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**Mullingar Regional Sports Complex,  
Blackhall Place, Mullingar, Co.  
Westmeath –  
Appropriate Assessment Screening  
Report**



Ionad Spóirt Réigiúnach  
an Mhuilinn Chearr

Mullingar Regional  
Sports Complex

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**Appropriate Assessment Screening Report**

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## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Regulatory Context	1
1.3	Appropriate Assessment and the Habitats Directive	2
1.4	The Appropriate Assessment Process	2
<b>2</b>	<b>AA Screening Methodology</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1	Appropriate Screening	4
2.2	Statement of Competency	5
2.3	Desktop Studies & Consultation	6
2.4	Assessment Methodology	6
<b>3</b>	<b>Site Details</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1	Project Description	8
3.2	Site Location and Environs	9
3.3	Environmental Considerations	11
3.3.1	Topography	11
3.3.2	Hydrology	11
3.3.3	Geology & Hydrogeology	11
3.4	Natura 2000 Sites Identified	12
3.5	Natura 2000 Impact Assessment	17
3.6	Finding of No Significant Effects	20
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>22</b>



# 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 a full Appropriate Assessment of the proposed plan or project is necessary.

The development consists of a regional sports complex located at Blackhall Place, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. A full description of the development is provided in **Section 3.1**. A comprehensive assessment of the potential significant effects of the development on 9no. designated sites was carried out in July 2025 by Larry Manning BSc (Hons), of ORS Building Consultants. This report will allow the relevant competent authority to undertake an Appropriate Assessment as required under the Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive.

In accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitat's Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) regarding Appropriate Assessment, this screening exercise was carried out 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

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). This is explained in greater detail in the following **Section 1.3**.

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 based on 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 the status does not deteriorate in any waters.

### 1.3 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.”*

### 1.4 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 AA Screening Methodology

### 2.1 Appropriate Screening

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

- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC*. European Commission (2018).
- *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 (2021).
- *Nature and Biodiversity Cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice*. European Commission (2006).
- *Clarification of the Concepts of: Alternative Solution, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence, Opinion of the Commission*. European Commission (2007).
- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities*. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009).
- *Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, OPR Practice Note PN01, 2021*

The EC Guidance sets out a number of principles as 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 involves:

**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: Natura Impact Statement** – 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.
- Description of proven mitigation measures.

## 2.2 Statement of Competency

This AA Screening report was carried out by Larry Manning BSc (Hons). Larry has an honours degree in Applied Freshwater and Biology from GMIT (ATU) Galway, where he gained an education in ecology and environmental management. Larry has worked on a wide variety of ecological assessments and habitat/species management surveys, including working as a consultant MMO for the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group Consulting, taking a lead role in marine engineering projects and overseeing regulatory compliance. He has extensive experience in the field of fisheries monitoring and research both in North Atlantic waters and in Antarctic waters for CAMMLR representing the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands government.

The author has worked as a fisheries scientist for the Marine Institute since 2017 on research projects, species management plans, and fisheries species-specific population analysis. While working in the Fisheries Ecosystem Advisory Service at the Marine Institute, Larry engaged with the fishing fleet directly while data gathering at sea on trawlers and played a vital role in gathering sensitive data pertaining to national catch quotas and landings obligations relevant to current regulations. Larry also has experience in implementing company strategy for offshore hydrographic and geophysical surveys in line with current legislation for Offshore windfarm development. During seismic surveys the author was employed as an offshore fisheries liaison officer which required in depth knowledge of regulatory frameworks to ensure the fishing fleet, the survey company, and the ships officers of the watch were all compliant and safe during highly complex and

dynamic operations. The author also works as an ornithologist and provides habitat and species assessments for terrestrial infrastructure developments.

## 2.3 Desktop Studies & Consultation

Information regarding the site of the proposed development and its environs was studied prior to the completion of this statement. The following data sources were accessed 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.
- NPWS Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities, 10 December 2009 (as revised 11 February 2010).
- Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites (2001)
- Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive (2018).
- NPWS (2013). The Status of Protected EU Habitats and Species in Ireland.
- Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)- Information pertaining to water quality, geology and licensed facilities within the area.
- Myplan.ie – Map-based information.
- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) – Information pertaining to protected plant and animal species within the study area.
- National Planning Application Database.
- EPA Online Maps
- Bing maps & Google Street View – High quality aerial and street images.

## 2.4 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 Site Details

### 3.1 Project Description

The proposed development will be located on a site of 1.8ha and consists of a 2-3 storey community-based, multi-sport facility, including:

- 8 lane 25m swimming pool
- 20x8m teaching pool & splash pad
- Multi-use sports hall (12 court)
- Gym & studios
- Reception and ancillary spaces including meeting rooms, viewing area, sensory room, staff room, WCs, wet/dry changing rooms, stores, plant rooms, ESB Substation
- External works including landscaped public plaza, pedestrian/cycle/vehicle routes, and car/bike parking facilities
- Upgrade works to public road including junctions
- Ancillary works as required

In addition to the building accommodation at this location, the outdoor area is intended as a public open space, where appropriate landscaping will allow this space to function as a marketplace, event or meeting space. The outdoor facilities comprise of:

- a. Drop off area, but minimally used, accommodates buses, accessible users, and emergency vehicles
- b. Pedestrianised area
- c. Dedicated two-way cycle lane encircling the site
- d. At-grade car park to the east, with designated spaces for accessible, EV, priority, and regular parking.

On the ground floor there is a reception area with viewing points for the swimming pool, access to the hall designated for public events, the 12-court sports hall, and wet and dry changing areas to the left and right of the reception. Community rooms, studios, and tiered seating overlooking the pool are located on the first floor. The lower ground floor houses the pool tank, associated plant equipment and storage.

The design of the proposed development has made consideration to surface water management. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) objectives have been set out as part of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027. This County Development Plan states that *“the Council will require that all developments incorporate ‘Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems’ (SuDS) as part of the development proposals. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) are effective technologies which aim to reduce flood risk, improve water quality and enhance biodiversity and amenity.”*

The Greater Dublin Strategic Drainage Study (GDSDS) is the key guideline document used for the purpose of design of surface water drainage systems. GDSDS provides a regional strategic approach to sustainable drainage in consistency with the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). The implementation of GDSDS guidelines in the context the proposed development will aim to prevent the adverse impacts of discharging the resulting development runoff, which

includes discharging pollutants, into existing watercourses. The other objective of working in accordance with the GDSDS guidelines is to decrease the risk of flooding of the proposed development within the project's footprint.

As noted under the Blackhall Place site proposals, the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 mandates the integration of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) in all new developments. It is proposed to incorporate a variety of SuDS measures across the Blackhall Place site to address the four pillars of SuDS. At Blackhall Place, there is no recorded surface water network immediately adjacent to the site however the River Brosna is within 60m of the eastern boundary. The utility survey carried out has identified existing below ground storm water pipework in the vicinity of the River Brosna. A connection to the existing 750mm storm line which appears to discharge to the River Brosna would be a feasible means of providing drainage of the development. Discharge will be controlled via flow control devices to restrict flows to match pre-development greenfield runoff rates. Storage of excess run-off generated during the 1 in 100-year storm event incorporated. An allowance for 20% due to climate change is included in all attenuation volume calculations.

As surface water is to be collected from the roads and car parking areas with a low risk of spillage, a Class 1 Petrol/Oil Bypass Interceptor will be provided prior to discharge. All surface water shall be drained from impermeable areas through precast lockable gully traps. A Greenfield run off rate of circa 4.1 litres/second/hectare is anticipated for the Blackhall Place site. This rate was calculated based on the method outlined in IH 124, with a Standard Average Annual Rainfall (SAAR) for Mullingar taken as 941mm and assuming Soil Type 3 conditions with a mixture of permeable and impermeable soils in similar proportions.

Following a site assessment study, it was determined that a dual site approach was the preferred option for the Mullingar Sports Complex, with amenities such as a swimming pool being sited more centrally in the town at Blackhall allowing for easy public transport access, whilst the use of a site on the outskirts of the town facilitates a superior scale of outdoor facilities than originally envisaged.

The proposed development at the Blackhall Place site aims for comprehensive sports integration, blending facilities for swimming, strength training, and indoor ball games into a cohesive, multi-functional environment.

Regarding the construction phase of this project, there will be a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) which will highlight the best practice procedures during the construction to prevent negative impacts on the Natura 2000 sites identified in this report.

### **3.2 Site Location and Environs**

The proposed works are located at a prominent location in the centre of Mullingar Town. A variety of mixed-use developments are located to the north of the proposed site while the site is bounded to the east by premises associated with Mullingar Library. The proposed site is bounded to the south by rail lines leading to Mullingar Rail Station which is located ca. 90m southwest of the proposed site. Mixed-use developments extend west of the proposed site.

The site location and environs is presented in **Figure 3.1** and **Figure 3.2** below.





### 3.3 Environmental Considerations

#### 3.3.1 Topography

The site features a slight downward gradient from northwest to southeast. The topographical survey carried out states that the topography ranges from ca. 93m OD to the northwest corner of the site to ca. 90m OD to the southeast corner.

#### 3.3.2 Hydrology

Maps generated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and featuring data from the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) were consulted to assess the extent and quality of waterbodies present in the vicinity of the proposed development.

The site is located within the WFD catchment 25A – Lower Shannon and sub-catchment BROSNA\_SC\_010. The principal hydrological feature within the vicinity of the site consists of the River Brosna (EPA name: BROSNA\_020), which runs from northeast to south, located ca. 53m east of the site. The Royal Canal is located ca. 185m west of the Blackhall site. The site is not part of an Arterial Drainage Scheme (Brosna Drainage scheme C45(1) located ca. 80m E of the site), and none of the land is classified as benefitting land.

Regarding the Water Framework Directive and the status of the river and canal waterbodies in this area, according to the EPA maps, the River Brosna has a WFD status of “Poor” and is “At Risk” in accordance with the Water Framework Directive. This indicates the river's ecological status and chemical status are poor. Concerning the nearest canal waterbodies, the Royal Canal Main Line (Lower Shannon) possesses a WFD status of “Good” and the Risk Level is “Under Review”. According to the Cycle 3 HA 25A Lower Shannon Catchment Report, May 2024, the main pressures on the Brosna\_020 waterbody occur due to Urban run-off and hydro morphological changes, e.g. channelisation, damming, urban development, that ultimately disrupt the flow and storage ability of the water body.

EPA Maps were consulted to determine if any WFD River Network Routes were designated as Designated Salmonid Waters under S.I. No. 293/1988 - European Communities (Quality of Salmonid Waters) Regulations 1988 existed in the surrounding areas of the site. None of the aforementioned river waterbodies were included in the register, therefore, no adverse impacts from the site are envisioned for salmonid habitats.

#### 3.3.3 Geology & Hydrogeology

Teagasc soil mapping indicates that the surface / quaternary sediments at the Blackhall site are classified as made-ground or artificial surface, with the parent material described as Till derived from limestone on the majority of the site. The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) bedrock database indicates that soils of the proposed site are underlain at depth by the Lucan Formation, which consists of dark limestones and shale.

GSI groundwater maps state that the site overlies a locally important aquifer. The groundwater vulnerability index at the site ranges from moderate to high. The hydrogeological setting at the site is described as moderate permeability subsoil overlain by well-drained soil. The groundwater vulnerability is based on the predicted time taken for a pollutant released to the ground at surface level to reach an aquifer, i.e. the ease with which groundwater may be contaminated by human activities. No groundwater source protection zones or protected



hydrological features, such as holy wells or springs, are located within the boundaries of the proposed site. The nearest source protection zone is located ca. 25km east of the development, the Ballivor public water scheme. The nearest Drinking Water Surface Water Bodies is Lough Owell, located ca. 4km northwest of the development.

There are no records of landfills or dumping grounds in the area of the proposed development. The nearest landfill site, the Marlinstown Landfill (License No W0071- 02), is approximately 3.3km east.

Based on the historical review of the site and the findings of a site investigation report provided to ORS, a significant amount of made ground is present, which may be contaminated given the sites previous use and its location in a town centre. The historical site report only assessed a section of this proposed site. ORS carried out a more detailed site investigation on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

The Tier-I Environmental Risk Assessment determined that a Tier-II Environmental Risk Assessment will be necessary before construction works to assess potential contamination present in the ground. Proposals to retain any contaminated material on site below open paved areas will be evaluated. Existing paved parking areas will require breaking up and excavating to provide a new plaza area over this side of the site. Material excavated will be assessed before disposal to identify the appropriate treatment and disposal methods.

A piled foundation is anticipated given the loadings anticipated below long span roof structures and the swimming pool area. External works will also include retaining wall structures to account for the varying site levels across the site. Retaining walls are anticipated to be reinforced concrete walls. Given the town-centre location for Blackhall place, bored concrete piles are proposed in favour of precast driven piles, which will have reduced noise and vibration levels. There is also the rail line embankment along the southern boundary to consider. Vibration and displacement monitoring at site boundaries will be required to demonstrate the low level of impact from the works on neighbouring lands, particularly the rail embankment.

### **3.4 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 the vicinity 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 influence were also considered. The zone of influence 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. The measurements used here are taken from the closest point along the proposed work area to the SAC / SPA.

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.

An initial Zol of 15km was set to identify the European Sites that could potentially be affected by the proposed development. After this initial assessment, only those Natura 2000 sites that have any reasonable Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) connectivity were considered further, in line with OPR best practice guidance.

There are 9 no. Natura 2000 Sites located within 15km of the subject site which are summarised in **Table 3.1**. A map showing their locations relative to the works is shown in **Figure 3.3**. A full description of the sites can be read on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service ([www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)).

<b>Table 3.1: Natura 2000 Sites within 15km of Subject Site</b>			
<b>Site Name &amp; Code</b>	<b>Distance &amp; Direction from Site</b>	<b>Qualifying Interests</b>	<b>Screened In/Out</b>
Lough Ennell SAC, 000685	Located ca. 2.9km SW from site.	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. [3140]  Alkaline fens [7230]	<b>Screened Out:</b>  The proposed development is in close proximity to the River Brosna which outflows into Lough Ennell. Considering the medium scale and nature of the development, and the design elements incorporated into the construction and operational phase of the development, the hydrological linkage to Lough Ennell SAC and its qualifying interests can be ruled out as a pathway for negative effects.  The topography of the site shows a change in elevation of ca. 3m towards the southeast portion of the site, in the direction of the River Brosna. The proposed development will be incorporating SuDS systems and excess surface water flow preventative measures. General good housekeeping practices and adherence to the CEMP will ensure any significant effects can be ruled out.
Lough Ennell SPA, 004044	Located ca. 3.3km SW from site.	Pochard ( <i>Aythya ferina</i> ) [A059]  Tufted Duck ( <i>Aythya</i>	<b>Screened Out:</b>  The proposed development is in close proximity to the River Brosna which

		<p><i>fuligula</i>) [A061]</p> <p>Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) [A125]</p> <p>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>	<p>outflows into Lough Ennell. Considering the medium scale and nature of the development, and the design elements incorporated into the construction and operational phase of the development, the hydrological linkage to Lough Ennell SAC and its qualifying interests can be ruled out as a pathway for negative effects. The topography of the site shows a change in elevation of ca. 3m towards the southeast portion of the site, in the direction of the River Brosna. The proposed development will be incorporating SuDS systems and excess surface water flow preventative measures. General good housekeeping practices and adherence to the CEMP will ensure any significant effects can be ruled out.</p>
<p>Wooddown Bog SAC, 002205</p>	<p>Located ca. 4.5km E from site.</p>	<p>Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]</p>	<p><b>Screened Out:</b> The proposed site is not located immediately adjacent this designated site nor are there any direct pathways to this site within the proposed site boundaries.</p> <p>Considering the implementation of best practice measures, it is not foreseen that the proposed development will generate a quantity of construction-related emissions that would be considered significant enough to reach this designated site via air, land, or hydrological pathways. All development works will be carried out well within the confines of the site boundary and there will be no land take from the protected site. It is not foreseen that the development will negatively affect the conservation objectives of the protected site.</p>
<p>River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, 002299</p>	<p>Located ca. 12.3km NE from site.</p>	<p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0]</p> <p>River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra</i></p>	<p><b>Screened Out:</b> The proposed site is not located immediately adjacent this designated site nor are there any direct pathways to this site within the proposed site boundaries.</p> <p>Considering the implementation of best practice measures, it is not foreseen that the proposed development will generate a quantity of construction-</p>

		<p><i>fluviatilis</i>) [1099]</p> <p>Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>) [1106]</p> <p>Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) [1355]</p>	<p>related emissions that would be considered significant enough to reach this designated site via air, land, or hydrological pathways. All development works will be carried out well within the confines of the site boundary and there will be no land take from the protected site. It is not foreseen that the development will negatively affect the conservation objectives of the protected site.</p>
Lough Derravaragh SPA, 004043	Located ca. 10.2km NE from site.	<p>Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038]</p> <p>Pochard (<i>Aythya ferina</i>) [A059]</p> <p>Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) [A061]</p> <p>Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) [A125]</p> <p>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>	<p><b>Screened Out:</b> The proposed site is not located immediately adjacent this designated site nor are there any direct pathways to this site within the proposed site boundaries.</p> <p>Considering the implementation of best practice measures, it is not foreseen that the proposed development will generate a quantity of construction-related emissions that would be considered significant enough to reach this designated site via air, land, or hydrological pathways. All development works will be carried out well within the confines of the site boundary and there will be no land take from the protected site. It is not foreseen that the development will negatively affect the conservation objectives of the protected site.</p>
Scragh Bog SAC, 000692	Located ca. 5.8km N from site.	<p>Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Slender Green Feather-moss (<i>Hamatocaulis vernicosus</i>) [6216]</p>	<p><b>Screened Out:</b> The proposed site is not located immediately adjacent this designated site nor are there any direct pathways to this site within the proposed site boundaries.</p> <p>Considering the implementation of best practice measures, it is not foreseen that the proposed development will generate a quantity of construction-related emissions that would be considered significant enough to reach this designated site via air, land, or hydrological pathways. All development works will be carried out well within the confines of the site boundary and there will be no land take from the protected site. It is not foreseen that the</p>

			development will negatively affect the conservation objectives of the protected site.
Lough Owel SAC, 000688	Located ca. 4.0km N from site.	<p>Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. [3140]</p> <p>Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>White-clawed Crayfish (<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>) [1092]</p>	<p><b>Screened Out:</b> The proposed site is not located immediately adjacent this designated site nor are there any direct pathways to this site within the proposed site boundaries.</p> <p>Considering the implementation of best practice measures, it is not foreseen that the proposed development will generate a quantity of construction-related emissions that would be considered significant enough to reach this designated site via air, land, or hydrological pathways. All development works will be carried out well within the confines of the site boundary and there will be no land take from the protected site. It is not foreseen that the development will negatively affect the conservation objectives of the protected site.</p>
Lough Owel SPA, 004047	Located ca. 4.0km N from site.	<p>Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>) [A056]</p> <p>Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) [A125]</p> <p>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>	<p><b>Screened Out:</b> The proposed site is not located immediately adjacent this designated site nor are there any direct pathways to this site within the proposed site boundaries.</p> <p>Considering the implementation of best practice measures, it is not foreseen that the proposed development will generate a quantity of construction-related emissions that would be considered significant enough to reach this designated site via air, land, or hydrological pathways. All development works will be carried out well within the confines of the site boundary and there will be no land take from the protected site. It is not foreseen that the development will negatively affect the conservation objectives of the protected site.</p>
Lough Iron SPA, 004046	Located ca. 10.3km NW from site.	<p>Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038]</p> <p>Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>)</p>	<p><b>Screened Out:</b> The proposed site is not located immediately adjacent this designated site nor are there any direct pathways to this site within the</p>

		<p>[A050]</p> <p>Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) [A052]</p> <p>Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>) [A056]</p> <p>Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) [A125]</p> <p>Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140]</p> <p>Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) [A395]</p> <p>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>	<p>proposed site boundaries.</p> <p>Considering the implementation of best practice measures, it is not foreseen that the proposed development will generate a quantity of construction-related emissions that would be considered significant enough to reach this designated site via air, land, or hydrological pathways. All development works will be carried out well within the confines of the site boundary and there will be no land take from the protected site. It is not foreseen that the development will negatively affect the conservation objectives of the protected site.</p>
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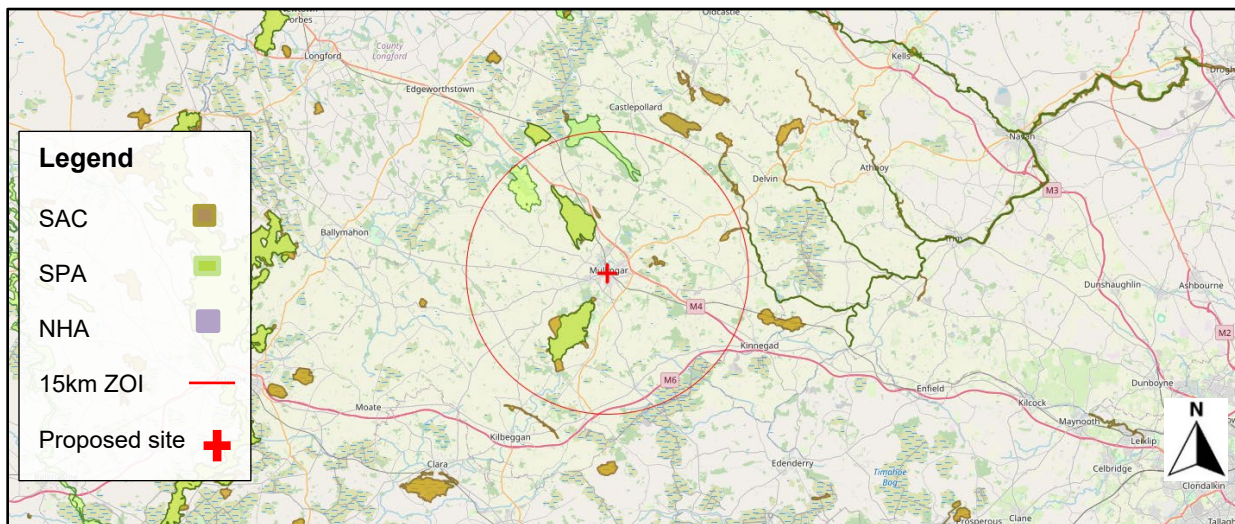


Figure 3.3: Natura 2000 sites within a 15km Zone of Influence of the proposed development.

### 3.5 Natura 2000 Impact Assessment

The potential significant effects of the proposed development on the Natura 2000 sites identified are described below in **Table 3.2**.

<p><b>Table 3.2: Natura 2000 Threshold Levels</b></p> <p><b>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:</b></p> <p>A description of the proposed development is provided in <b>Section 3.1</b> and a proposed site layout included in <b>Figure 3.2</b>.</p> <p>The construction and operational phases of the proposed development were taken into consideration for the assessment of potential impacts arising from the project alone and in combination with other</p>
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projects in the site vicinity. Design elements of the project and adherence to a CEMP and good housekeeping, as well as the size and scale of the proposed development were taken into consideration for their ability to prevent any potential impacts arising.

The following construction and operational phase elements of the proposed project were considered for their potential to affect upon Natura 2000 sites:

#### **Construction Phase**

- Groundworks - Groundworks have the potential to give rise to silt, sediment, and other pollutants that can travel via air to reach pathways and sensitive receptors. Dewatering processes during this phase can also generate quantities of silt laden water which requires disposal.
- Surface water runoff containing fuels, oils, silt/dust into surface water receptors (rivers, streams, canals, etc.).
- Surface water runoff containing fuels, oils, silt/dust into groundwater receptors.
- Environmental emissions by means of noise, dust and vibration to nearby receptors resulting from plant and machinery operation on site.
- Increased lighting emissions required for construction activity on site.
- Generation of construction and demolition waste, including but not limited to; soils and stone, waste concrete, oils/fuels and hazardous waste.

#### **Operational Phase**

- Surface water emissions from site.
- Foul water emissions from site.
- Human activity resulting in an increase in baseline daytime noise levels.
- Increase light emanating from the development.

Considering the precautionary principle, the proposed works will not likely have significant effects on the European sites identified. Potential impacts arising during construction primarily consists of the generation of contaminants such as fuels, oils, dust/silt, and concrete contaminants. With adherence to best practice measures and CEMP guidelines, it is envisioned that no significant effects will arise during the construction phase. Despite the topography of the site, any such pollutants would be handled by the SuDS systems before reaching the River Brosna which outflows into Lough Ennell SAC / SPA during the operational phase. The proposed site is sufficient distance from Natura sites for operation noise and light levels to pose significant impacts.

#### **In-combination Effects:**

Granted planning applications of a relatively large scale in the vicinity of the proposed site were assessed for the potential for in-combination effects upon Natura sites to occur. Relevant projects are listed below.

#### **Annebrook House Hotel, Pearse Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, N91YH2F Planning Ref 2460035**

Permission for development which will consist of demolition of existing premises at No.7 Pearse Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath and provision of new 4 storey extension to existing Annebrook House Hotel (a protected structure - RPS Reference No.019/118) to consist of new restaurant/bistro, new breakfast room, reception area extended bar area, ancillary rooms and 60 number bedrooms with new internal alterations to the adjoining premises at No.9 Pearse Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath (a protected structure - RPS Reference No.019/117) to include new connection to hotel, new single storey extension to rear, external alterations and all associated site works.

**In-combination effects:** Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was carried out for this development which will prevent any potential effects on Natura 2000 sites determined to have connectivity with the project. In-combination effects are not deemed likely.

**Clonmore Road, Clonmore Industrial Estate, Mullingar, Co Westmeath  
Planning Ref 21266**

Permission for development of an open storage yard. The development comprises levelling of existing site with a new permeable aggregate surface, enclosure with a new paladin fence of 1.8m height, installation of a 6m wide entrance gate, an independent pedestrian access gate and all other associated site works.

**In-combination effects:** There are no shared pathways to any Natura sites between this development and the one proposed at Blackhall Place. No in-combination effects envisaged.

**Saunders Bridge, Ardmore Rd, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath  
Planning Ref 22547**

Development to vary the An Bord Pleanala planning permission reference PL25M.239612 to replace 27 No. granted house types as follows: remove granted house unit numbers 80, 81 & 94 to 118 inclusive consisting of 3 & 4-bedroom 2 & 3-storey houses, to be replaced with 27 No. 3-bedroom 2-storey houses and all associated site works.

**In-combination effects:** There are no shared pathways to any Natura sites between this development and the one proposed at Blackhall Place. No in-combination effects envisaged.

Examination of granted planning applications in the vicinity of the proposed developed do not indicate likelihood of in-combination effects occurring.

**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:** The proposed development will be contained within confines of the site boundary outlined in **Figures 3.1** and **3.2**. The proposed development is of medium scale and the generation of high levels of contaminants during the construction is not foreseen.

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

**Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site:** There are 9 no. Natura 2000 sites located within 15km of the proposed works, but none are likely to have their integrity compromised due to this proposed development.

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

**Emissions:** There are no in stream works required as part of the proposed development. There will be no watercourse crossings. Significant emissions into water features and Natura sites within the ZOI arising from the works are not foreseen with adherence to best practice construction procedures and good housekeeping as outlined in the project CEMP.

**Excavation requirements:** Excavation works for site clearance and groundworks will be required. The generation of silt and dust as part of these works will be controlled once correct procedures, good housekeeping, CEMP guidelines and management measures are carried out. It is not foreseen that negative impacts on the qualifying interests or integrity of Natura 2000 sites will occur.

**Transportation requirements:** The increase in construction traffic resulting from the construction phase will be managed by site personnel and will not give rise to significant effects on any Natura 2000 sites.

**In-Combination / Cumulative Impacts:** Planning applications in the vicinity of the site were also assessed to identify potential cumulative effects posed to the aforementioned protected sites. Considering granted applications of a relatively medium scale, no cumulative effects are expected.

**Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning, etc:** The duration of construction works is estimated to be 12-24 months.

<b>Describe any likely changes to the nearby Natura 2000 sites arising as a result of:</b>
<p><b>Reduction of habitat area:</b> The proposed development lies outside the boundaries of any European sites. It is not foreseen that there will be any reduction of designated habitat area within any SAC or SPA. There will likely be no impacts upon the habitat qualifying interests of any designated site. There will be no interference with the boundaries of any European site.</p> <p><b>Disturbance to key species:</b> There will not be any significant disturbance to key species protected under the EU Habitats Directive or EU Birds Directive.</p> <p><b>Reduction in species density:</b> There will be no reduction in the densities of the qualifying interests of the designated sites identified.</p> <p><b>Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.):</b> There will likely be no negative impacts upon surface water quality and air quality within the European sites identified.</p>
<b>Describe any likely impacts on the nearby Natura 2000 sites as a whole in terms of:</b>
<p><b>Interference with the key relationships that define the structure or function of the site:</b> Significant effects unlikely to occur.</p>
<b>Provide indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of:</b>
<p><b>Loss - Estimated percentage of lost area of habitat:</b> None likely  <b>Fragmentation:</b> None likely  <b>Disruption &amp; disturbance:</b> None likely  <b>Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality, etc.):</b> None likely</p>

### 3.6 Finding of No Significant Effects

<b>Table 3.3: Significant Effects Report Matrix</b>	
<b>Finding of No Significant Effects Report Matrix</b>	
<b>Name and Description of project</b>	Mullingar Regional Sports Complex – Blackhall Place, Co. Westmeath
<b>Name and location of Natura 2000 site</b>	Lough Ennell SAC & SPA, ca. 2.9km Southwest.
<b>Is the project directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site?</b>	No
<b>Are there other projects or plans that together with project being assessed could affect the site?</b>	No
<b>The Assessment of Significance of Effects</b>	
<b>Describe how the project is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site</b>	Having regard to the location, nature and scale of the 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.
<b>Explain why these effects are</b>	Significant effects are unlikely.

<b>not considered significant</b>	
<b>Describe how the project is likely to affect species designated under Annex II of the Habitats Directive.</b>	No qualifying interests of the Natura 2000 sites listed under Annex II of the Habitats Directive are likely to be affected.
<b>Data Collected to Carry out the Assessment</b>	
<b>Who carried out the assessment</b>	Larry Manning, BSc (Hons), Ecologist
<b>Sources of data</b>	NPWS, EPA, National Biodiversity Data Centre, Westmeath County Council
<b>Level of assessment completed</b>	Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening
<b>Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed</b>	Full results included

## 4 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., Westmeath County Council, to carry out the screening for AA and to reach one of the following determinations:

1. 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;
2. 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 full Appropriate Assessment 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. Therefore, this proposed project does not need to proceed to Stage II of the Appropriate Assessment Process, i.e., a Natura Impact Statement (NIS).



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