

Ballinahown Greenway, Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report





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Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

Document Control Sheet

Client:	Westmeath County Council
Document No:	252243-ORS-XX-XX-RP-EN-13d-001

Revision	Status	Author:	Reviewed by:	Approved By:	Issue Date
P01	S1	KS	SB/JS	NK	22/01/2026



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report has been prepared in support of a proposed development located on a site adjacent to Ballinahown Sports Center, in the townland of Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath. The proposed development will consist of a pedestrian and cycle link from Ballinahown Village to Bord Na Mona lands at Ballinahown. A full description of the development is provided in **Section 4.1**.

Article 6 of the EU Habitats 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 Stage II Appropriate Assessment of the proposed plan or project is necessary. A comprehensive assessment of the potential significant effects of the development on designated sites was carried out in October 2025 by Killian Smith BAgSc, of ORS Building Consultants. This report will allow the relevant competent authority to undertake an Appropriate Assessment as required, and determine the appropriateness of the proposed project in the context of the conservation status of the designated sites.

In complying with the obligations set out in Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, and following guidelines in Section 2, this screening statement has been structured as a stage-by-stage approach as follows:

- Description of the proposed project and its potential sources of ecological impact.
- Identification of the Natura 2000 sites within the Zone of Influence 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.

1.2 Statement of Competency

1.2.1 Lead Author

This Appropriate Assessment Screening report was authored by Killian Smith BAgSc. Killian's academic background, along with his professional experience has helped him to develop a broad range of practical skills in environmental science, agriculture, ecology, environmental monitoring, report writing and client success.

Since joining ORS, Killian has been producing technical reports such as Environmental Due Diligence reports, Phase-1 Contaminated Land reports, Construction Environmental Management Plans and Resource Waste Management Plans.

1.2.2 Reviewer

This Appropriate Assessment Screening report was reviewed by Seán Burke, MSc. Seán has a bachelor's degree in science – Single Honours Biology from Maynooth University and a

master's degree in Ecology & Biodiversity from Stockholm University. His academic experience has provided fundamental training in the scientific method and a strong knowledge of the theoretical background of biological and ecological processes. Seán has previous experience working in the agri-food sector developing biological control agents for the suppression of fungal pathogens which provided hands on experience in learning laboratory techniques and studying ecological interactions. His more recent work experience with ORS has provided the opportunity to take part in ecological field work consisting of macroinvertebrate sampling, bird surveying, habitat assessment and classification, preliminary bat surveying, mammal surveying, and ecological impact assessment. This experience has been applied to projects of varying size across commercial, industrial, and residential projects.

1.3 Development Overview

Westmeath County Council (WCC) proposes to develop a 1.3 km combined pedestrian and cycleway from Ballinahown Sports Park through lands predominantly in agricultural use, located to the west of the L-1406 local road in Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath.

Subject to land acquisition and licencing, the works will include:

- Construction of a 3 m-wide pedestrian and cycleway with a bound surface and associated grass verges
- Installation of a new 1.3 m-high stock-proof fence supplemented with native hedgerow planting
- Provision of a bridge/culvert to carry the pedestrian and cycleway across an existing drainage channel; and
- Other associated ancillary works.

There are no recorded monuments or protected structures within the site.

The purpose of the project is to link Ballinahown village to the wider Greenway network by providing a dedicated pedestrian and cycle connection between Ballinahown and the planned Bord na Móna Greenway (Athlone–Clonmacnoise). In time, this Greenway will connect to the Dublin–Galway Cycleway, forming part of the EuroVelo 2 route from Galway to Moscow. Approximately €14 million has been invested to date in Westmeath's Greenways, and WCC continues to work with local communities to develop the linkages, facilities, and amenities required to maximise their value.

The project will also provide improved access to Greenway amenities for residents of Ballinahown and the wider community, who despite living adjacent to these significant recreational assets have had limited means to access them safely and conveniently.

The location of the proposed development is provided in **Figure 1.1**, below. A further assessment of the characteristics of the proposed development and its environs is included in **Sections 4 and 5** of this report.



Figure 1.1: Location of proposed development, Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath.

2 Regulatory Context

The foundation of ecological protection in Ireland is rooted in European Union legislation, particularly Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (the 'Habitats Directive') and Council Directive 2009/147/EC (the 'Birds Directive'). These directives establish the Natura 2000 network, a pan-European system of protected sites aimed at safeguarding the most valuable and threatened habitats and species across the EU.

Within this network, two types of designations are used:

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)**, designated under the Habitats Directive, protect habitats, flora and non-avian fauna of European importance.
- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)**, designated under the Birds Directive, focus on the conservation of rare and migratory bird species and their habitats, including wetlands and coastal zones.

The Birds Directive 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 SPAs, selected for the conservation of bird species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive. These are regularly occurring populations of migratory bird species, species that are particularly threatened, species vulnerable to specific changes in their habitat, and rare species. SPAs are of international importance for these birds.

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 the EU-wide Natura 2000 network.

2.1 Appropriate Assessment and the Habitats Directive

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive call for the undertaking of an Appropriate Assessment for plans and projects that are likely to have a significant effect on any Natura 2000 sites, but are not directly connected with, or necessary to, their management.

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.”

2.2 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.

2.3 Appropriate Screening Guidelines

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*

2.3.1 The Precautionary Principle

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.

2.3.2 The Source-Pathway-Receptor Model

The OPR Guidance states that “a European site will only be at risk from likely significant effects where the Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) link exists between the proposed development and the European site”. Determining whether a S-P-R linkage exists between the proposed development and a European site requires identifying the three components of the S-P-R model:

Source: “identify characteristics of the proposed development such as the nature, size and location and the types of effects, such as direct emissions or loss of habitat”.

Pathway: “identify the existence and characteristics of pathways, such as waterbodies or air, that could link European sites and their Qualifying Interests to the proposed development”.

Receptor: “establish the location, nature and sensitivities of the qualifying species and habitats, the ecological conditions underpinning their survival and the conservation objectives specified to maintain or restore favourable conservation status”.

2.3.3 Conditions for Requirement of Natura Impact Statement

Plans directly connected to, or necessary to the management of, the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site are not subject to AA. All other plans or projects must be screened with respect S-P-R linkage with the Natura 2000 network. A full Natura Impact Statement is required *“if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that it will have a significant effect on that site, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects”* (European Commission, 2006). Due to the **precautionary principle**, AA (NIS) is still required **where doubt exists** about the risk of a significant effect (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009).

In this context, a **significant effect** refers to situations where the impacts of a plan or project are likely to undermine the conservation objectives for a Natura 2000 site. 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 pathway or connectivity between the source and receptor, (*e.g.* a water course). Where it can be shown that the impacts of a plan or project are not relevant to the sensitivities of the Qualifying Interests (QIs) or Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) for a Natura 2000 site (habitats and species), a significant effect can be excluded. Similarly, impacts without a plausible pathway between source and receptor can be excluded. This is influenced by the size of the plan area, the nature and extent of development, and any combined impacts arising from other planning proposals in the area.

3 AA Screening Methodology

3.1 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.
- Westmeath County Council.
- EPA Online Maps.
- Bing maps & Google Street View – High quality aerials and street images.

3.2 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.

4 Site Details

4.1 Project Description

Westmeath County Council (WCC) proposes to develop a 1.3 km combined pedestrian and cycleway extending from Ballinahown Sportspark onto adjoining lands predominantly in agricultural use, located west of the L-1406 local road in Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath.

Project elements (subject to land acquisition) include:

- **Boundary Works:** Installation of 1.3 m-high stock-proof fencing supplemented with native hedgerow planting. Existing hedgerows and trees will be retained where possible. Grassed strips between the track and boundaries will be maintained and reseeded as required.
- **Pedestrian and Cycleway Construction:** A 3 m-wide paved route with a bound surface and grass verges, suitable for cyclists, pedestrians, wheelchair users, and buggies. Access will be provided from Ballinahown Sportspark, the rear of Ballinahown National School (subject to agreement), and from the northwest via the planned Bord na Móna Greenway.
- **Bridge Structures:** Provision of a 3 m-wide pedestrian and cycle bridge structure to cross existing open drainage channels.
- **Ancillary Infrastructure:** Installation of signage (mapboards, tourist information, and directional signage) and provision of cycle parking and benches at Ballinahown Sportspark, the scheme's northern extent within Bord na Móna lands, and at other suitable locations.

WCC is advancing improvements to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in Ballinahown. The proposed site currently lacks dedicated cycling facilities and will require localised widening of the existing footpath within the Sportspark and potential road widening along the route, which may necessitate limited tree removal and culverting of three open drains.

The scheme is at preliminary design stage and may be subject to refinement. Works will typically include:

- Excavation of soils and subsoils;
- Off-site disposal of surplus material to an authorised facility;
- Installation of culverts;
- Placement and compaction of hardcore;
- Installation of a 50 mm macadam surface;
- Ducting and provision for public lighting;
- Fencing and compensatory planting where required;
- Daytime construction-related noise and disturbance.

The construction phase is expected to last approximately 12 months.

A site layout plan is provided in in **Figure 4.1** below.



Figure 4.1: Proposed site layout plan (Source: Westmeath County Council).

4.1.1 Potential Sources of Ecological Impact

Incorporating best practice in construction and operation (*without* mitigation), the proposed development has the following potential ecological impacts:

Habitat Modification (On-site). Ground clearance. Hedgerow destruction. Bound surfacing for cycle path.

Introduction of Invasive Alien Species (On-site). Road/access construction. Soft landscaping.

Habitat Connectivity (<200 m). Risks due to habitat loss during hedgerow removal for installation of bridge structures.

Disturbance (<500 m). Noise/Vibration. Minor excavation for pathway. Site Clearance (200 m). Construction. Demolition. Operation/usage. Site traffic.

Air Pollution (500 m). Fumes. Site traffic. Construction dust. Soil erosion. Fire risks.

Groundwater Pollution (<5 km). Chemical spills. Excavation. Contamination from fuels/oils.

Surface Water Pollution (500 m + 10 km downstream). Site run-off. Chemical spills. Soil erosion (2 km downstream). Installation of flat bed bridges.

Increased Run-off (Downstream Catchment). Excavation. Artificial Surfaces. Infiltration changes following compacting of topsoil.

Altered Hydrology (Downstream Groundwater Flow Path). Infiltration changes following loss of topsoil.

The following sections discuss features of the local environment that will influence the risk of significant ecological impacts occurring.

4.2 Site Location, Environs and Environmental Considerations

The proposed works are beginning at Ballinahown Sports Park, (approximate ITM Coordinates: 609975, 733311) and will finish approximately 1.5km west at the edge of the Bord na Móna lands (approximate ITM Coordinates: 609039, -7.8642240). The site is bound to the east by Ballinahown village. The site is bounded to the north, south and west by extensive low-lying agricultural lands. The surrounding areas are also characterised by areas of raised bog, such as Clonydonnin Bog, located east of the village. Ballinahown lies on the N62 road national approximately 10km south of Athlone.

The entire expanse of the proposed site is greenfield and is to expand for approximately 1.5 west of Ballinahown village.

The site location and environs are presented in **Figure 4.2**.

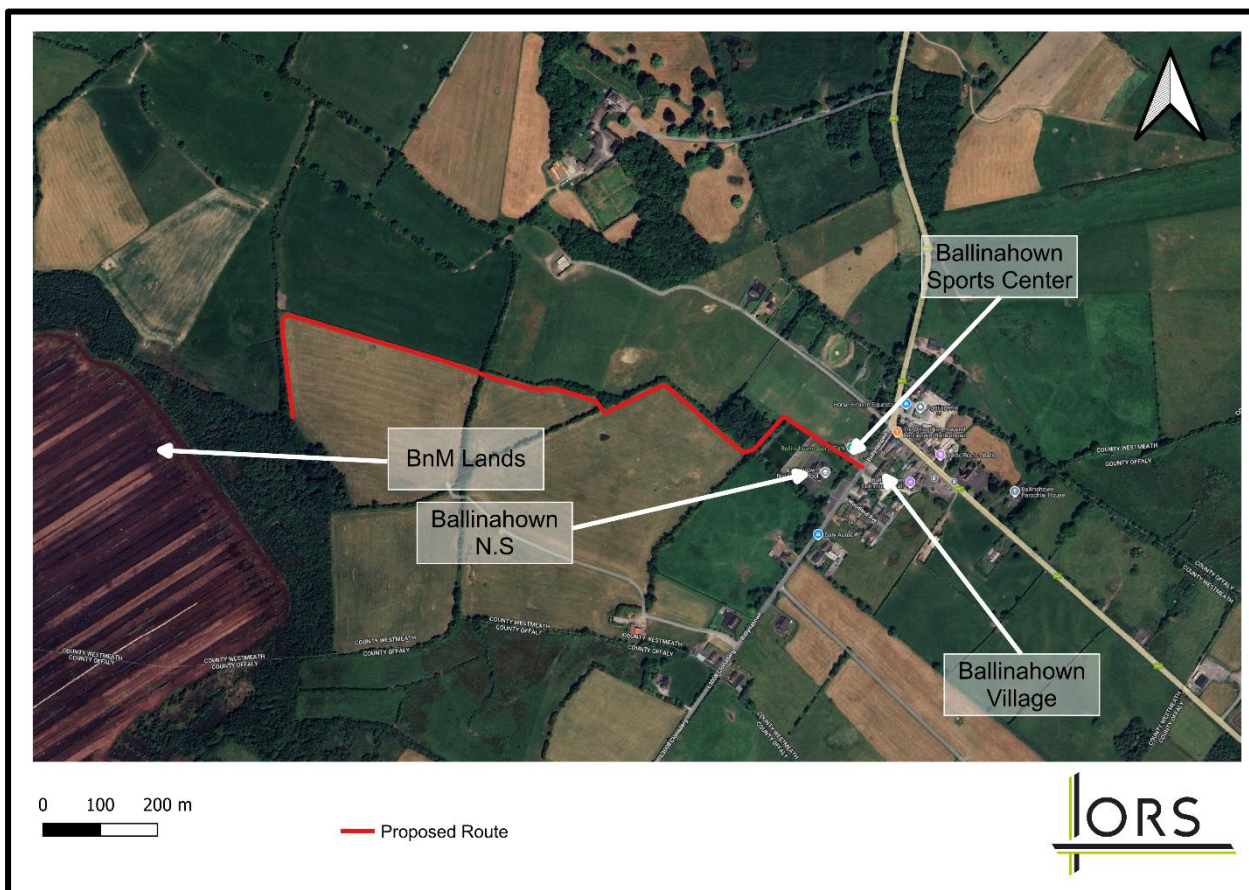


Figure 4.2: Site location and environs (Source: Google Maps).

4.2.1 Topography

A topographical survey was conducted across the entire site. The site is at between ca. 43 m and 51 m AOD from the highest to the lowest point across the 1.5 km pedestrian track. This indicates a vertical difference of ca. 7 m over a horizontal distance of ca. 850 m, resulting in a slope of approximately 1.06%. According to the FAO Slope Gradient Classes (2006), this places the site within the “nearly level” category (Class 03).

4.2.2 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 nearest waterbody to the site is the River Worm (WFD designation: BALLYNAHOWN_26) located ca. 300m north of the proposed development. The Worm flows from the southeast to the west through Ballinahown village, where it is adjoins the River Boor (WFD designation: Boor) and eventually discharges into the River Shannon ca. 2.5km west of the end of the greenway.

Taking the scale and nature of the proposed development into consideration, waterbodies within a 2 km radius of the site, and hydrologically connected downstream, were considered as potential impact pathways and were included in this analysis. A summary of the waterbodies with the potential to act as impact pathways can be found in **Table 4.1** below.

Waterbody	WFD Sub-basin Name	Code	Distance & Direction From Site	WFD Status
River Worm	BOOR_020	IE_SH_26B071200	300m N	Moderate
Unnamed Tributary of River Worm	BOOR_020	IE_SH_26B071200	600m E	Moderate
River Boor	BOOR_020	IE_SH_26B071100	1.7km N	Moderate
Unnamed Tributary of River Shannon	SHANNON (Upper)_120	IE_SH_26S021800	2km S	Moderate

The WFD runs in 6-year cycles with the most recent data being generated between 2016-2021. The Directive takes rivers, lakes, estuaries, groundwater and coastal waters into consideration and each waterbody can be awarded one of five statuses: High, Good, Moderate, Poor, and Bad. Additionally, waterbodies can be assigned a risk level (“At Risk”, “Not at Risk”, “Review”) which represents the risk of the waterbody of failing its WFD objectives by 2027.

Based on data from EPA maps and in accordance with the Water Framework Directive (WFD), both the River Worm, the Boor River have a WFD status of “Moderate” and are classified as “At Risk,” indicating that their ecological and chemical conditions are not favourable.

The entirety of the proposed site is situated within the BOOR_020 Sub-Basin, within Hydrometric Area 26, the Upper Shannon Catchment, and the Shannon[Lower]_SC_010 sub-catchment. The 3rd Upper Shannon Catchment Report (HA 26), published in May 2024 and based on data up to 2021, provides a summary of water quality assessments for this catchment. According to the report, the most significant pressures on water quality in the catchment are hydromorphology, followed by peat and agricultural pressures. The issues driven by these pressures are altered morphological condition (habitat), nutrient pollution and organic pollution impacts.

EPA Maps were also consulted to determine whether any WFD River Network Routes in the vicinity are designated as Salmonid Waters under *S.I. No. 293/1988 - European Communities*

(Quality of Salmonid Waters) Regulations 1988. None of the nearby riverine waterbodies are included in this designation, meaning that no adverse impacts on salmonid habitats are anticipated from the site.

4.2.3 Undocumented Watercourses

Three watercourses traverse the proposed pedestrian track, none of which are identified on EPA hydrological mapping. It is assumed these features function as improved drainage channels associated with the agricultural lands through which the route passes. The design proposes to traverse each channel using flat-deck bridge structures, with no instream works required. This approach avoids direct disturbance to the watercourses and ensures minimal impact during both the construction and operational phases.

4.2.4 Geology & Hydrogeology

GSI & Teagasc soil mapping indicates that the surface soils across the site are classified as “Grey Brown Podzolics, Brown Earths” to the east of the site, and “Basin Peats, Blanket Peats” to the west of the site. The “Grey Brown Podzolics, Brown Earths” soils are described as being derived from mainly calcareous parent materials, which are deep, well drained mineral (mainly acidic) (BminDW). The “Basin Peats, Blanket Peats” soils are described as being derived from cutaway or cutover peat. The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) bedrock database indicates that soils of the proposed site are underlain at depth by bedrock of the Ballysteen Formation, which consists predominantly dark muddy limestone, shale.

According to GSI groundwater maps, the site overlies a locally important aquifer (LI). This aquifer is capable of supplying locally important supplies (e.g., smaller public water supplies, group schemes). The groundwater vulnerability index of the entirety of the site is described as moderate.

The EPA map viewer indicates that the site is underlain by the Inny groundwater body. This groundwater body comprises a large area stretching from south Cavan and the eastern boundary of the Shannon RBD to Lough Ree.

No karst features are present in close proximity to the proposed works, with the nearest feature being a superficial solution feature (IE_GSI_Karst_40K_11045) located ca. 4.6 km south of the site.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts with Other Planning Proposals

Cumulative impacts with other planning proposals were assessed by considering all planning applications from the past 5 years within the Zone of Influence (**Figure 4.3**). Each proposal was assessed for the likelihood of a cumulative impact in terms of the magnitude/scale of ecological impact listed in **Section 4.1.1** (e.g. through additional loss of habitat connectivity), or by increasing the Zone of Influence (e.g. by threatening water quality) (**Table 4.2**).

Of the 3 no. proposals identified, 3 no. have the potential for cumulative impacts and will need to be considered further: 24/60492, 19/7166 and 21/347.

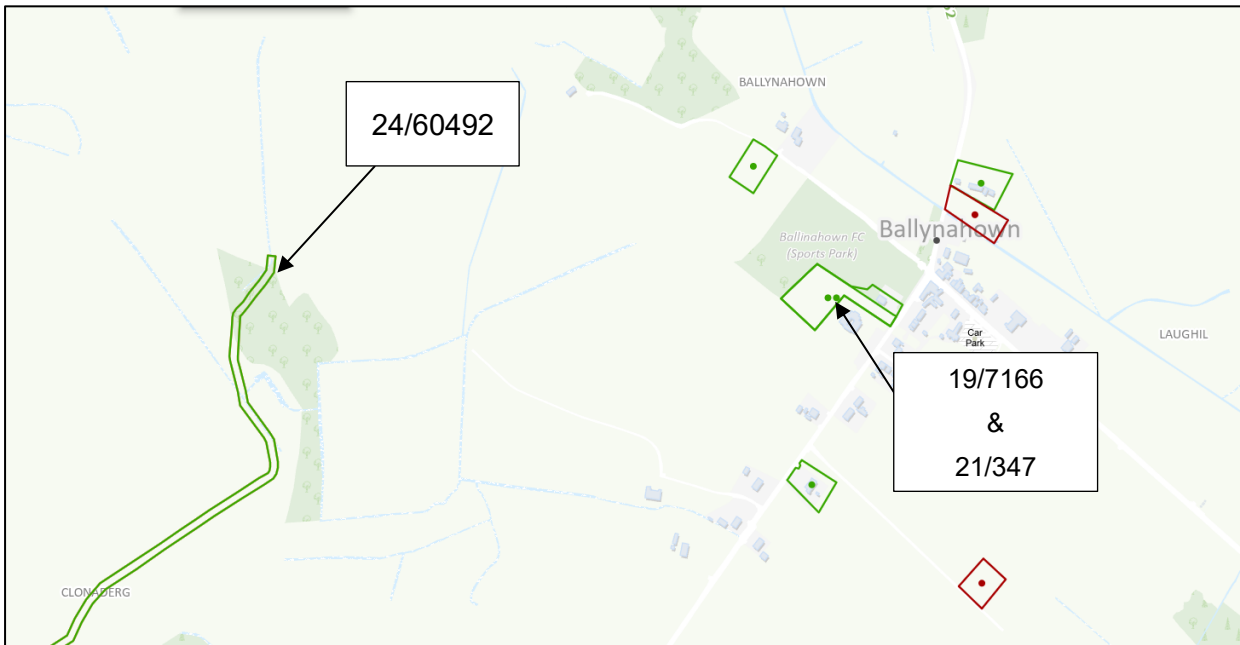


Figure 4.3: Planning Proposals (2015-2025) within Zone of Influence. (Source: housinggovie.maps.arcgis.com)

Table 4.2: Planning Proposals (2015-2025) within Zone of Influence		
Planning Ref. & Decision	Description	Location & Cumulative Impact
24/60492 19/12/2024 – INCOMPLETED APPLICATION	The development of a recreational shared cycle and walkway. The development proposes the following; The delivery of a shared cycle and walkway on Bord na Móna lands. This will include the repurposing of 16,919 meters of existing former rail bed and 8,960 meters along existing bog headlands / former high fields. The proposed shared cycle and walkway will connect into the existing Grand Canal Greenway, The Offaly Way, and the Lough Boora Discovery Park. The construction of car and / or bicycle parking facilities at a number of gateway locations along the proposed route and the provision of EV Charging spaces at the Gateway locations. This will include; 5 no. Type 2 Gateways (including 2 no. upgrades to existing parking and 3 no. proposed parking facilities) 6 no. Type 3 Gateways, 1 no. Type 4 Gateways, 2 no. Major Rest Points, 2 no. Minor Rest Points. Upgrade works to Brosna Bridge (Ref 15-100). The construction of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge spanning the Grand Canal within the Turraun townland. Upgrade works to 10 no. local access road crossings, and 8 no. agricultural crossings. The erection of wayfinding and interpretative signage at Gateway locations along the route. The implementation of Sustainable	When considered in combination with the proposed greenway on the Bord na Mona lands connecting the Grand Canal Greenway, The Offaly way and the lough Boora Discovery park, the proposed pathway at has the potential to interact cumulatively with an adjoining greenway currently under planning, for which a Natura Impact Statement has been prepared. The adjacent scheme has therefore been subject to Appropriate Assessment, with potential effects on European sites identified and addressed through mitigation. The proposed development does not introduce new pathways or increase the scale or intensity of effects

	<p>Drainage Systems (SuDS) nature-based drainage proposals at the Gateway locations to cater for surface water drainage at car park locations. Fencing and screening will be erected where required for health and safety and biodiversity reasons which will include 14,909 meters of ecological screening. All other ancillary and associated site work. This Planning Application is accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement (NIS)</p>	<p>beyond those assessed, and it is not considered likely to give rise to significant cumulative effects on any European site</p>
<p>19/7166 04/10/2019 - CONDITIONAL</p>	<p>Construction of a new 70m by 40m all-weather sports pitch with artificial (AstroTurf) playing surface. The supporting works will include inter alia all site preparations, access road from car park of existing adjacent Ballinahown Sports Park, (utilizing the park's existing vehicular access unto the public roadway), internal pathways, associated parking, drainage, 5m high enclosing fence to pitch, with access gates, four light stanchions (12m high), hurling wall (5m high) and all other associated ancillary site works.</p>	<p>When considered in combination with the adjacent all-weather pitch development, the proposed greenway does not give rise to significant cumulative effects on designated sites or sensitive receptors. While both projects introduce hard surfaces and potential disturbance, there is no direct hydrological connectivity to Natura 2000 sites, and standard drainage and pollution prevention measures will ensure that cumulative impacts on water quality and biodiversity are negligible.</p>
<p>21/347 17/08/2021 - CONDITIONAL</p>	<p>The following additional works to the granted permission under Ref: 19/7166 (i) spectator enclosure (33m long x 2m wide), (ii) warm-up area (230sqm) with two 3m high lighting standards and 2.4m high fencing with gateway (iii) permanent diversion of existing walking track to match existing with three new 3m high public lighting standards (iv) 1.3m high site fencing with access gateway, complete all ancillary and associated site works</p>	

4.4 Cumulative Impacts and Zones of Influence

Taking construction best practices and potential cumulative impacts into consideration, the potential (unmitigated) ecological impacts of the proposed project are summarised in **Table 4.3**.

Table 4.3: Potential Sources of Ecological Impact from Proposed Project				
Impact	Source & Scale [Phase¹]	Zone of Influence	Pathways of Concern	Key Ecological Receptors
Habitat Loss	Ground clearance. Tree-felling. Hedgerow destruction. Bound surfacing for cycle path [P]	0 m	Direct	Species of Concern including Migratory Species
Introduction of Invasive Alien Species	Road/access construction. Soft landscaping. [C]	0 m	Direct	Species and Habitats of Concern
Loss of Connectivity	Habitat loss. Road/access construction. Barrier fencing. Hedge clearance. [P]	0 m	Direct	Species of Concern
Disturbance to Nesting Birds and Mammals	Hedge clearance. [P]	0 m	Direct	Birds, Bats and Mammals
Noise/Vibration	Excavation. Construction. Demolition. Operation/usage. Site traffic. [P, C]	500 m	Proximity	Species of Concern
Air Pollution	Fumes. Site traffic. Construction dust. Soil erosion. Fire risks. [P, C]	500 m	Wind	Species and Habitats of Concern
Groundwater Pollution	Chemical spills. Excavation. Contamination from fuels/oils. [P, C]	500 m	Bedrock aquifer (Locally important)	Species and Habitats of Concern
Surface Water Pollution	Site run-off. Chemical spills. Rain/flooding run-off (operational). Soil erosion. [P, C]	3 km downstream (indirect connectivity)	Surface water and drainage	Species and Habitats of Concern
Waste Pollution (e.g. Plastics)	Construction waste. Usage (private waste). [P, C]	3 km downstream (indirect connectivity)	Surface water and drainage	Species and Habitats of Concern
Increased run-off	Excavation. Hard landscaping. Artificial Surfaces. Infiltration changes following compacting of topsoil.	3 km downstream (indirect connectivity)	Surface water and drainage	Species and Habitats of Concern



	[P, C, O]			
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1. **P**: Pre-construction; **C**: Construction; **O**: Operations; **D**: Decommissioning.

5 Natura 2000 Sites

5.1 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.

An initial screen was performed within the established cumulative Zol of the site (Section 4.4) to identify 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 2 no. Natura 2000 designated sites (SACs and SPAs) located within the Zol of the proposed site (**Figure 5.1**), of which 2 no. had potential S-P-R linkage (**Table 5.1**) and are considered further, below. A full description of the sites can be read on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (www.npws.ie).

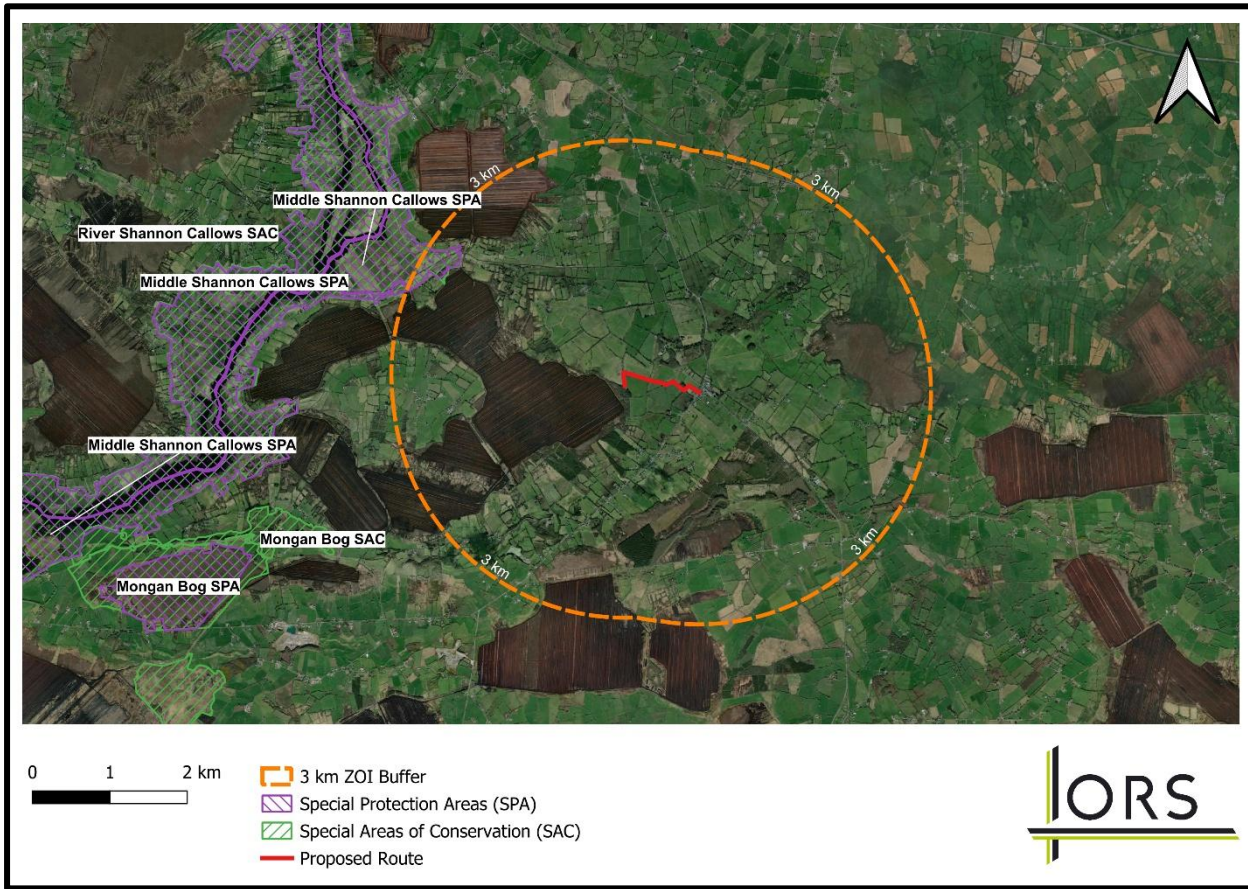


Figure 5.1: Natura 2000 Sites within Zol of Proposed Development.

Table 5.1: Natura 2000 Sites within Zol of Subject Site			
Site Name & Code	Distance & Direction from Site	Potential S-P-R Linkage?	Details
Middle Shannon Callows SPA 004096	2.8 km NW	Indirect linkage	There are 3 no. of surface water drainage channels which traverse the site; however, it has not been confirmed whether these channels discharge to the River Worm, or alternatively attenuate and infiltrate locally to ground, with any potential interaction limited to the underlying Locally Important bedrock aquifer. By employing the precautionary principle, it is assumed these drainage channels discharge to the River Worm and as such, an indirect hydrological linkage is established.
River Shannon Callows SAC 000216	2.8 km NW	Indirect linkage	There are 3 no. of surface water drainage channels which traverse the site; however, it has not been confirmed whether these channels discharge to the River Boor, or alternatively attenuate and infiltrate locally

			<p>to ground, with any potential interaction limited to the underlying Locally Important bedrock aquifer.</p> <p>By employing the precautionary principle, it is assumed these drainage channels discharge to the River Worm and as such, an indirect hydrological linkage is established.</p>
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5.1.1 Natura 2000 Sites with Potential Pathways for Impact

Two Natura 2000 sites have indirect pathways established between the proposed development site and the Natura 2000 site, warranting further consideration: Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096) and River Shannon Callows SAC (000216). These are detailed in **Table 5.2** and **Figure 5.2**. Both sites lie downstream of the River Worm, which flows ca. 300 m north of the proposed development before discharging to the River Boor ca. 1.5 km further north. The River Boor then enters the River Shannon to the northwest. The Middle Shannon Callows SPA and the River Shannon Callows SAC lie within the downstream hydrological pathway.

Table 5.2: Natura 2000 Sites with Potential Pathways for Impact

Site Name & Code	Distance & Direction from Site	Qualifying Interests	Screened In/Out
Middle Shannon Callows SPA 004096	Ca. 2.5m W from site.	<p>Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038]</p> <p>Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) [A122]</p> <p>Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140]</p> <p>Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142]</p> <p>Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) [A156]</p> <p>Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179]</p> <p>Wigeon (<i>Mareca penelope</i>) [A855]</p>	<p>Screened Out</p> <p>Although a river flows approximately 250 m north of the most easterly extent of the proposed greenway and is hydrologically connected to the River Shannon Callows SAC and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA, no direct hydrological connectivity has been established between on-site drainage features and this watercourse.</p> <p>Drainage channels traversing the site are not confirmed to discharge to the river and may instead attenuate and infiltrate locally to ground, with any interaction limited to the underlying Locally Important bedrock aquifer.</p> <p>By employing the precautionary principle, it is assumed these drainage channels discharge to the River Worm and as such, an indirect hydrological linkage is established.</p> <p>Although the river 250m north is hydrologically connected to the European sites, it is not considered feasible that disturbances or contaminants arising from the proposed development would travel the required waterborne (ca. 4 km) or</p>

		<p>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>	<p>airborne (ca. 2 km) distances to give rise to significant effects.</p> <p>A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been prepared specifically for the proposed development, which will ensure the works involved with the proposed development will not significantly impact the surrounding environment. The CEMP outlines measures which will mitigate dust emissions, ensure no uncontrolled surface or groundwater discharges occur via existing drainage channels, and ensure no ecological or hydrological receptors will be impacted by the proposed works.</p> <p>Strict adherence to the CEMP, as well as good housekeeping and adherence to best practice construction and environmental management measures will prevent significant effects upon the SPA or its QIs from arising</p> <p>No credible source–pathway–receptor linkage has been identified.</p>
<p>River Shannon Callows SAC 000216</p>	<p>Ca. 2.5m W from site.</p>	<p>Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinia caerulea</i>) [6410]</p> <p>Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) [6510]</p> <p>Alkaline fens [7230]</p> <p>Limestone pavements [8240]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, <i>Alnus incana</i>, <i>Salix alba</i>) [91E0]</p>	<p>Screened Out</p> <p>Although a river flows approximately 250 m north of the most easterly extent of the proposed greenway and is hydrologically connected to the River Shannon Callows SAC and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA, no direct hydrological connectivity has been established between on-site drainage features and this watercourse.</p> <p>Drainage channels traversing the site are not confirmed to discharge to the river and may instead attenuate and infiltrate locally to ground, with any interaction limited to the underlying Locally Important bedrock aquifer.</p> <p>By employing the precautionary principle, it is assumed these drainage channels discharge to the River Worm and as such, an indirect hydrological linkage is established.</p> <p>Although the river 250m north is hydrologically connected to the European sites, it is not considered feasible that disturbances or contaminants arising from the proposed development would travel</p>

		<p>Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]</p>	<p>the required waterborne (ca. 4 km) or airborne (ca. 2 km) distances to give rise to significant effects.</p> <p>A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been prepared specifically for the proposed development, which will ensure the works involved with the proposed development will not significantly impact the surrounding environment. The CEMP outlines measures which will mitigate dust emissions, ensure no uncontrolled surface or groundwater discharges occur via existing drainage channels, and ensure no ecological or hydrological receptors will be impacted by the proposed works.</p> <p>Strict adherence to the CEMP, as well as good housekeeping and adherence to best practice construction and environmental management measures will prevent significant effects upon the SPA or its QIs from arising</p> <p>No credible source–pathway–receptor linkage has been identified.</p>
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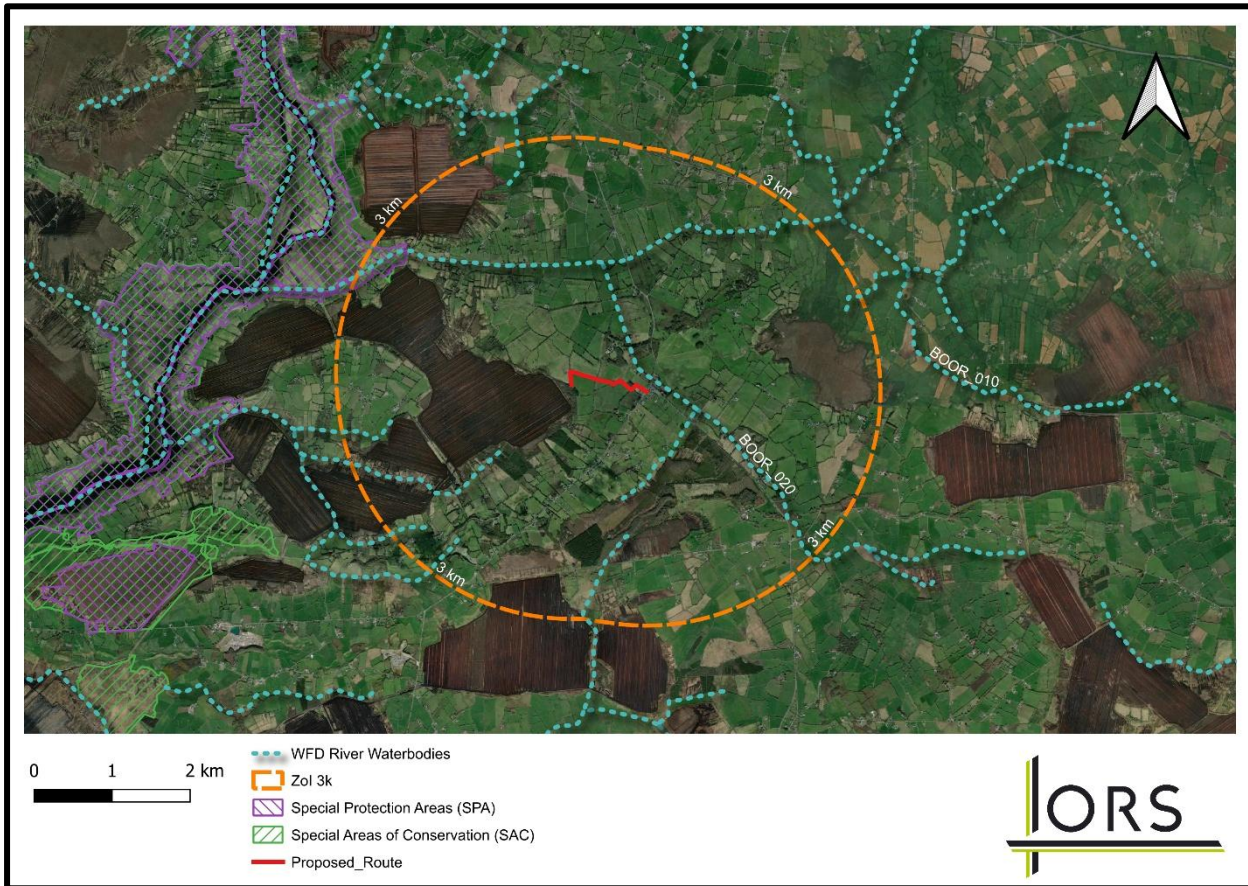


Figure 5.2: Nearest Natura 2000 Sites and hydrological pathways to proposed site.

5.2 Natura 2000 Impact Assessment

The potential significant effects of the proposed development on the European sites identified are described below in **Table 5.3**.

Table 5.3: Natura 2000 Threshold Levels

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 sites:

Westmeath County Council (WCC) proposes to develop a 1.3 km combined pedestrian and cycleway from Ballinahown Sports Park through lands predominantly in agricultural use, located to the west of the L-1406 local road in Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath.

Subject to land acquisition and licencing, the works will include:

- Construction of a 3 m-wide pedestrian and cycleway with a bound surface and associated grass verges
- Installation of a new 1.3 m-high stock-proof fence supplemented with native hedgerow planting
- Provision of a bridge/culvert to carry the pedestrian and cycleway across an existing drainage channel; and
- Other associated ancillary works.

Although the river 250m north is hydrologically connected to the European sites, it is not considered feasible that disturbances or contaminants arising from the proposed development would travel the required waterborne (ca. 4 km) or airborne (ca. 2 km) distances to give rise to significant effects.

Strict adherence to the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) prepared for the proposed development (**Document Ref.: 252243-ORS-XX-XX-RP-EN-002**), as well as good housekeeping and adherence to best practice construction and environmental management measures will prevent significant effects upon any Natura 2000 sites and their QIs from arising.

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 is small in scale, comprising a 1.3 km shared pedestrian and cycleway with associated boundary works, drainage crossings, signage, and ancillary infrastructure within a predominantly agricultural landscape on the western side of Ballinahown village.

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

Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site: The Middle Shannon Callows SPA and River Shannon Callows SAC are located ca. 2.6 km west of the most western point of the proposed development. Although the river 250m north is hydrologically connected to the European sites, it is not considered feasible that disturbances or contaminants arising from the proposed development would be generated in sufficient quantities to travel the required waterborne (ca. 4 km) or airborne (ca. 2 km) distances to give rise to significant effects.

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

Emissions: There are no instream works proposed, and watercourse crossings will be completed using flat-deck bridge that avoid works within the channels themselves. The drainage network traversing the site potentially provides an indirect hydrological pathway to the Middle Shannon Callows SPA and River Shannon Callows SAC located approximately 2.6 km west of the site. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been prepared specifically for the proposed development, which will ensure the works involved with the proposed development will not significantly impact the surrounding environment. The CEMP outlines mitigation measures which will mitigate dust emissions, ensure no uncontrolled surface or groundwater discharges occur via existing drainage channels, and ensure no ecological or hydrological receptors will be impacted by the proposed works. Adherence to the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will ensure that best-practice measures are implemented to prevent emissions from reaching the downstream Natura 2000 sites.

Excavation requirements: Excavations will be required for formation of the 3 m-wide shared path and for the installation of service ducting.

Transportation requirements: Movement of construction-related vehicles will most likely increase as a result of the proposed development. These movements will take place outside of the boundaries of the nearest Natura 2000 site, and it is not considered likely that transportation requirements will lead to effects on any Natura 2000 site identified.

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. A summary of relevant planning applications, based on their scale and nature, along with an assessment of their potential cumulative impacts are listed below:

Planning Ref.: 19/7166

Description: Construction of a new 70m by 40m all-weather sports pitch with artificial (AstroTurf) playing surface. The supporting works will include inter alia all site preparations, access road from car park of existing adjacent Ballinahown Sports Park, (utilizing the park's existing vehicular access unto the public roadway), internal pathways, associated parking, drainage, 5m high enclosing fence to pitch, with access gates, four light stanchions (12m high), hurling wall (5m high) and all other associated ancillary site work.

Decision: 04/10/2019 - CONDITIONAL

Cumulative Assessment: The two developments are unlikely to generate cumulative impacts, as both are situated on improved agricultural land with no shared surface water pathways, and any temporary construction-phase effects will cease once works are completed, leaving no significant long-term cumulative impacts.

Planning Ref.: 21/347

Description: The following additional works to the granted permission under Ref: 19/7166 (i) spectator enclosure (33m long x 2m wide), (ii) warm-up area (230sqm) with two 3m high lighting standards and 2.4m high fencing with gateway (iii) permanent diversion of existing walking track to match existing with three new 3m high public lighting standards (iv) 1.3m high site fencing with access gateway, complete all ancillary and associated site works.

Decision: 17/08/2021 - CONDITIONAL

Cumulative Assessment: The two developments are unlikely to generate cumulative impacts, as both are situated on improved agricultural land with no shared surface water pathways, and any temporary construction-phase effects will cease once works are completed, leaving no significant long-term cumulative impacts.

Planning Ref.: 24/60492

Description: The development of a recreational shared cycle and walkway. The development proposes the following; The delivery of a shared cycle and walkway on Bord na Móna lands. This will include the repurposing of 16,919 meters of existing former rail bed and 8,960 meters along existing bog headlands / former high fields. The proposed shared cycle and walkway will connect into the existing Grand Canal Greenway, The Offaly Way, and the Lough Boora Discovery Park. The construction of car and / or bicycle parking facilities at a number of gateway locations along the proposed route and the provision of EV Charging spaces at the Gateway locations. This will include; 5 no. Type 2 Gateways (including 2 no. upgrades to existing parking and 3 no. proposed parking facilities) 6 no. Type 3 Gateways, 1 no. Type 4 Gateways, 2 no. Major Rest Points, 2 no. Minor Rest Points. Upgrade works to Brosna Bridge (Ref 15-100). The construction of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge spanning the Grand Canal within the Turraun townland. Upgrade works to 10 no. local access road crossings, and 8 no. agricultural crossings. The erection of wayfinding and interpretative signage at Gateway locations along the route. The implementation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) nature-based drainage proposals at the Gateway locations to cater for surface water drainage at car park locations. Fencing and screening will be erected where required for health and safety and biodiversity reasons which will include 14,909 meters of ecological screening. All other ancillary and associated site work. This Planning Application is accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement (NIS)

Decision: 19/12/2024 – INCOMPLETED APPLICATION

Cumulative Impact: When considered in combination with the proposed greenway on the Bord na Mona lands connecting the Grand Canal Greenway, The Offaly way and the Lough Boora Discovery park, the proposed pathway has the potential to interact cumulatively with an adjoining greenway currently under planning, for which a Natura Impact Statement has been prepared. The adjacent scheme has therefore been subject to Appropriate Assessment, with potential effects on European sites identified and addressed through mitigation. The proposed development does not introduce new

pathways or increase the scale or intensity of effects beyond those assessed, and it is not considered likely to give rise to significant cumulative effects on any European site.

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

Reduction of habitat area: The proposed development lies outside the boundaries of 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.

Disturbance to key species: Given the absence of instream activity, and the implementation of best-practice surface water and sediment-control measures outlined in the CEMP, no significant cumulative effects on either Natura 2000 site are considered likely.

Reduction in species density: No ecological corridors between the proposed site and the European sites identified will be damaged or destroyed. In the absence of mitigation, effects on water quality may lead to effects on species density of the qualifying interests of the Lower River Suir SAC.

Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.): Given the absence of instream activity, and the strict adherence to and implementation of best-practice surface water and sediment-control measures outlined in the CEMP, no cumulative effects on either Natura 2000 site are considered likely.

Describe any likely impacts on the nearby Natura 2000 sites as a whole in terms of:

Interference with the key relationships that define the structure or function of the site: Given the absence of instream activity, and the strict adherence to and implementation of best-practice surface water and sediment-control measures outlined in the CEMP, no cumulative effects on either Natura 2000 site are considered likely.

Provide indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of:

Loss - Estimated percentage of lost area of habitat: None likely.

Fragmentation: Negligible fragmentation will occur to allow for a 3 m gap in the hedgerow to accommodate the bridge crossing.

Disruption & disturbance: None likely.

Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality etc.): Given the absence of instream activity, and the strict adherence to and implementation of best-practice surface water and sediment-control measures outlined in the CEMP, no cumulative effects on either Natura 2000 site are considered likely.

5.3 Finding of No Significant Effects

Table 5.4: Significant Effects Report Matrix

Finding of No Significant Effects Report Matrix

<p>Name and Description of project</p>	<p>The proposed development will consist of a pedestrian and cycle link from Ballinahown Village to Bord Na Mona lands at Ballinahown</p>
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Name and location of Natura 2000 sites	Middle Shannon Callows SPA, 004096, ca. 2.5 km west River Shannon Callows SAC, 000216, ca. 2.5 km west
Is the project directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site?	No
Are there other projects or plans that together with project being assessed could affect the site?	<p>Yes</p> <p>Planning Ref.: 19/7166</p> <p>Description: Construction of a new 70m by 40m all-weather sports pitch with artificial (AstroTurf) playing surface. The supporting works will include inter alia all site preparations, access road from car park of existing adjacent Ballinahown Sports Park, (utilizing the park's existing vehicular access unto the public roadway), internal pathways, associated parking, drainage, 5m high enclosing fence to pitch, with access gates, four light stanchions (12m high), hurling wall (5m high) and all other associated ancillary site works.</p> <p>Decision: 04/10/2019 - CONDITIONAL</p> <p>Cumulative Assessment: Negligible, Slight, Permanent</p> <p>Planning Ref.: 21/347</p> <p>Description: The following additional works to the granted permission under Ref: 19/7166 (i) spectator enclosure (33m long x 2m wide), (ii) warm-up area (230sqm) with two 3m high lighting standards and 2.4m high fencing with gateway (iii) permanent diversion of existing walking track to match existing with three new 3m high public lighting standards (iv) 1.3m high site fencing with access gateway, complete all ancillary and associated site works</p> <p>Decision: 17/08/2021 - CONDITIONAL</p> <p>Cumulative Assessment: Negligible, Slight, Permanent</p> <p>Planning Ref.: 24/60492</p> <p>Description: The development of a recreational shared cycle and walkway. The development proposes the following; The delivery of a shared cycle and walkway on Bord na Móna lands. This will include the repurposing of 16,919 meters of existing former rail bed and 8,960 meters along existing bog headlands / former high fields. The proposed shared cycle and walkway will connect into the existing Grand Canal Greenway, The Offaly Way, and the Lough Boora Discovery Park. The construction of car and / or bicycle parking facilities at a number of gateway locations along the proposed route and the provision of EV Charging spaces at the Gateway locations.</p>

	<p>This will include; 5 no. Type 2 Gateways (including 2 no. upgrades to existing parking and 3 no. proposed parking facilities) 6 no. Type 3 Gateways, 1 no. Type 4 Gateways, 2 no. Major Rest Points, 2 no. Minor Rest Points. Upgrade works to Brosna Bridge (Ref 15-100). The construction of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge spanning the Grand Canal within the Turraun townland. Upgrade works to 10 no. local access road crossings, and 8 no. agricultural crossings. The erection of wayfinding and interpretative signage at Gateway locations along the route. The implementation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) nature-based drainage proposals at the Gateway locations to cater for surface water drainage at car park locations. Fencing and screening will be erected where required for health and safety and biodiversity reasons which will include 14,909 meters of ecological screening. All other ancillary and associated site work. This Planning Application is accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement (NIS)</p> <p>Cumulative Assessment: Negligible, Slight, Temporary</p>
<p>The Assessment of Significance of Effects</p>	
<p>Describe how the project is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site</p>	<p>In the absence of mitigation, it is unlikely that surface water emissions arising from the site during construction and operation may migrate to the SAC and SPA 2.5 km west of the site.</p>
<p>Explain why these effects are not considered significant</p>	<p>Given the absence of instream activity, and the implementation of best-practice surface water and sediment-control measures outlined in the CEMP (Document Ref.: 252243-ORS-XX-XX-RP-EN-13d-002), no cumulative effects on either Natura 2000 site are considered likely.</p>
<p>Describe how the project is likely to affect species designated under Annex II of the Habitats Directive.</p>	<p>The project is unlikely to affect species designated under Annex II of the Habitats Directive.</p>
<p>Data Collected to Carry out the Assessment</p>	
<p>Who carried out the assessment</p>	<p>Killian Smtih, BAgSc, Environmental Consultant</p>
<p>Sources of data</p>	<p>NPWS, EPA, GSI, NBDC, Westmeath County Council</p>
<p>Level of assessment completed</p>	<p>Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment Screening</p>
<p>Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed</p>	<p>Full results included</p>

6 Conclusion

In accordance with Article 6(3) and (4) 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 the Zone of Influence of the application site that may have established S-P-R linkages.

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.

On the basis of objective information provided in this report, a significant effect of the proposed development on any European sites, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, can be excluded. It is therefore the opinion of the author that Stage II (Natura Impact Statement) of the proposed development is not required.

7 References

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10 SERVICES, 1 TEAM

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The image shows a laptop and a tablet. The laptop screen displays a grid of 10 service icons with labels: Environmental, Project Management, Infrastructure, Health & Safety, Assigned Certifier, Fire Safety, Energy Management, Civil & Structural, Building Surveying, and Mechanical & Electrical. The tablet displays the 'Core Values' section with five items: People-First, Quality, Flexibility, Relationships, and Ambition. A green button with a mouse cursor icon and the text 'CLICK HERE' is positioned below the laptop, with a dotted line pointing to the 'OUR SERVICES' header on the laptop screen.

OUR SERVICES

- Environmental
- Project Management
- Infrastructure
- Health & Safety
- Assigned Certifier
- Fire Safety
- Energy Management
- Civil & Structural
- Building Surveying
- Mechanical & Electrical

Core Values.

- People-First.**
Empowering you to thrive
- Quality.**
Always
- Flexibility.**
It's what we're built on
- Relationships.**
Matter
- Ambition.**
It's our mindset

CLICK HERE

Best Workplaces
Great Place To Work
IRELAND 2025