

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report
for proposed

Social Housing
at
**Belvedere Orphanage, Tyrrellspass,
County Westmeath**

**in accordance with the requirements of
Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive**

CAAS Ltd
for
Westmeath County Council



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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

CAAS has been appointed by Westmeath County Council to prepare this Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (AASR) for the proposed social housing at Belvedere Orphanage, Tyrrellspass ('the proposed development'). This report has been prepared to assist the Council in assessing whether the proposed development should be subject to AA and whether a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is required. An overview of the AA process and its legislative background is provided in Appendix II.

1.2. Report structure

This report sets out an overview of the methodology used for this assessment. It then describes the proposed development including any associated works, followed by a description of receiving environment of the lands to which the proposed development relates, and any relationships to European sites. Subsequently the factors that determine which European sites are included in the report are described and the selected European sites are identified.

The proposed development and its potential sources for effect are then examined in the context of the receiving environment, connectivity to the relevant European site and their sensitive ecological features. Following this, as part of the screening for AA, the metrics for the assessment of a 'likelihood of significant effect' of these potential effects are applied to each of the European sites identified, with support from scientific literature where relevant. Subsequently, sites that are identified as having a likelihood for significant effects advanced to the next stage of the assessment process and a Natura Impact Statement is advised where mitigation measures need to be applied to prevent adverse effects on European sites.

The potential for significant effects on be increased or presented independently when the proposed project is considered in-combination with effects arising from other plans and/or projects is also taken into account as part of this report.

The assessment is undertaken in view of the Conservation Objectives, known sensitivities and threats and pressures on the Qualifying Interests and Special Conservation Interests for each European site, which are provided in Appendix II if required in the report. Appendices II and III provide supporting information on the AA process and the legislative background, and author competencies respectively.

2. Methodology

2.1. AA Screening overview

Screening for AA identifies any likely significant effects on European sites arising from the project (for the purposes of this report, the "project" is herein referred to as the "proposed development"), either alone or in combination with other projects or plans. The proposed development and receiving environment of the proposed development are examined in order to determine:

- Whether the project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site.
- Whether the project will have a potentially significant effect on a European site, either alone

or in combination with other projects or plans, in view of the site's conservation objectives or if residual uncertainty exists regarding potential impacts.

The proposed development is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site and therefore will be considered as to whether it may have a potentially significant effect on any European site in screening for AA.

2.2. Relevant guidance

This AASR is prepared in line with the relevant legislation (ref s1.3), is based on best scientific knowledge, and has utilised ecological expertise, with consideration of the relevant guidance, including the following:

- *Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021;*
- *Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission Notice, Journal of the European Union, 2021;*
- *Commission Notice: Managing Natura 2000 sites - The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC", European Commission 2018;* and
- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009.*

2.3. Assessment methodology

See Appendix II for an overview of the legislative context for this report, the Habitats Directive, and the AA process.

2.3.1. Desktop review

The desktop review provides supporting information for conducting the SPR model, and establishing a ZoI. The identification of the "Conservation Objectives" (COs), "Qualifying Interests" (QIs) and/or "Special Conservation Interests" (SCIs) of European sites requiring assessment as part of this review, is an integral part of the screening for AA process.

QIs are the habitats and species (flora and fauna) listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive respectively, for which each Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been designated under the Habitats Directive. SCIs are bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive for which each Special Protection Area (SPA) has been designated under the Habitats Directive. Under the requirements of the Habitats Directive, the threats and pressures on the ecological / environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs, with specific regard to the COs of each site, are considered as part of the assessment.

The COs or Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) for each site aim to achieve and maintain the favourable conservation status¹ for a particular habitat or species at that site. COs define the

¹ Favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when: 'population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.'

requirements for the favourable conservation condition of the QIs or SCIs at a given European site by setting targets for attributes which define the healthy characteristics of a given habitat or species.

Note: where detailed SSCOs have not been prepared for any European site, the below First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives apply:

European site type	First Order Site-specific Conservation Objective ²
SAC	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected
SPA	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for the SPA

The following databases are utilised in the preparation of this AASR: the National Biodiversity Data Centre³; the NPWS⁴; the EPA⁵; data collected for the most recent Article 12 and 17 conservation status reporting cycle, 2019; and, *The Status of Protected EU Habitats and Species in Ireland* report (NPWS, 2019). Based on these resources, the desktop review is also comprised of the following elements:

- Identification of European sites within one or several zones of Influence (as defined in s 2.3.3) established using the source -pathway-receptor model (as defined in s 2.3.2);
- Review of the NPWS site synopses and Conservation Objectives for European sites within the zone(s) of influence for which potential pathways from the proposed development area have been identified; and
- Examination of available data on protected species' and habitats' distribution, trends and abundances – where relevant.

Supporting information on threats to individual sites and vulnerability of habitats and species is also reviewed in the following documents where relevant:

- Ireland's Article 17 Report to the European Commission "*Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland*" (NPWS, 2019);
- Ireland's Article 12 Report to the European Commission "*Bird species' status and trends reporting format for the period 2008-2012-*" (NPWS, 2012)
- Site Synopses⁶; and
- NATURA 2000 Standard Data Forms¹³.

2.3.2. Source-pathway-receptor model

The assessment of potential for significant effects on European sites is conducted following a standard source-pathway-receptor (SPR) model, where, in order for an effect to be established, all

Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when:

'its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable'.

² NPWS Conservation Management Planning [website](#).

³ NBDC datasets available [here](#)

⁴ NPWS European sites information and mapping available [here](#) and [here](#) respectively

⁵ EPA datasets available [here](#)

⁶ NPWS (2019); NPWS Database of protected site data and associated documents for each European site; available [here](#). Accessed March 2025

three elements of this mechanism must be in place. EC guidance⁷ outlines the types of effects that may affect European sites. These include effects from the following activities:

- Land take
- Resource requirements (drinking water abstraction etc.)
- Emissions (disposal to land, water or air)
- Excavation requirements (removal of soil and vegetation)
- Transportation requirements
- Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning

This guidance is taken into consideration when applying the SPR model to this AASR.

Examples of a source, pathway and receptor are:

- Source(s) – e.g., pollutant run-off from proposed development
- Pathway(s) – e.g., groundwater connecting to nearby qualifying wetland habitats; and,
- Receptor(s) – e.g., qualifying habitats and species of European sites

Thus, in the context of this report, a receptor is a QI or SCI, or an ecological feature that is known to be utilised by the QIs or SCIs of a European site. A source is any identifiable element of the proposed development that is known to interact with the QI, SCI, or any ecological processes underpinning a QI or SCI. A pathway is any connection or link between the source and the receptor⁸, for example a river.

When all three elements of the SPR model are in place, a pathway for potential effect is identified to that European site. The pathway, receptor and source for effect are then examined further by conducting a desktop review, in the context of the receiving environment and the characteristics of the proposed development, in order to establish a Zone of Influence for potential significant effects.

2.3.3. Zone of Influence

The Zone of Influence (Zoi) (as defined in the relevant guidance^{9,10}) is informed by the SPR model and is the geographical area over which a proposed project could affect the ecological receiving environment in any way that could result in potential significant effects on the Qualifying Interests or Special Conservation Interests of a given European site, in view of the Conservation Objectives of each site.

2.3.4. Characterising potential significant effects

The terms used to characterise potential effects¹¹ in this report are as follows: -

⁷ 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 Environment DG, 2001

⁸ Receptor example: a Qualifying Interest or Special Conservation Interest of the European site in question in the context of their known sensitivities and Conservation Objectives

⁹ *Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021.*

¹⁰ CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine. Version 1.3, updated September 2024. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

¹¹ Terms and parameters have been adapted from the following guidance documents on the conduction Appropriate Assessments and Ecological Impact Assessments:

- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities
- CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine. Version 1.3, updated September 2024. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester; and,

- **Direct and Indirect Impacts:** An impact can be caused either as a direct or as an indirect consequence of a Plan/Project.
- **Extent:** the spatial or geographical area over which the impact/effect may occur under a suitably representative range of conditions (e.g. noise transmission under water).
- **Magnitude:** the size, amount, intensity and volume of an impact/effect. Magnitude is quantified where possible and expressed in absolute or relative terms (e.g. the amount of habitat lost, percentage change to habitat area, percentage decline in a species population).
- **Duration:** defined in relation to ecological characteristics (such as the lifecycle of a species) as well as human timeframes (e.g., five years, may be short-term in the human context or other long-lived species, but would span at least five generations of some invertebrate species). In addition, the duration of an activity may differ from the duration of the resulting effect caused by the activity (e.g., if short-term construction activities cause disturbance to birds during their breeding period; longer-term implications could be failure to reproduce that season). The Duration of impacts and effects may be described as the following, defined in months/years:
 - Short
 - Medium
 - Long-Term and Permanent, or
 - Temporary.
- **Frequency:** The number of times that an activity or impact occurs. This will influence the magnitude and/or duration of the resulting effect (e.g., a single person walking a dog will have very limited impact on nearby waders using wetland habitat, but numerous walkers will subject the waders to frequent disturbance and could affect feeding success, leading to displacement of the birds and knock-on effects on their ability to survive).
- **Timing:** The timing of an activity or change may result in an impact, or have different magnitude of impact if it occurs at different times of a given year versus others (e.g., if it coincides with critical life-stages such as a bird species bird nesting season)
- **Reversibility:** An irreversible effect is one from which recovery is not possible within a reasonable timescale or there is no reasonable chance of action being taken to reverse it. A reversible effect is one from which spontaneous recovery is possible or which may be counteracted by mitigation. It is possible that certain activities can cause both reversible and irreversible effects.

2.3.5. Assessment of significant effects

The CIEEM (2018)¹⁰ guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment define an ecologically significant effect based on a variety of questions and factors, such as:

- is the project and associated activities likely to undermine the conservation objectives of the site, or positively or negatively affect the conservation status of species or habitats for which the site is designated, or may it have positive or negative effects on the condition of the site or its interest/qualifying features?
- is the project likely to result in a change in ecosystem structure and function?

The guidance also recommends that consideration should be given to whether:

- any processes or key characteristics will be removed or changed

- there will be an effect on the nature, extent, structure and function of component habitats
- there is an effect on the average population size and viability of component species.

The OPR Guidance¹² on conducting Appropriate Assessment for developments defines likely significant effects as the following:

Likely means a risk or possibility of effects occurring that cannot be ruled out based on objective information.

Significant effects are those that would undermine the conservation objectives of the European sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects. The significance of ecological impacts depends on:

- the ecological characteristics of the species or habitat, including their structure, function, conservation status and sensitivity to change, and/or
- the character, magnitude, duration, consequences and probability of the impacts occurring.

When the SPR models is conducted and the Zone of Influence is established; European sites (and their respective QIs and SCIs) that occur within this zone are examined with supporting surveys conducted, if necessary, to ultimately determine whether or not there is a *likelihood of significant effect* on a given European site. This is carried out by assessing objective information such as: the nature of the source for effect; the nature of the pathway; the distances involved; the QIs/SCIs (or 'receptors') involved, their threats, pressures and sensitivities; and consulting best scientific evidence/literature when required. As such, the presence of all three elements and the identification of a pathway for potential effect, does not automatically constitute the likelihood of significant effect on a European site, and is dependent on factors such as character, magnitude, duration etc. However, the absence or removal of one of the elements of the mechanism is sufficient to conclude that there is no potential effect(s) and thus no further consideration required.

Where a likelihood for significant effects on any European site is established to be present, and/or the lack of significant effect cannot be ruled out based on the precautionary principle¹³, mitigation measures are required and the project must proceed to Stage 2 AA, where a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is compiled in order to prevent adverse effects on the QIs/SCIs of the European sites involved, in view of their Conservation Objectives.

3. The proposed development

3.1. Proposed development description

The proposed development involves the provision of 5(No.) social housing units, the refurbishment of a protected structure on the site which will house 2(No.) of the 5(No.) units as apartments, and all associated site works (Figure 3.1).

The main proposed construction works elements include the following:

- Site clearance and excavation
- Strip foundations of proposed units

¹² OPR (2021). Practice Note PN01 on Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management.

¹³ With regard to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, and case law [C127/02 Waddenzee](#)

- Renovation/alterations of existing building
- Underground site services (see Figure 3.2 for proposed surface water and waste water drainage)
- External boundary walls and fences
- Hardstandings, kerbs and roadways
- Road marking and signage

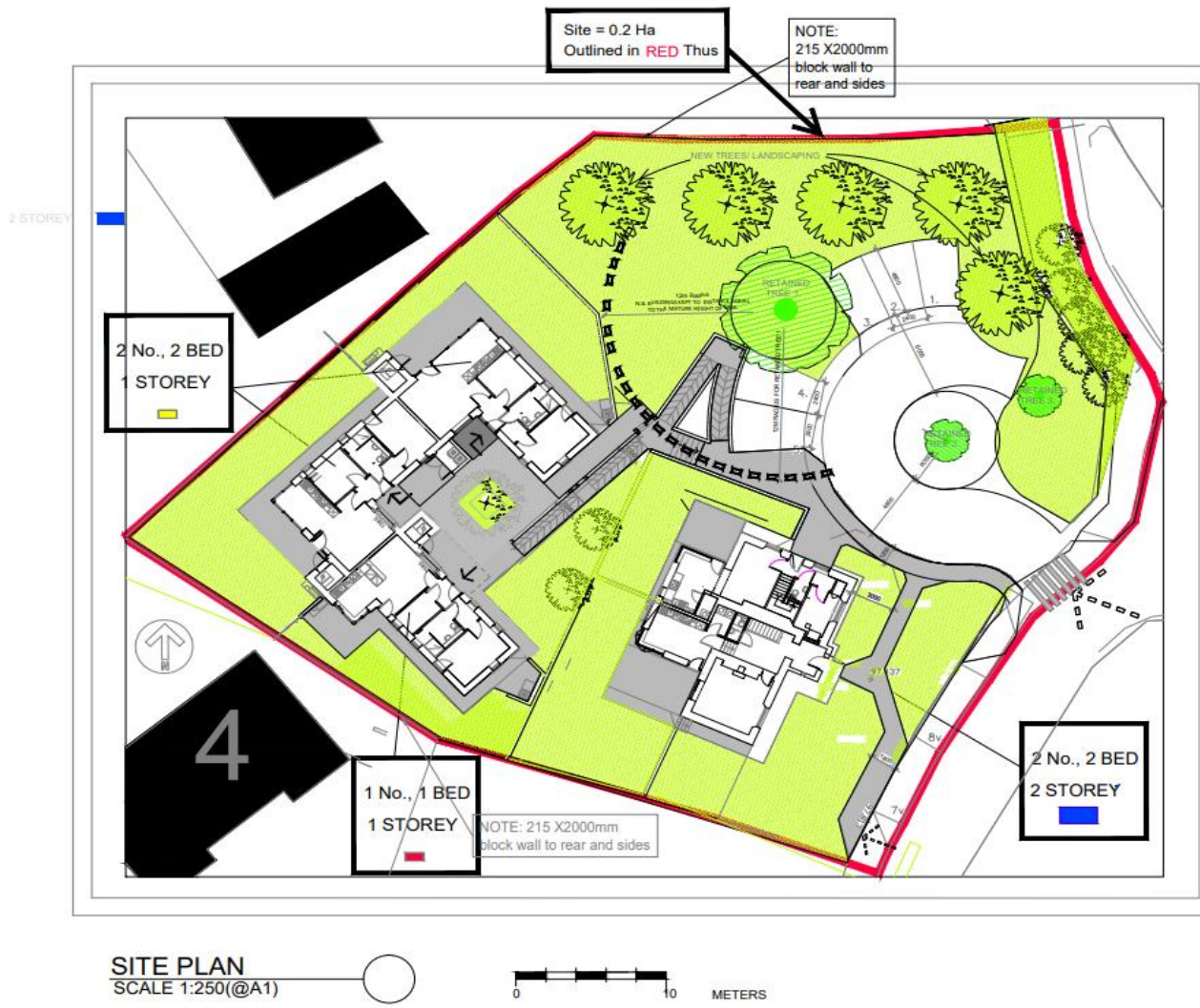


Figure 3.1 Plan for the proposed development ¹⁴

¹⁴ Source: Westmeath County Council. See accompanying drawing set for full scale version

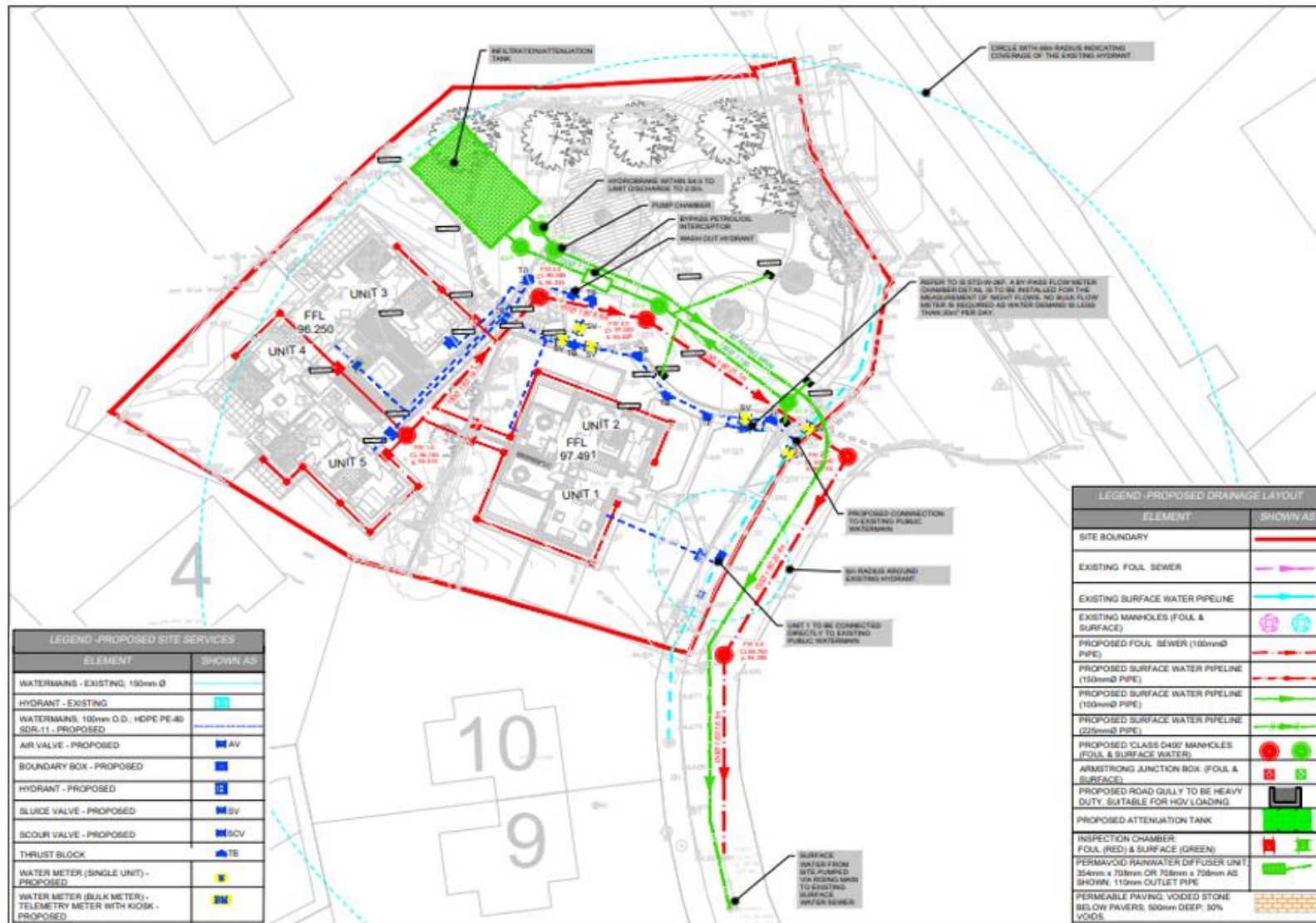


Figure 3.2 Proposed surface and waste water drainage for the proposed development ¹⁰

4. Receiving environment overview

The proposed development is located at the site of the former Belvedere Orphanage, to the north of Tyrrellspass village (Figure 4.1), County Westmeath. The proposed site is approximately 0.145 ha in area and is composed of a mix of amenity grassland, mature trees, hard surface pathways, scrub and the former Matron's House and associated outbuildings.

In the wider context, the proposed site is situated within a suburban area of Tyrrellspass village with a number of similar small residential areas and amenities in the vicinity. The lands to the east and west of the site are mainly agricultural use, with a large peatland, the Cloncrow Bog, located approximately 400 m west which is partially excavated and partially forested (Figure 4.1).

In examining satellite imagery and the EPA databases on water courses¹⁵, there are no surface water courses directly connected with or adjacent to the proposed development site; and at its closest point the nearest water course, the Tyrrellspass stream, is approximately 415 m north of the proposed site (Figure 4.2)

¹⁵ Accessed at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/> 11th June 2024

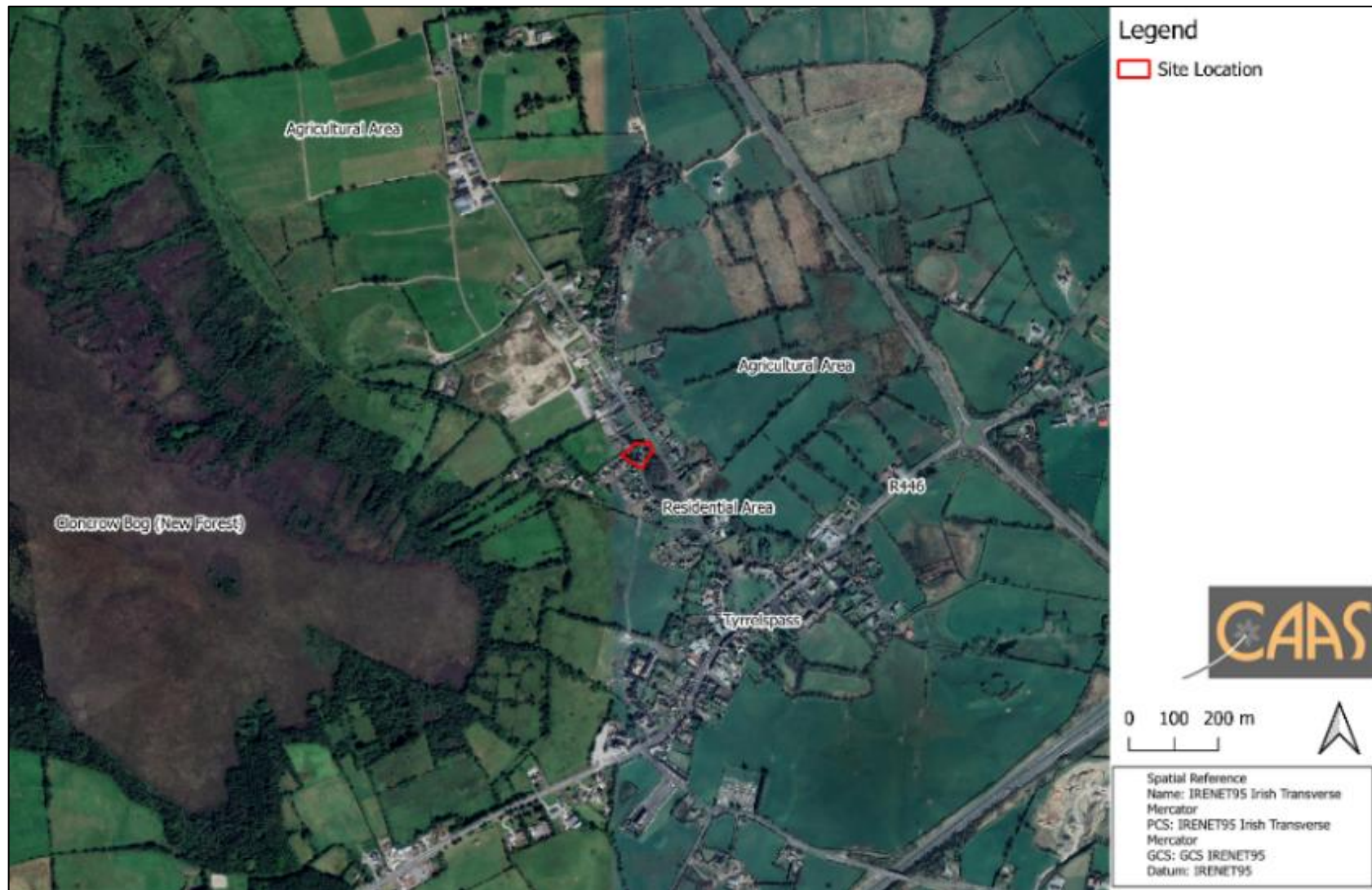


Figure 4.1 Proposed development site location¹⁶

¹⁶ Source: Google maps (site boundary is approximate)

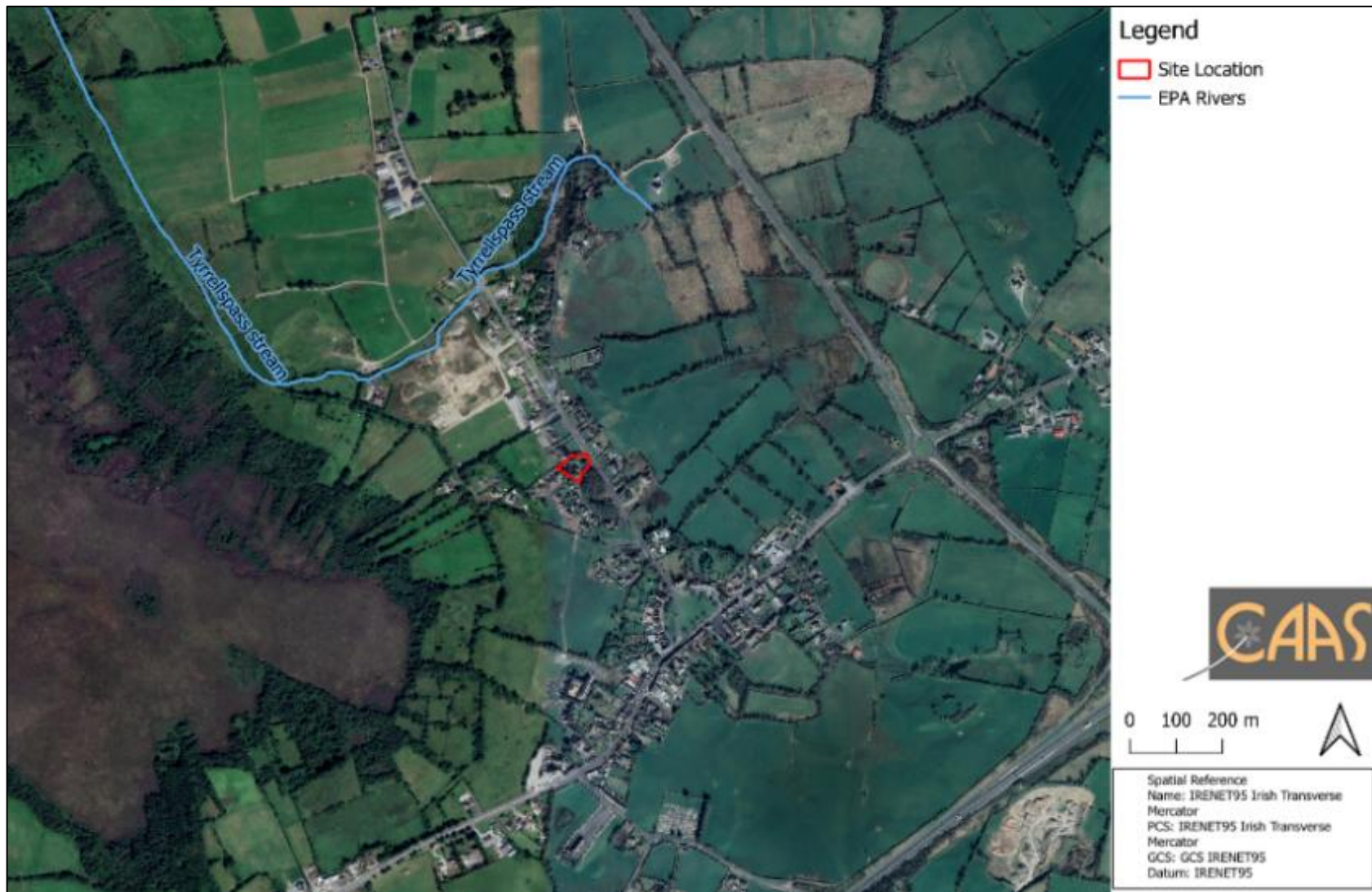


Figure 4.2 Location of EPA surface watercourses in the vicinity of the proposed development site¹⁷

¹⁷ Source: EPA datasets – available [here](#)

5. Screening for Appropriate Assessment

5.1. Introduction

This stage of the process identifies any likely significant effects on European sites arising from the project, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans. A series of questions are asked in order to determine:

- Whether the project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site.
- Whether the project will have a potentially significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, in view of the site's conservation objectives or if residual uncertainty exists regarding potential impacts.

An important element of the AA process is the identification of the "Conservation Objectives", "Qualifying Interests" (QIs) and/or "Special Conservation Interests" (SCIs) of European sites requiring assessment. QIs are the habitat features and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive for which each Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been designated and afforded protection under the Habitats Directive. SCIs are bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive for which each Special Protection Area (SPA) has been designated and afforded protection under the Habitats Directive. Under the requirements of the Habitats Directive, the threats and pressures on the ecological / environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs, with specific regard to the COs of each site, are considered as part of the assessment.

Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) have been designed to define favourable conservation status for a particular habitat or species at that site. According to the European Commission interpretation document 'Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC', paragraph 4.6(3):

"The integrity of a site involves its ecological functions. The decision as to whether it is adversely affected should focus on and be limited to the site's conservation objectives."

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- Its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing;
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future; and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- Population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats;
- The natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future; and
- There is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

5.2. Relationship with European sites

The closest European site is Split Hills and Long Hill Esker SAC at 3.67 km directly from the proposed site, and the closest hydrologically sensitive European sites is Lough Ennell SAC at 4.87 km directly from the proposed site. There are no direct hydrological connections with any European site, there may be distant indirect connectivity via surface water drainage systems.

The proposed development involves disturbance interactions with the surrounding landscape. European sites that are designated for SCI species that are known to utilise isolated / ex-situ resources across the landscape (i.e., for foraging and or roosting outside of the designated SPA boundary) and thus could interact with the proposed development are considered in this context during the assessment report.

As such, considerations were given to any potential indirect connectivity to European sites, via surface water drainage and ex-situ foraging disturbance. These factors are considered in the context of the proposed development, and a Zone of Influence is established for each source, pathway and receptor as necessary in the context of the relevant European sites.

5.2.1. Zone of Influence

Regarding general noise and dust disturbance from the construction phase of the proposed development, a ZoI of 200 m is considered suitable given the small-scale nature of the proposed development and adjoining short timeline for construction.

Similarly considering the small-scale nature of the proposed development and the connection of services (i.e., surface water drainage and wastewater) for the operational phase of the proposed development to the existing respective networks which service the Tyrrellspass area, a ZoI of 500 m indirect hydrological connectivity (if any) via urban drainage is considered suitable.

Regarding noise disturbance for potential ex-situ foraging SCI species; the closest SPA is 6 km in distance (directly) from the proposed development, and is designated for species which occur in freshwater habitats. However, SCI species from SPAs further afield could utilise adjoining or nearby agricultural lands for roosting or foraging. Considering these factors and the small scale of the proposed development, a ZoI of 200 m is also considered suitable for examining potential disturbance effects from the construction and operational phases to ex-situ foraging SCI species.

5.3. Characterising potential significant effects

In order to determine the potential effects of the development, information on the qualifying features, known vulnerabilities and threats pertaining to any potentially affected European sites has been reviewed. Background information on threats to individual sites and vulnerability of habitats and species that was used during this assessment included the following:

- Ireland's Article 17 Report to the European Commission "*Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland*" (NPWS, 2019);
- Ireland's Article 12 Report to the European Commission "*Bird species' status and trends reporting format for the period 2008-2012-*" (NPWS, 2012)

- Site Synopses¹⁸; and
- NATURA 2000 Standard Data Forms¹³.

The terminology used for characterisation of potential effects¹⁹ in this AASR is as follows: -

- **Direct and Indirect Impacts** - An impact can be caused either as a direct or as an indirect consequence of a Plan/Project.
- **Magnitude** - Magnitude measures the size of an impact, which is described as high, medium, low, very low or negligible.
- **Extent** - The area over that the impact occurs – this should be predicted in a quantified manner.
- **Duration** - The time that the effect is expected to last prior to recovery or replacement of the resource or feature.
 - Temporary: Up to 1 Year;
 - Short Term: The effects would take 1-7 years to be mitigated;
 - Medium Term: The effects would take 7-15 years to be mitigated;
 - Long Term: The effects would take 15-60 years to be mitigated; and
 - Permanent: The effects would take 60 or more years to be mitigated.
- **Likelihood** – The probability of the effect occurring taking into account all available information.
 - Certain/Near Certain: >95% chance of occurring as predicted;
 - Probable: 50-95% chance as occurring as predicted;
 - Unlikely: 5-50% chance as occurring as predicted; and
 - Extremely Unlikely: <5% chance as occurring as predicted.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) guidelines for ecological impact assessment (2016) define: an ecologically significant impact as an impact (negative or positive) on the integrity of a defined site or ecosystem and/or the conservation status of habitats or species within a given geographic area; and the integrity of a site as the coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area, which enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it was classified.

The Habitats Directive requires the focus of the assessment at this screening stage to be on the integrity of the site as indicated by its Conservation Objectives. It is an aim of NPWS to draw up conservation management plans for all areas designated for nature conservation. These plans will, among other things, set clear objectives for the conservation of the features of interest within a site.

Detailed SSCOs have been prepared for a number of European sites. These detailed SSCOs aim to define favourable conservation condition for the qualifying habitats and species at that site by setting

¹⁸ NPWS (2019); NPWS Database of protected site data and associated documents for each European site; available at <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>: last accessed 17th April 2024

¹⁹ Parameters used have been adapted from the following guidance documents on the conduction Appropriate Assessments and Ecological Impact Assessments:

- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities
- CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.2. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester; and,

targets for appropriate attributes which define the character habitat. The maintenance of the favourable condition for these habitats and species at the site level will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when: *‘population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.’*

Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when: *‘its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable’.*

Where detailed SSCOs have not been prepared for any European site, the below **First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives** apply:

European site type	First Order Site-specific Conservation Objective²⁰
SAC	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected
SPA	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for the SPA

5.4. Identification of potential significant effects

This part of the screening assessment process identifies whether the changes brought about by the proposed development may have sources with pathways for introducing direct, indirect or secondary potential effects (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the European sites considered in this report, in the absence of any controls, conditions, or mitigation measures (as required for an AASR). The overall aim of the AASR is to examine the potential effects presented by the proposed development and examine whether they can be reasonably foreseen to have a likelihood of causing significant effects on European sites as a result of the implementation of the proposed development, in the context of their SSCOs and the threats and pressures on their QIs and SCIs.

The elements of the construction and operational phases of the proposed development with potential to introduce sources for effects on ecological processes are identified below. These will be discussed and considered for a likelihood of significant effects in view of the Special Conservation Interests, and Qualifying Interests of the European sites, and their sensitivities, and Qualifying Interests. Subsequently the potential effects with sources and pathways that have been identified to have a likelihood for significant effects on European sites (if any) will be summarised.

5.4.1. Construction phase potential effects

²⁰ NPWS Conservation Management Planning [website](#), accessed May 2024

The closest European site is Split Hills and Long Hill Esker SAC at 3.67 km directly from the proposed site, and the closest hydrologically sensitive European sites is Lough Ennell SAC at 4.87 km directly from the proposed site. The proposed site small scale at 0.145 ha in size, has no direct hydrological connection to any European site. The construction phase will involve the construction of 5 social housing units (Figure 3.1), all associated works and new wastewater and surface water drainage infrastructure on site that will connect to existing drainage infrastructure (Figure 3.2). The construction phase will be localized, small-scale, and temporary. There will be an increase in hard surface area within the proposed site during the construction phase. Therefore, sources for potential effects from the construction phase of the proposed development have been identified as:

- Disturbance effects through noise;
- Surface water drainage; and,
- Dust.

Disturbance effects through noise

SCI species of SPAs are sensitive to disturbance effects; in general distances beyond 2 km are seen to be sufficient to preclude such effects^{21,22}. These distances can vary due to factors such as species and/or time of year^{23,24}. There are no European sites located within the 200m ZoI for noise disturbance to SCI species. The closest SPA to the proposed development site is Lough Ennell SPA at 6 km in distance, therefore there are no sources for direct disturbance to SPAs as a result of the proposed development. The agricultural lands surrounding the proposed site (Figure 4.1) could be utilised by SCI species from SPAs further afield, for roosting or foraging, and the proposed development could present a course for effect from noise disturbance if SCI species were to utilise such lands. However, considering the small scale (0.145 ha) and temporary timelines (under one year) for construction, the nature of the proposed development (s 3.1), there are no sources with pathways for likely significant effects on European sites or supporting habitats via disturbance from the construction phase of the proposed development

Drainage

The proposed development involves the construction of 5 residential units and associated site services and landscaping. This could present a source for potential effects on water quality via construction phase related surface run off via surrounding underground suburban drainage. There are no European sites located within the 500m ZoI for potential effects from surface water drainage. Considering the small scale (0.145 ha), short duration of the proposed development's construction phase; the lack of any direct hydrological connectivity, surface water drainage does not present a source for likely significant effects on European sites as a result of the construction phase of the proposed development.

Dust

There will be an increase in dust emissions during the construction phase of the proposed

²¹ Rudock, M. and Whitfield, D.P., 2007. A review of disturbance distances in selected bird species. A report from Natural Research (Projects) Ltd to Scottish Natural Heritage, 181.

²² Bright, J.A., Langston, R. and Anthony, S., 2009. Mapped and written guidance in relation to birds and onshore wind energy development in England. Sandy: RSPB.

²³ Bötsch, Y., Tablado, Z. and Jenni, L., 2017. Experimental evidence of human recreational disturbance effects on bird-territory establishment. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 284(1858), p.20170846.

²⁴ Goss-Custard, J.D., Hoppe, C.H., Hood, M.J. and Stillman, R.A., 2020. Disturbance does not have a significant impact on waders in an estuary close to conurbations: importance of overlap between birds and people in time and space. *Ibis*, 162(3), pp.845-862.

development. There are no European sites located within the 200m ZoI for potential effects from construction phase related dust. Given the distances between the proposed development site and the closest European sites of 3.67 km (Split Hills and Long Hill Esker SAC); the small scale of the proposed development; and, the temporary nature of the construction phase, there are no sources with pathways for likely significant effects via construction related dust as a result of the proposed development.

5.4.2. Operational phase potential effects

The closest European site is Split Hills and Long Hill Esker SAC at 3.67 km directly from the proposed site, and the closest hydrologically sensitive European sites is Lough Ennell SAC at 4.87 km directly from the proposed site. The proposed site small scale at 0.145 ha in size, has no direct hydrological connection to any European site. The operational phase will result in loss of amenity grassland habitat. There will also be additional drainage infrastructure on site for surface water run-off and wastewater on site. There will be an increase in noise at the site due to the increase in housing units. Therefore, the sources for potential effects from the operational phase of the proposed development have been identified as:

- Disturbance effects through noise;
- Urban drainage (surface run off and wastewater); and,
- Habitat loss.

Disturbance effects through noise

The proposed development's operational phase will consist of 5 social housing units. This is a small-scale residential development that is not expected to result in any significant increases in local noise levels, and will be in keeping with the existing noise levels from the small scale surrounding residential developments along the Mullingar Road (Figure 4.1).

Urban drainage (surface run off and wastewater)

New surface water drainage and waste water drainage infrastructure will be installed on site as part of the operational phase of the proposed development. This will connect to existing drainage systems already serving the Tyrrellspass area (Figure 3.2). An infiltration/attenuation tank will also be installed as part of the surface run-off management in the operational phase; however, this is a best practice measure that will be installed regardless of European sites and thus not intended to address potential effects²⁵. There are no European sites located within the 500m ZoI for potential effects from surface water drainage. In addition, the proposed development does not have any direct hydrological connection to any European site. The wastewater drainage system will connect to the local WWTP and Confirmation of Feasibility has been received by the Council from Uisce Éireann for the operational phase of the proposed development.

Thus, considering the above, the proposed development does not present any sources for likely significant effects due to Urban drainage (surface run off and wastewater) as a result of the operational phase of the proposed development.

Habitat loss

The site is composed of habitat that is unsuitable for ex-situ foraging species due to a combination of

²⁵ Case law: Eco Advocacy v An Bord Pleanála (Case C-721/21)

hard artificial surfaces and small patches of residential amenity grassland which are regularly disturbed in the residential environment. Thus, there will be no loss of habitat that neither supports, nor is ecologically connected to, any European sites as a result of the operational phase as a result of the proposed development.

5.4.3. Summary of likely significant effects

Therefore, in summary of the above, for the purposes of this assessment report of the proposed development, and considering the precautionary principle²⁶, the proposed development is identified as having no sources with pathways for likely significant effects on any European sites arising from the construction or operational phases of the proposed development.

5.5. Other plans and projects

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that an assessment of a plan or project must consider other plans or projects that might, in combination with the plan or project, have a likelihood for significant effects on European sites.

The plans or projects considered for in-combination effects were chosen based on the following criteria, in the context of the characteristics and the associated sources for potential effects of the proposed development (as discussed in s 5.4):

- Having direct or indirect connectivity to a European site;
- Being in close proximity to a European site;
- Being of a substantial scale relative to the conditions and/or current works taking place in the surrounding landscape;
- Having disperse emissions or far-reaching sources for effects;
- Having sources for effects on ecological connectivity.

Considering the above factors for Local Authority and An Coimisiún Pleanála (ACP) planning applications; the Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage planning/Local Authority²⁷ and ACP²⁸ databases were searched using a radius of 500m from the proposed development boundary, over the past 5 years²⁹. All developments in these parameters were considered.

Any potential sources for effects from the proposed development have been examined in combination with the potential sources for effects from the plans and projects resulting from the above detailed search parameters for potential additive or interactive effects on the European sites. The resulting plans from the above search criteria are discussed in 5.5.1 below, while the resulting projects from this search are discussed in s 5.5.2 below and displayed in Appendix I.

5.5.1. Plans considered for in-combination effects arising from the proposed development

- Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

²⁶ Case law: ([C127/02 Waddenzee](#)).

²⁷ Local Authority planning applications - available [here](#), accessed; 26th June 2024

²⁸ An Bord Pleanála planning application - available [here](#), accessed; 26th June 2024

²⁹ Planning applications have a standard lifespan of 5 years as per Section 40 (3)(b) of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended; therefore, these are viewed to be the 'live' applications, all other projects are considered as part of the site other than refused and withdrawn applications, as these would not have any in-combination effects

- Westmeath Climate Action Plan 2024-2029
- Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2030

Considering the land use zoning of the above County Development Plan, and that the proposed development has a small-scale, temporary construction phase and the operational phase is consistent with the current site use, it is not foreseen that proposed development will have any likely significant in-combination effects with this plan.

5.5.2. Projects considered for possible in-combination effects from the proposed development:

There were no ACP applications within the above parameters resulting from the search. There are a number of other proposed projects to the Local Authority planning system in the vicinity of the proposed development including works which are at planning stage or underway on various sites. The database search found that the majority of projects within the area are relating to the construction and alteration of residential structures, or change of use applications, all of which undergo Appropriate Assessment where required (Appendix I).

Given the nature and scale of the proposed development, and the lack of any sources with a likelihood for significant effects, there are no sources with pathways for likely significant in-combination effects of the proposed development with any other plans or projects on European sites.

6. Conclusion

This Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has considered potential effects which may arise during the construction and operational phases of the social housing at Belvedere Orphanage, Tyrrellspass, County Westmeath. Through an assessment of the potential sources and potential pathways for significant effects; an evaluation of the project characteristics; taking account of the processes involved and the relationships to and distances from European sites, it has been evaluated by this report that there is no likelihood of significant effects occurring to the Qualifying Interests, Special Conservation Interests or Conservation Objectives of any designated European site as a result of the implementation of the proposed development.

Given its small scale, temporary (i.e., under one year) of the construction period, the operational phase being in keeping with the context of the local environment setting, and the nature and context of the other plans and projects identified in this report; the proposed development is not foreseen to have any likelihood for significant in-combination effects arising from any other plans or projects.

It is concluded by this AA Screening Report that the proposed development is not foreseen to have any likelihood of significant effects on any European sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects – and therefore any potential for significant effects on any European site as a result of the proposed development can be ruled out. This conclusion is made in view of the Conservation Objectives of the habitats or species for which these sites have been designated. Consequently, the proposed development does not need to be subject to Stage Two Appropriate Assessment and a Natura Impact Statement is not required.

Appendix I Local Authority planning applications in the vicinity³⁰ of the proposed development

Project Code	Decision	Description	Grant Date	Project Area (sq m)	Distance from Proposed Development (m)	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Likelihood of significant in-combination effects
2660042	N/A (New application)	construction of an astro turf Juvenile sports pitch (100m x43.5m) to the northwest of the existing site and for a juvenile sports pitch (82.7m x 46.6m) the southwest of the site. Permission is also sought to extend the existing walking track to the northeast of the site, measuring 195m in length and an average of 3m wide and all associated site works. Retention permission is sought for the existing sports pitch of that previously granted under Ref. No. 206180 (90-degree orientation). Retention permission is sought for the existing gravel walking track (an average of 3m wide), measuring 1243m in length. Retention permission is also sought for the existing 40 no. walking lights, adjacent to the walking track and all associated site works.	-	65,097.6	80.30	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects on European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects on any European sites.	No
206180	Conditional	The development will consist of the following: permission for a proposed sports and recreational development adjacent to existing GAA pitch and clubhouse. The construction of a full size gaelic football pitch, an underage gaelic football pitch, two training areas, hurling wall area with AstroTurf surface finish, a dressing room building adjoining the existing gym building consisting of 2 No. dressing rooms with referee room, kitchen and toilet facilities all connecting to existing sewerage pipework on site together with associated drainage works and for the installation of 16 LED pitch flood lighting with supporting masts extending to a maximum height of 21 meters around pitches. Permission is also sought to construct the following (a) a new car-parking area finished with tarmacadam with a total number of 108 spaces and 4 no. bus parking bays with associated kerbing and to erect safety signage, to install street furniture, bins and safety bollards together with landscaping soft areas (b) to construct new walkways around pitches varying in width from 4.5 metres to 7.5 metres and measuring approximately 1400 metres with associated safety lighting for the walkways and carpark and to erect a 2 meter high security fence around main boundaries with pitch railing around the perimeter of the proposed playing pitches and (c) to retain and complete a new site entrance as constructed on site. Permission is also sought to (d) install a new surface drainage system with road gullies, attenuation tank and	2021-03-31	46,529.4	183.67	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects on European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects on any European sites.	No

³⁰ Parameters used: Local Authority planning applications within the last 5 years, within a radius of 200m around the proposed development boundary

Project Code	Decision	Description	Grant Date	Project Area (sq m)	Distance from Proposed Development (m)	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Likelihood of significant in-combination effects
		petrol interceptors with outlet pipe connected to existing stream adjacent to the site and for permission to connect to all on site ancillary services together with all associated site works.					
196169	Conditional	development that consists of cut and fill of soil material located in the adjoining field North West to the Tyrrellspass GAA grounds. The proposed maximum depth of cut is approximately 0.7m deep and the maximum amount of soil fill is approximately 3m. The proposed finished ground level is approximately 0.4m above the existing adjacent playing pitch and approximately 1.4m below road level taken from a point located at the existing GAA entrance. No material will be removed off the site while it is proposed to fill with imported soil (subject to waste permit/certificate subject to a separate application) and for all associated site works.	2020-01-06	41,639.2	80.74	<p>This is a medium-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements.</p> <p>Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects on European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects on any European sites.</p>	No

Appendix II Legislative context and Habitats Directive overview

The Habitats Directive provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the “favourable conservation status” of habitats and species of European Community Interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives (Habitats Directive as above and Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds) with Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated to afford their protection. Qualifying Interests (QIs) are the habitats and species for which SACs are designated and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) are the species for which SPAs are designated. SACs and SPAs are known and referred to as European sites.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect such sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for AA. These requirements are implemented in the Republic of Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive States:

‘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’.

For the purposes of this assessment, the above definition relates to a project. The AA process relates to the protection of species listed in Annex I and Annex II of the Habitats Directive which form the Natura 2000 network (Article 3(1)). Species breeding and resting places of species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive are nationally protected in Ireland as per Articles 15 and 16 of the Habitats Directive. The actual species listed in Annex IV do not form part of the Natura 2000 network as they are not mentioned in Article 3(1) of the Directive which defines the Natura 2000 network.

Article 3(1) of the Habitats Directive States:

‘A coherent European ecological network of special areas of conservation shall be set up under the title Natura 2000. This network, composed of sites hosting the natural habitat types listed in Annex I and habitats of the species listed in Annex II, shall enable the natural habitat types and the species’ habitats concerned to be maintained or, where appropriate, restored at a favourable conservation status in their natural range’.

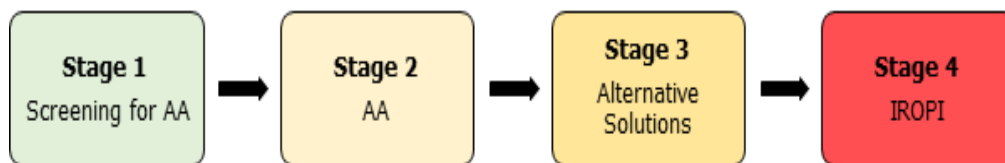
AA is an assessment of the likelihood of significant effects arising from a project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, to assess if the project will have potential for significant effect on any European site concerned, and implications in view of the European site’s Conservation Objectives (COs). These sites consist of SACs and SPAs and provide for the protection and long-term

survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. Where a formal consent process applies, the AA process is concluded by the relevant competent authority making a determination in accordance with article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Overview of the Habitats Directive and Appropriate Assessment process

The Habitats Directive itself promotes a hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensatory measures. This approach aims to avoid any effects on European sites by identifying possible effects early in the project making process and avoiding such effects. Second, the approach involves the application of mitigation measures, if necessary, during the AA process to the point where no adverse impacts on the site(s) remain. If potential significant effects on European sites remain, and no further practicable mitigation is possible, the approach requires the consideration of alternative solutions. If no alternative solutions are identified and the project is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, then compensation measures are required for any remaining adverse effects.

There are four main stages in the AA process:



Stage one: Appropriate Assessment Screening

The process that identifies the likely impacts upon a European site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant. An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (AASR) can be compiled to inform the competent authority on conducting a Screening for AA.

Stage two: Appropriate Assessment (AA)

The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the European 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 effects mitigation measures are required to avoid or minimise potential effects. The details of these mitigation measures are then assessed in the context of the ecological integrity of the plan/project characteristics to ensure no significant adverse effects on European sites. If this assessment process shows there are no residual significant effects, then the process may end at this stage, stage two, of the AA process which are formalised in Natura Impact Statements (NIS) reports which support the overall AA process. However, if the likelihood of significant impacts remains, then the process must proceed to Stage Three.

Stage three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions

The process that examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoids adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site.

Stage four: Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI)

An assessment of compensatory measures, where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain, but in the light of an assessment of IROPI, it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Appendix III Contributor details

Author - Karen Dylan Shevlin is a lead ecologist with over 12 years' experience working in multiple capacities in ecology in Irish and international research institutions and organisations, and holds a MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation from Trinity College Dublin (Dist. 2013). Karen has significant skills and experience in leading research and ecological surveys of bats, birds, insects, habitats and mammals, data analysis and managing resulting reports. Karen is also a specialist in ecological theory and the impacts/effects that altering natural dynamics may have on the surrounding environment. Karen has been the lead author and reviewed on many Appropriate Assessment Screenings, NISs, and EIARs for a range of public and private projects and plans ranging from residential and industrial projects, to County Development Plans, to major wind turbine sites. This combination of skills and knowledge provides the backbone of the assessment process, and ensure that all of the baseline and detailed data gathered in the field is interpreted in a manner that is grounded in best scientific knowledge.

Reviewer - Paul Fingleton has an MSc in Rural and Regional Resources Planning (with specialisation in EIA) from the University of Aberdeen. Paul is a member of the International Association for Impact Assessment as well as the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. He has over twenty-five years' experience working in the area of Environmental Assessment. Over this period, he has been involved in a diverse range of projects including contributions to, and co-ordination of, numerous complex EIARs and EIA screening reports. He has also contributed to and supervised the preparation of numerous AAs and AA screenings.

Paul is the lead author of the current EPA Guidelines and accompanying Advice Notes on EIARs. He has been involved in all previous editions of these statutory guidelines. He also provides a range of other EIA related consultancy services to the EPA. Paul is regularly engaged by various planning authorities and other consent authorities to provide specialised EIA advice.

Technical assistant - Callum O'Regan is an ecologist who holds a B.Sc. degree in Zoology from University College Cork and a Master's in Conservation Behaviour from Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in 2021. Callum has skills in data management and analysis, report writing and GIS mapping. Callum has also worked on preparation of a number of reports including Ecological Impact Assessments (EClAs) and Appropriate Assessment Screenings for private and public projects of various sizes and complexities.