acoustic impact of project on the surrounding environment and request for points additional to the original acoustic survey to be modelled to inform the NIS	

4. Screening of Designated Sites

4.1. Site Location

The project is proposed to take place on an area of land of approximately 6200m² on the outskirts of Lanesborough, within an old quarry site in an area of mixed woodland on the shore of Lough Ree (Fig. 3). The surrounding landscape to the north and west is a mixture of semi-rural, residential, and agricultural land; to the south lies an area of deciduous woodland composed mostly of ash and hazel. The quarry itself is predominately bare ground with some recolonisation of vegetation; part of the floor of the quarry holds water and a shallow pond has formed. The rock wall of the quarry to the east is heavily vegetated with a mixture of ivy, bramble, and some small ash trees.

The works area lies within the Upper Shannon 26E catchment, Shannon (Upper)_SC_090 sub-catchment.



Figure 1 Overview of the works area

4.2. Receiving Environment

A description of the habitats of significant ecological value that were observed within the immediate surroundings of the works area are listed below, with descriptions adapted from "A Guide to Habitats in Ireland" by Julie A. Fossitt, 2000.

A description of the habitats of significant ecological value that were observed within the immediate surroundings of the works area are listed below and depicted in Figure 1.

The works area is an old quarry site which is in various stages of recolonisation, ranging from bare ground and grassland to scrub and woodland, with some mature trees around the perimeter of the site. See Fig. 2 for habitat map of the area. See Appendix I for photographs of the site.

The westernmost edge of the works area, away from the back wall of the quarry is an area of bare ground **ED2** with some piles of gravel and compost to the south. To the north of this is an area of **GS1** neutral/calcareous grassland on shallow soil, with vetch *Vicia sativa*, yarrow *Acillea millefolium*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and black knapweed *Centaurea nigra* all present. This habitat forms a mosaic throughout the site with ED3 recolonising bare ground, tending towards **WS1** scrub which is with cononeaster *Cotoneaster* sp., blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and ash saplings *Fraxinus excelsior* present. This tends towards **WS1** scrub dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and then a treeline **WL2** of mature ash trees which borders the northern edge of the works area.

Within the quarry, the quarry walls are composed of **ER2** exposed calcareous rock with extensive bramble scrub at the base of the wall in several areas. Also present are numerous mature ash trees growing from both the top and out from the cliff face. Cotoneaster is also present in many locations, and approximately 50% of the rock face is covered with ivy *Hedera* sp. The base of the quarry is a mosaic of **ED2** spoil and bare ground and **ED3** recolonising bare ground. Present are grasses such as cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata*, creeping buttercup, dandelion *Taraxacum vulgaria*, dock *Rumex* sp., creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and ribwort plantain. A portion of the quarry floor to the southeast has become flooded and holds a shallow **FW8** pond. The pond has a small amount of soft rush *Juncus effusus* around the edges. Also present in the shallower areas to the north of the pond is floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans* and some *Phalaris arundinacea*. Other species present at low abundance are water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, yellow flag-iris *Iris pseudacorus* and curled dock *Rumex crispus*.

To the south of the works area the quarry floor gives way to **WS1** scrub, dominated by blackthorn and bramble, with occasional young and semi-mature ash up to 10m in height. Also present is some young and semi-mature willow *Salix* spp. and some occasional gorse *Ulex* sp. Interspersed with the scrub are areas of **ED2** spoil and **ED3** recolonising bare ground where some construction and demolition waste has been dumped in piles. Some non-native species present that probably result from the dumping of waste are cotoneaster, montbretia *Crocosmia* spp. and box *Buxus* spp. Two plants of pendulous *sedge Carex*

pendulosa which may also be horticultural in origin are also present. Ground flora in this part of the quarry includes tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum*, barren strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*, cleavers *Gallium aparine*, herb-robert *Geranium robertianum*, creeping buttercup and creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*.

The above scrub merges to the south into a **WN2** broadleaf woodland composed primarily of ash (up to 18m in height) with an understory of hazel *Corylus avellana* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. Some willow and shrubby cotoneaster are occasional. Ground flora throughout the woodland includes herb-robert, barren strawberry, ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea* and wood avens *Geum urbanum*.



Figure 2 Habitat map of the proposed works area

4.2.1. Surface water

No watercourses are present within the works area. The disused quarry functions like a bowl; surface water tends to collect in the pond in the centre of the area, rather than flow outwards to the wider receiving environment. Lough Ree lies ca50m from the works area; the potential does exist for improperly managed surface water within the works area to enter the lake, although the intervening space is heavily wooded, and no direct pathway exists.

4.2.2. Breeding Birds

All species of wild bird that occur naturally in Ireland are fully protected at all times by the Wildlife Act and relevant amending legislation. Similarly, all birds naturally occurring in the wild state are afforded a measure of protection by the EU Birds Directive, but derogations may reduce protection for specific reasons. As such, any vegetation clearance must be carried out outside of the bird nesting season (March 1st - August 31st).

No dedicated bird survey was carried out as part of this investigation. Should the proposed works require removal of any trees around the perimeter of the works, a pre-construction nesting bird survey is recommended, depending on the timing of works.

4.2.3. Amphibians

The survey took place concurrent with the amphibian spawning period. The pond in the quarry could provide suitable habitat for both breeding common frog *Rana temporaria* and smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*. No sign of either species was found at the time of survey, however.

4.2.4. Invasive Species

The Wildlife Acts, 1976 and 2000, contain a number of provisions relating to invasive non-native species (INNS), covering several sections and subsections of the Acts. It is prohibited, without licence, to plant or otherwise cause to grow in a wild state, in any place in the State, any species of flora, or the flowers, roots, seeds or spores of invasive flora listed on the Third Schedule. Articles 49 and 50 of the aforementioned Acts set out the legal implications associated with alien invasive species and Schedule 3 (the Third Schedule) of the regulations lists non-native species subject to the restrictions of Articles 49 and 50, which make it an offence to plant, disperse, allow dispersal or cause the spread of invasive species.

No 3rd schedule species were noted during the survey. A number of non-native species were observed, but were associated with the dumped spoil and should not require any specific management across the works area, namely cotoneaster *Cotoneaster* sp, montbretia *Crocosmia* sp. and box *Buxus* sp.

4.3. Proposed Works

It is proposed to construct an outdoor amphitheatre in an old quarry site on the east shore of Lough Ree just outside Lanesborough (Fig. 3). The works, with a total footprint of 0.62ha, are expected to include:

- Outdoor amphitheatre comprising **475 seats** in 12 tiered rows.
- Stage with tensile fabric roof covering.
- Sloped landscaping to rear of tiered seating.
- Sound booth.

Ancillary accommodation

- 1 no. 40 foot container for bar and first aid room.
- 1 no. 20 foot container for 'back-stage' accommodation for acts.
- Provision for 8 no. portable toilet cabins.

Site services

- Site lighting.
- Stage lighting and sound system.
- New power supply to the site serving all containers, stage and site lighting.
- Toilets will be portable type with own drainage to be removed off site after events.

Site landscaping

- Gravel finish to paths and new access areas.
- 3m high wire mesh fencing to perimeter.
- New soft landscaping to sloped areas around amphitheatre.
- All associated site development works.

f note is that no additional car parking is proposed (existing parking in the car park in Lanesborough to the north), and that no additional works are proposed to the access pathways leading to the site.



Figure 3 Overview of proposed works

4.4. Works, site characteristics and risks to the environment

The principal risks posed from the project proposal relate to surface water discharge from the site during the construction phase that may contain elevated sediment/nutrient levels impacting on the integrity of Lough Ree immediately to the west of the proposed works area, as well as changes to the landscape immediately adjacent, all of which lies within Lough Ree SAC.

Since the works footprint lies within the boundary of the SAC, there will be direct landscape impacts within the European site. The construction phase of the project poses the risk of disturbance to many of the SCI species for which Lough Ree SPA, 70m to the west, has been designated.

Additionally, the operations phase of the project poses a continuous risk of disturbance, both from the increased human traffic along the margin of the lake towards the project, and from the noise generated by performances taking place.

4.4.1 Acoustic modelling

As part of the preliminary work for this project, acoustic modelling of the works area and surrounds was conducted by Allegro Acoustics (See Kearney, 2022). This work was focused on the built receiving environment and human impacts and concluded that at the receiver locations noise levels resulting from normal operations of the project would not exceed the 55db threshold set out in the EPA guidelines (Fig.

3). It is recommended that this modelling be extended to cover areas at the lake shore and approach to better inform the ecological assessment of the impacts of the project operation.



Figure 4 Receiver locations for acoustic modelling (Source: Allegro Acoustics)

4.5. Nearby Designated Sites

All sites within 15km of the proposed works were initially considered as part of this screening. Following this initial exercise, only two European sites with any reasonable source-pathway-receptor connectivity were considered further, *Lough Ree SAC 000440* and *Lough Ree SPA 004064* (Fig. 5)

4.5.1 Lough Ree SAC

The works area lies entirely within this very large European Site, the third largest lake in Ireland. The main feature of the SAC is the lake itself, but due to its nature as a shallow, glacial lake on Carboniferous limestone, the site encompasses other interesting shoreline, terrestrial and semi-aquatic habitats. Of immediate relevance to the project is a small area of limestone pavement on the lake shore between the works area and the lake, one of the Qualifying Interests of the SAC. See Table 2 for the full list of qualifying

interests of the site, and <u>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/synopsis/SY000440.pdf</u> for a full site synopsis.

Table 2 Qualifying Interests of Lough Ree SAC

Qualifying interest	Natura Code
Natural Eutrophic Lakes	3150
Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland	6210
Active Raised Bog	7110
Degraded Raised Bog	7120
Alkaline Fens	7230
Limestone Pavement	8240
Bog Woodland	91D0
Alluvial Forests	91E0
Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	1355

4.5.2 Lough Ree SPA

Lough Ree is an important site for wintering wildfowl with nationally important populations of species such as Little Grebe, Whooper Swan, Goldeneye, Golden Plover, and Lapwing. Greenland White-fronted Goose has been recorded in some of the flooded margins of the lake. As a breeding site, it supports a nationally important population of Common Tern, and is a traditional breeding site for Black-headed Gull. Of relevance to the project, the woodland around the lake margins is a stronghold for the scarce Garden Warbler. See Table 3 for the full list of SCI species for the site, and <u>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/synopsis/SY004064.pdf</u> for a full site synopsis.

Table 3 Qualifying Interests for Lough Ree SPA

Qualifying interest	Natura Code
Little Grebe (Tachybaptus ruficollis)	A004
Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus)	A038
Wigeon (Anas penelope)	A050
Teal (Anas crecca)	A052
Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos)	A053
Common Scoter (Melanitta nigra)	A065
Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula)	A061
Shoveler (Anas clypeata)	A056
Goldeneye (Bucephala clangula)	A067
Coot (Fulica atra)	A125
Golden Plover (Pluvialis apricaria)	A140
Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus)	A142
Common Tern (Sterna hirundo)	A193
Wetland and Waterbirds	A999



Figure 5 Natura 2000 sites in proximity to the proposed works

5. ARTICLE 6(3) SCREENING ASSESSMENT

This section of the report focuses solely on the potential for the proposed works to impact upon Natura 2000 sites. Section 4.3 of this report identified pathways for direct/indirect impact on two Natura 2000 sites found within the standard 15km radius of the project area – **Lough Ree SAC 000440** and **Lough Ree SPA 004064.** The European Commission has set guidelines for the assessment of a project's potential to impact on a designated site (EC, 2001). The consideration of this project in this context is detailed below.

5.1 Article 6(3) Assessment Criteria

Description of the individual elements of the project likely to give rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 sites

Changes to the landscape within *Lough Ree SAC* during project construction constitute a risk of direct impact on the Natura 2000 site; mobility of sediment associated with groundwork also constitute an indirect risk to the integrity of the lake, although given the flat gradient and the intervening distance between the works area and the lake shore, that risk is considered to be low. Noise disturbance from both **construction and operation** have the potential to impact the qualifying interests of both Natura 2000 sites, particularly given the potential hours of operation of an outdoor theatre venue.

5.1.1 Description of any likely direct, indirect, or secondary impacts of the project on the Natura2000 sites

Any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the proposed works, both alone and in-combination with other plans or projects, on the designated sites by virtue of the following criteria: size and scale, land take, distance from the Natura 2000 site or key feature thereof, resource requirements, emissions, excavation requirements, transportation requirements and duration of construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the works are detailed in the table below (Table 4).

Table 4 Assessment of likely impacts or	n Lough Ree SAC	and Lough Ree SPA
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Assessment of Likely Impacts	
Size and scale	The development takes place within a ca6000m ² area. The scale of the
	development is small.
Landtake	All work takes place entirely within the boundary of Lough Ree SAC;
	while groundworks are projected to be within the footprint of the old
	quarry and adjacent features are to be left untouched, some landscape
	change will occur within the Natura 2000 site.
Distance from Natura 2000	Project is within Lough Ree SAC and 120m from Lough Ree SPA; some
site or key features of the site	features of significance associated with the sites such as an area of
	limestone pavement are within 100m of the works area.
Resource requirements	No materials for construction will be sourced from within any Natura
	2000 site. No water will be abstracted from the site during the
	construction or operation of the site.
Emissions	Without appropriate mitigation, the project has a slight potential to
	emit suspended solids/other construction materials directly and
	indirectly into the lake via surface runoff. Given the works area lies
	within the boundary of the SAC, all emissions to land have the potential
	to damage the integrity of the site. No other emissions to air other than
	those associated with a small construction project area likely, and none
	that will impact on the Natura 2000 site.
Excavation requirements	Some groundwork and landscaping will take place within the boundary
	of Lough Ree SAC
Transportation requirements	No access requirements are necessary for the proposed projects that will
	impact upon any Natura 2000 site.
Duration of construction,	As yet unknown. Owing to the size and scale of the project it is unlikely
operation, decommissioning	to take more than 1 year
Timing of works	As yet unknown
Cumulative or In-combination	A search of Planning Permissions for the area within which the project is
Impacts with other Projects	located did not indicate any plans for projects that are likely to lead to
and Plans	significant cumulative or in-combination impacts to any Natura 2000
	sites.

5.1.2 Description of any Likely Changes to the Natura 2000 sites

Any likely changes to the Natura 2000 sites are described in the table below (Table 5) with reference to the following criteria: reduction of habitat area, disturbance to key species, habitat or species fragmentation, reduction in species density, changes in key indicators of conservation value and climate change.

Table 5 Likely changes to Lough Ree SAC and Lough Ree SPA

Assessment of Likely Changes		
Reduction of habitat area	The works will take place within the boundary of Lough Ree SAC,	
	although no habitat for which the European site is designated will	
	be directly impacted, there exists a potential secondary risk to the	
	habitats within the SAC.	
Disturbance of key species	There is a potential for disturbance of the QI species from the SAC,	
	Otter, and many SCI species from the SPA from both the	
	construction phase and operations phase of the proposed project.	
Habitat or species fragmentation	The work will take place within the boundary of the SAC; however due	
	to the location and scale of the work, no impacts are predicted with	
	regard to habitat or species fragmentation.	
Reduction in species density	No reduction in species density is considered likely within the SAC or	
	SPA as a result of the works.	
Changes in key indicators of	The proposed works have the potential to impact water quality in	
conservation value	the SAC/SPA via the contamination of surface water runoff with	
	suspended solids/mobilized nutrients/other contaminants such as	
	hydrocarbons. Water quality is a key indicator of several QI havitats	
	associated with the European site.	
Climate change	No damage to any Natura 2000 site as a result of or in combination	
	with enhanced climate change is predicted as a result of the proposed	
	development.	

5.1.3 Likelihood of interference with the key relationships that define the structure and functions of the Natura 2000 site as a whole

It is considered that there will be no interference with the key relationships that define the structure and functions of the Natura 2000 site.

5.1.4 Indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects

Indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects are set out below in terms of loss, fragmentation, disruption, disturbance and changes to the key elements of the site (Table 5).

Indicators of Significance	
Loss	Some habitat, although not of qualifying importance, will be lost due to the
	proposed works.
Fragmentation	No habitat fragmentation to the Natura 2000 sites is predicted, since the proposed
	works takes place on the very edge of the Natura 2000 site, and no indirect effects
	are predicted that might cause habitat disconnection or fragmentation.
Disruption	The risk of disruption to the Natura 2000 site during construction or operation
	cannot be ruled out without further investigation, since the works area takes place
	entirely within the boundary of the SAC.
Disturbance	The potential for noise disturbance on both the SAC and the adjoining SPA exists
	from both the construction and operations phase of the proposed project.
Change to key	The potential for changes in water quality within the European site via the
elements of site	contamination of land or surface water runoff with suspended solids/mobilized
(e.g. water quality	nutrients/other contaminants such as hydrocarbons exists.
etc.)	

Table 6 Indicators of significance of impact to Lough Ree SAC and Lough Ree SPA

5.1.5 Description of any likely significant impacts or indeterminate impacts of the project on the Natura 2000 site

Based on a consideration of the likely or potential impacts arising from the proposed works and a review of their significance in terms of the conservation interests of Lough Ree SAC and Lough Ree SPA the potential for significant impact on the European sites exists in the form of degradation of key habitat requirements (water quality and substrate composition) and disturbance from noise of several QI species for which the sites are designated.

6. Screening Conclusions

This report presents the information for the relevant authority, Longford County Council, to carry out a screening for AA. A recommendation that a stage II is/is not required is made below, based on the findings of this assessment, which are summarised in Table 4. It is for the relevant authority to reach one of the following conclusions:

- (i) A stage II 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 Designated Sites.
- (ii) A stage II 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 Designated Sites.

Name of project or plan: Lime Quarry Theatre, Lanesborough, Co Longford.

Name and location of Natura 2000 sites: Lough Ree SAC (within the works area) and Lough Ree SPA (120m away).

Description of project or plan: Construction of outdoor theatre and associated buildings and site services in an old quarry site at Lanesborough, Co Longford.

Is the project or plan directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site? The project is not directly connected with or necessary for the management of any Natura 2000 sites.

Are there other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the site (provide details)? No plans or projects were found that are likely to lead to cumulative or incombination impacts to any Natura 2000 site.

6.1 Assessment of significance of effects

Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site:

The proposed project may significantly affect the Natura 2000 site via changes in surface water runoff entering the site negatively affecting water quality within the SAC/SPA and may disturb QI/SCI species for which both sites are designated.

Direct impacts upon the Natura 2000 sites:

- Potential for noise disturbance to the adjacent woodland and lake habitat within the SAC and SPA, with the potential to affect one or more QI species.
- Landscape changes/habitat loss within Lough Ree SAC, due to the works area being contained within the European site.

Indirect impacts upon the Natura 2000 sites?

• Changes in water quality resulting from surface water runoff/contamination of the soil within the SAC and Lough Ree nearby.

Overall Conclusions

In conclusion, impacts are likely as a result of the proposed works on the conservation objectives or overall integrity of the Natura 2000 sites; it is therefore recommended that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required. Additionally, it is recommended that further surveys and consultations take place with relevant stakeholders before the preparation of the Natura Impact Statement since sufficient information is not currently available regarding the distribution of QI species and the potential effects of the project on their ecology and behaviour in the vicinity of the works area.

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Appendix I: Photos



Figure 6 Bare ground and spoil heaps to north of works area



Figure 7 FW8 pond in the southeast of the quarry floor



Figure 8 Back wall of the quarry



Figure 9 Transitional scrub at edges of quarry floor



Figure 10 Adjoining woodland



Figure 11 Small area of limestone pavement close to the works area