ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT FOR ATHLONE CASTLE ENVIRONS PUBLIC REALM ENHANCEMENT SCHEME

1 CONTENTS

1 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report 4
1.1 Introduction 4
1.2 Legislative Background 4
1.2.1 Project Type and thresholds 4
1.2.2 Statement of Authority 10
2 Description of the Proposed Development 11
2.1 Summary of the Proposed Development 11
3 Overview of existing Environment 13
3.1.1 Population and Human Health 13
3.1.2 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna 15
3.1.3 Existing Habitats 19
3.1.4 Fauna 19
3.1.5 Water resources including Flood Risk 22
3.1.6 Flood Risk 23
3.1.7 Groundwater 26
3.1.8 Geology and soil 26
3.1.9 Cultural Heritage 28
3.1.10 Landscape 28
3.1.11 Climatic Factors 29
3.1.12 Material Assets 30
3.2 Environmental Protection Measures 31
3.2.1 Ecological clerk of work 31
3.2.2 Best Practice Construction Approach 31
3.2.3 Biosecurity 32
3.2.4 Landscape Plan 32
3.2.5 Lighting 32
4 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Exercise 33
4.1 Impact Assessment 33
4.2 Projects for the Cumulative Assessment 34
4.3 Assessment 37
4.4 Identification of the Relevant Assessments Available 43
4.5 Planning Context And Other Relevant Environmental Assessments 44
5 Conclusion 45
5.1 EIA Screening Conclusion 45
References 47

Photos from Site Visit January 2022.....48

Minogue & Associates
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANCY

1 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report

1.1 Introduction

MEC Ltd have been commissioned by the Urban Agency on behalf of Westmeath County Council (the authority), to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening exercise in relation to the *Athlone Castle Environs Public Realm Enhancement Scheme (the project).*

1.2 Legislative Background

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a procedure undertaken by a competent authority pursuant to its obligations under the EIA Directive the terms of European Directives on the assessment of the impacts of certain public and private projects on the environment. In accordance with the provisions of Part X of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), an EIA shall be carried out in respect of an application for development which is specified in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, (as amended) ([“the 2001 Regulations”)]. A mandatory EIA is required for developments which fall within the classes of development prescribed in remit of Schedule 5.

In addition, an EIA of ‘”*sub-threshold*”’ development EIA may be required, if the competent Planning Authority determines that the proposed development would be likely to have significant impacts on the environment. Schedule 7 of the Regulations details the criteria for determining whether a development would or would not be likely to have significant impacts on the environment considering the characteristics of the proposed development, its location and characteristics of potential impacts.

Thus, Article 93 of, and Schedule 5 to, Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (“the 2000 Regulations”) sets out the classes of development for which a planning application must be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment report (EIAR). Part 1 and Part 2 Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 prescribes the categories of, and thresholds for, prescribed development requiring EIA.

1.2.1 Project Type and thresholds

Schedule 5 Part 1 of the 2001 Regulations is aligned with Annex I of the EIA Directive and identifies those developments for which EIA and the submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) is mandatory. This schedule lists a range of development activities including major infrastructure projects such as airports, motorways or power stations. The proposed development does not fall within any of the classes of prescribed development contained in Part 1 of Schedule 5.

Schedule 5 Part 2 of the 2001 Regulations is aligned with Annex II of the EIA Directive and lists the type of development that may require an EIA. This depends on site area, and quantum of development in relation to thresholds listed and therefore if there is potential for likely significant environmental effects.

Paragraph 10(b) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 contains the following prescribed development:

“b) (i) Construction of more than 500 dwellings

(ii) Construction of a car-park providing more than 400 spaces, other than a car-park provided as part of, and incidental to the primary purpose of, a development.

(iii) Construction of a shopping centre with a gross floor space exceeding 10,000 square metres.

(iv) Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere.

(In this paragraph, "business district" means a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use.)".

In this regard, the relevant category for the public realm project at Athlone Castle area would be "urban development" listed in Schedule 5 Part 2, 10b, iv. European Commission (2015) guidance provides information on the interpretation of definitions of project categories and details potential project types that would meet the definition of 'urban development'. These are as follows:

- Projects with similar characteristics to shopping centres and car parks, such as bus garages, train depots;
- Construction projects such as housing development; concert halls; cultural venues;
- Projects to which the term 'urban' and 'infrastructure' may relate such as construction of sewerage and water supply networks.

The proposed public realm improvement works do not correspond or have similar characteristics to any of the suggested project definitions and would therefore not be considered under the 'urban development' criteria of Schedule 5 Part 2.

Furthermore, the thresholds for EIA for this project category are listed as development in a business district with a site area over 2 hectares, in a built-up area with a site area of over 10 hectares and elsewhere with a site area over 20 hectares.

For the purposes of EIA, the 2001 Regulations define 'business district' as a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use. A review of current landuse based on the landuse zoning of the Mitchelstown plan area, a review of google aerial imagery and site visit in 2022 show that whilst Athlone Castle and its immediate area supports commercial and amenity use. It does not correspond to a 'business district; for the purposes of EIA, and more accurately corresponds to a Built Up area.

In summary, the project does not correspond to 'urban development' project definition following European Commission guidance, nor does it meet the threshold for EIA in this project category, being an area of 0.452 ha with a mandatory EIA threshold of 10ha in this category.

In relation to criteria applied for mandatory EIA development as listed in Section 50 of the Roads Act 1993, the project does not meet the criteria for EIA given the scale, and nature of the proposed works, relating to public realm measures including reconfiguring of existing urban space, resurfacing /restoration of existing footpaths and increased seating, planting and enhanced pedestrian safety. In light of this, the project does not meet the criteria for such works under the Roads Act 1993, as amended.

However, notwithstanding that the proposed development is "sub threshold", as set out in the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment* (August 2018), screening is the initial stage in the EIA process and determines whether or not specified public or private developments are likely to have significant effects on the environment and, as such, require EIA to be carried out prior to a decision on a development consent application being made.

One of key amendments introduced by the 2014 EIA Directive includes strengthening of the procedures for screening, particularly through the introduction of new information requirements to be provided by the developer (Annex IIA, and transposed into Irish law by Schedule 7A to the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended) and revised selection criteria to be used by the competent authority in making a determination (Annex III of Directive, Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations).

According to European Commission Guidance (2017[1])

"*Screening has to implement the Directive's overall aim, i.e. to determine if a Project listed in Annex II is likely to have significant effects on the environment and, therefore, be made subject to a requirement for Development Consent and an assessment, with regards to its effects on the environment. At the same time, Screening should ensure that an EIA is carried out only for those Projects for which it is thought that a significant impact on the environment is possible, thereby ensuring a more efficient use of both public and private resources. Hence, Screening has to strike the right balance between the above two objectives*."

According to the Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (2018):

"*For all sub-threshold developments listed in Schedule 5 Part 2, where no EIAR is submitted or EIA determination requested, a screening determination is required to be undertaken by the competent authority unless, on preliminary examination it can be concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment. This is initiated by the competent authority following the receipt of a planning application or appeal.*

A preliminary examination is undertaken, based on professional expertise and experience, and having regard to the 'Source – Pathway – Target' model, where appropriate. The examination should have regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations.

Where, based on a preliminary examination of the information submitted with the application and any other supplementary information received, the competent authority concludes that, having considered the nature, size and location of the proposed development, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment, this should be recorded with reasons for this conclusion stated, and no EIA required or formal determination made. The recording of the competent authority's view should be brief and concise, but adequate to inform the public. In many cases this considered view will be included in the planner's/inspector's report on the planning application and this may be cross-referenced in the

[1] Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects Guidance on Screening (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU). European Commission 2017. Page 23.

competent authority's decision. Normally, this will be published at the time of the decision of the competent authority."

For the avoidance of doubt, Section 4 of this report, provides an assessment of the project against Schedule 7 criteria of the EIA regulation to which sub threshold development is required to be assessed. Section 5 provides the EIA Screening Determination.

This report documents the methodology employed to complete the screening exercise, having regard to relevant legislation and guidance documents. Figures 1.1 shows the site location and Figure 1.2. site boundary (for information).

Figure 1-1 Site Location

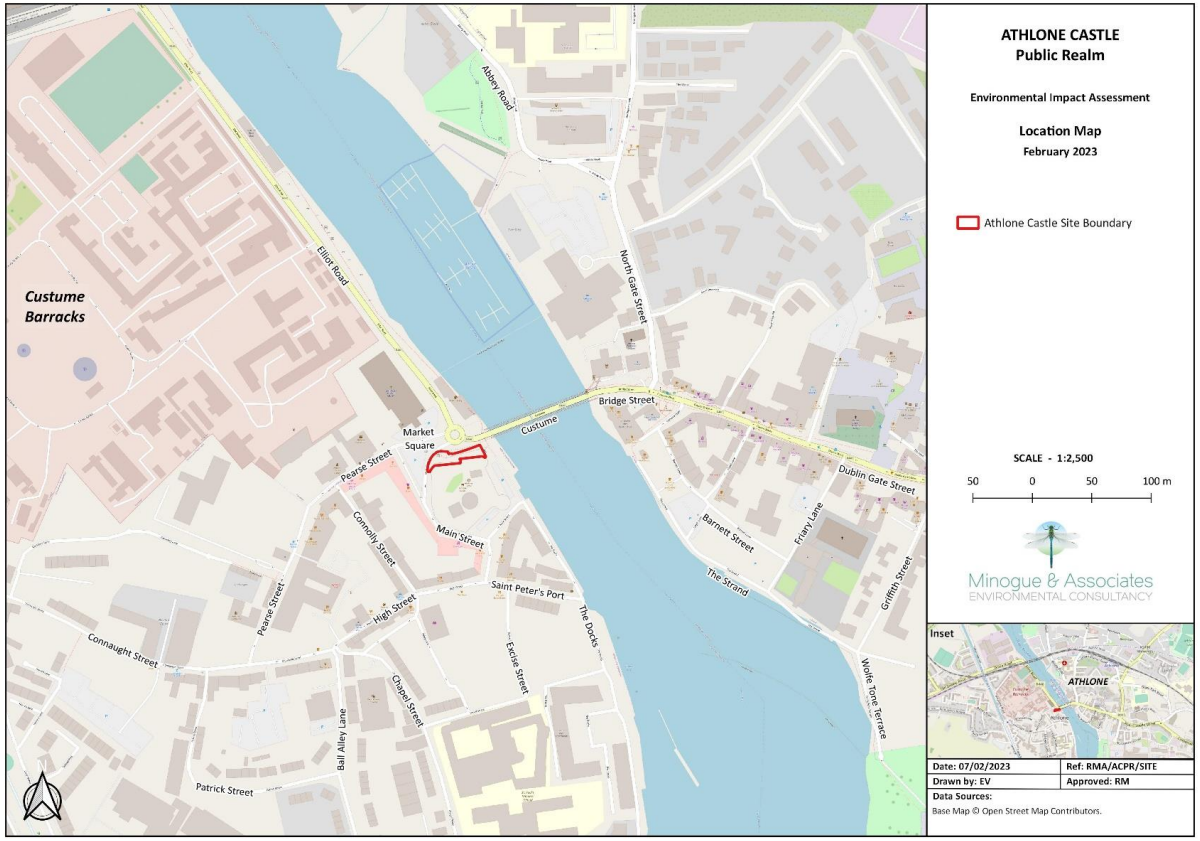
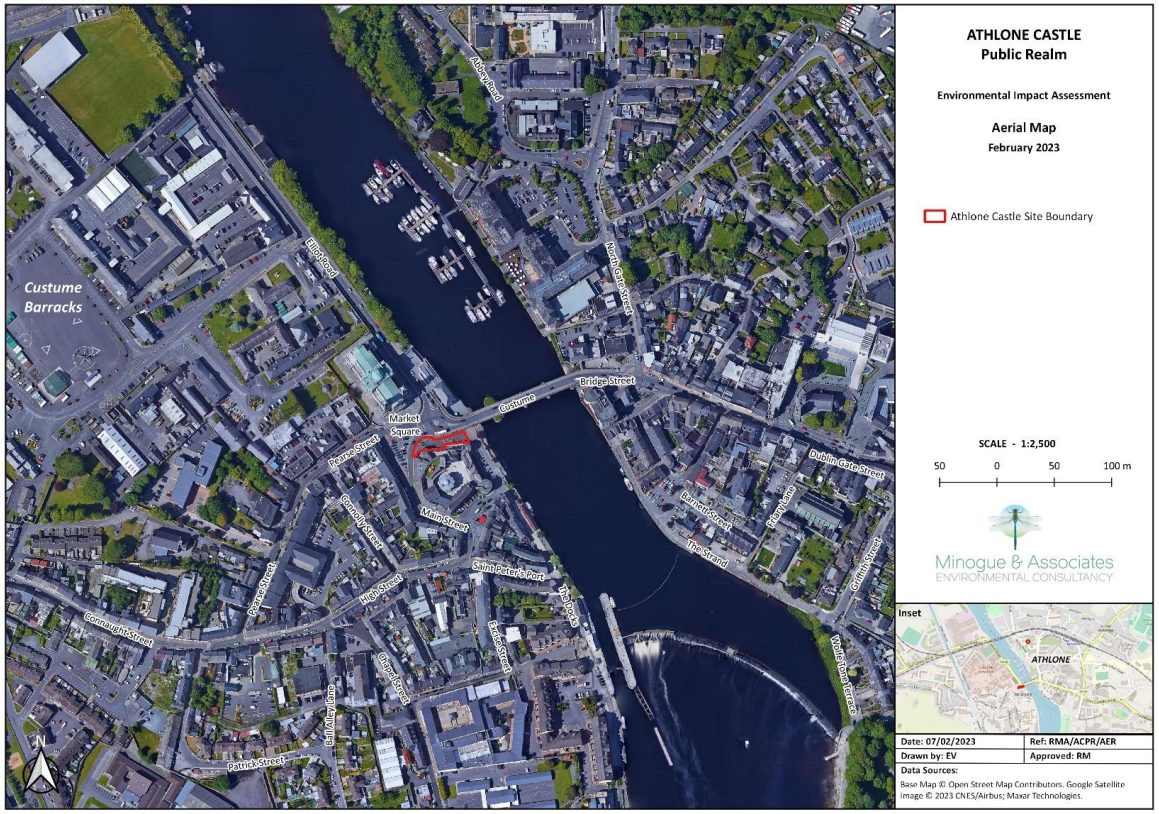


FIGURE 1-2 AERIAL IMAGERY



1.2.2 Statement of Authority

The EIA Screening exercise has been compiled by Ruth Minogue MCIEEM, who has twenty-three years' experience as an environmental consultant. She has expertise in environmental assessment including EIA and Strategic Environmental Assessment. Ruth is a full member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and the Irish Environmental Law Association. Recent CDP training includes the Advanced Diploma in Planning and Environmental Law (Kings Inn, 2017), GQIS for ecologists (IEEM, Feb 2019), Bats and Mitigation and Monitoring (IEEM 2021) and ongoing CPD through professional institutes. Additional inputs were provided by Eilis Vaughan MSc, who provided the Geographical Information Systems analysis and mapping outputs. A site visit was undertaken on 31st January 2022 by Ruth Minogue as part of a multi-disciplinary walkover.

2 Description of the Proposed Development

2.1 Summary of the Proposed Development

PART XI OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT, 2000 (as amended)

PART 8 OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, 2001 (as amended)

Pursuant to the requirements of the above, Westmeath County Council proposes to undertake the following works:

Public Realm Enhancement and Associated Works within an area encompassing c.0.0425ha immediately to the north of Athlone Castle (a National Monument and protected structure – reference Number RPS 070) and within an Architectural Conservation Area (Athlone Town), Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

The proposed development will consist of works at the northwest and proximate to the main entrance to Athlone Castle and include the following:

1. Removal of existing ramps, steps, railings, and relocation of public lighting
2. Public Realm enhancement to include hard and soft landscaping, footpaths, ramps, steps and public lighting;
3. Signage
4. Accommodation works (including utility provision, drainage and services);
5. Other associated works

The site is bounded by Athlone Castle to the South, Athlone Town bridge, also known as Shannon Road Bridge (a regional Monument and protected structure - Reference Number RPS 004) to the North, The Shannon quays to the East and Market Place to the West.

The project is to be completed in one phase as detailed below:

Pre-Construction & removal Phase – Site clearance

• Site set-up, hoarding, temporary services.

• Ground works and landscaping.

• removal of existing structures which are not part of the original fabric of the structure.

Phase 1 – Construction

• Installation of street lighting, vegetation and decorative landscape architecture pieces.

• Construction of the steps leading from Market Square/ Castle Street down to Quay Street

• Decorative paving pattern with granite or similar steps

Ancillary Works – which will consist of:

• Drainage networks. Currently there are no stormwater drainage on the project site, and the project will connect into the new drainage network being constructed under Planning Reference: 17-177182, Irish Water)

• Street lighting

• Landscaping

Pre-Construction Activities The main contractor will establish site setup, appropriate signing, hoarding, security fencing and welfare facilities.

Site Set-Up and Hoarding Perimeter hoarding will be provided around the site to provide a barrier against unauthorised access from the public areas. Controlled access points to the site, in the form of gates or doors, will be kept locked during any time that these areas are not monitored (e.g., outside working hours).

3 OVERVIEW OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The site is located at Athlone Castle, fronting the River Shannon and adjacent to the Athlone Bridge.

The site is surrounded on three sides by built land including the castle and the structures associated with the River Shannon that is canalised at this section of the town centre.

3.1.1 POPULATION AND HUMAN HEALTH

3.1.1.1 POPULATION

The designation of Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre supported by the identification of Mullingar as a Key Town in the National Planning Framework has elevated Westmeath's position in the Midlands region and represents a significant advancement for the County with a focus on improving local economies and quality of life to attract investment supported by sustainable communities. The inclusion of Athlone as regional driver will provide for increased employment and investment opportunities supported by the strong tourism assets identified throughout the County and targeted regeneration projects.

The project is located within the townland of Athlone and Bigmeadow. The population data (2016 census) for Athlone West Electoral District shows 3260 persons population.

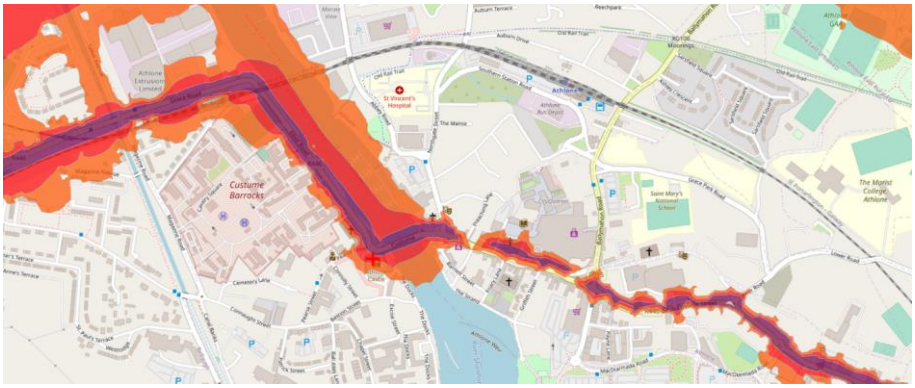
3.1.1.2 HUMAN HEALTH

3.1.1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL NOISE

Environmental noise is from long term or permanent sources, like major transport routes and factories. Noise from these sources has a different effect on people and is managed in a different way. The Environmental Noise Directive was written into Irish law in 2006, through The Environmental Noise Regulations (Statutory Instrument No. 140 of 2006). This law relates to the assessment and management of environmental noise. They provide for a common approach intended to avoid, prevent, or reduce the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise. These regulations do not apply to nuisance noise which can be dealt with under the Environmental Protection Agency Act.

Noise Action Plans are required under the Environmental Noise Directive (EU 2002/49/EC) transposed into Irish law by SI 140 of 2006. The aim of the Directive and the Regulations is to provide for the implementation of an EC common approach to avoid, prevent, or reduce on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise. Environmental noise is unwanted or harmful outdoor sound created by human activities, including noise emitted by means of transport, road traffic, rail traffic, air traffic and noise in agglomerations over a specified size. Types of noise not included in the Regulations are noise that is caused by the exposed person, noise from domestic activities, noise created by neighbours, noise at workplaces or noise inside means of transport or due to military activities in military areas. Round 3 of Noise Action Planning has been completed and the nearest roads subject to noise mapping and the project site are shown below in Figure 3.1 for daytime and modelling of these roads.

FIGURE 3-1 NOISE MAPPING, ROUND 3 FOR ROADS DAYTIME NOISE LEVELS. (SOURCE EPA.IE)



3.1.1.4 AIR QUALITY

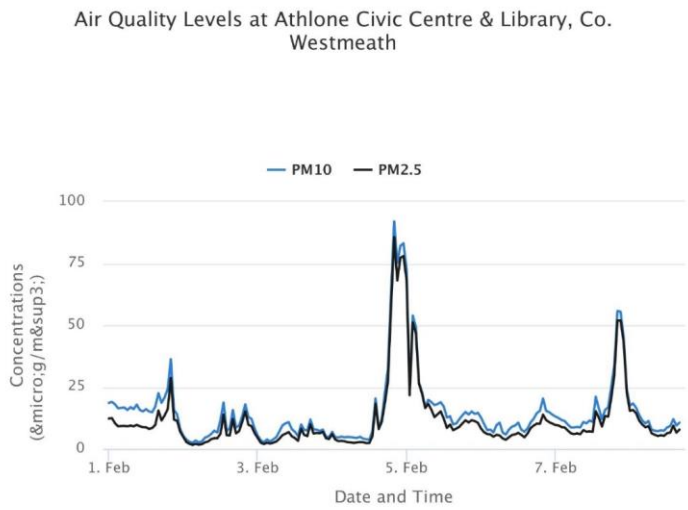
There is little local information available in relation to health and population. However, there are strong links between air quality, water quality, material assets and health. Air quality is dependent on a number of factors including the source of potential pollutants and weather conditions. The Air Framework Directive 96/62/EC (CEC, 1996) details how ambient air quality should be monitored assessed and managed. This Directive requires that member states divide their territory into zones for the assessment and management of air quality. The Air Quality Index of health[2] is based on hourly monitoring data from sites around Ireland and is based on measurements of five air pollutants all of which can harm health. The five pollutants are:

- Ozone gas
- Nitrogen dioxide gas
- Sulphur dioxide gas
- PM2.5 particles and
- PM10 particle

Air Quality was classified as 'good' under this index when accessed on 8th February 2023. Air quality for Athlone is monitored at the Athlone Civic Centre and Library (Station no 70). Figure 2 below presents air quality from 1st to 8th February 2023. This measures, $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10}.

[2]http://www.epa.ie/air/quality/

FIGURE 3-2 AIR QUALITY MONITORING ATHLONE



Athlone is located within Air Quality Zone 'C' and is also within a coal restricted area.

3.1.2 BIODIVERSITY, FLORA AND FAUNA

3.1.2.1 DESIGNATED SITES

An Appropriate Assessment Screening report accompanies this report and should be read in conjunction with this EIA Screening Report. The closest European Site is the River Shannon Callows SAC (site code 000216), as shown in Figure3.4. This site is approximately 494m south of the project site. In addition to European Sites, a number of proposed Natural Heritage Areas designated under the Wildlife Acts 2000 as amended are situated in the wider area and include Carrigyknackton Bog, southwest of the project site.

Figures 3.3 to 3.5. present designated sites within 15km of the project site.

FIGURE 3-3 SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION

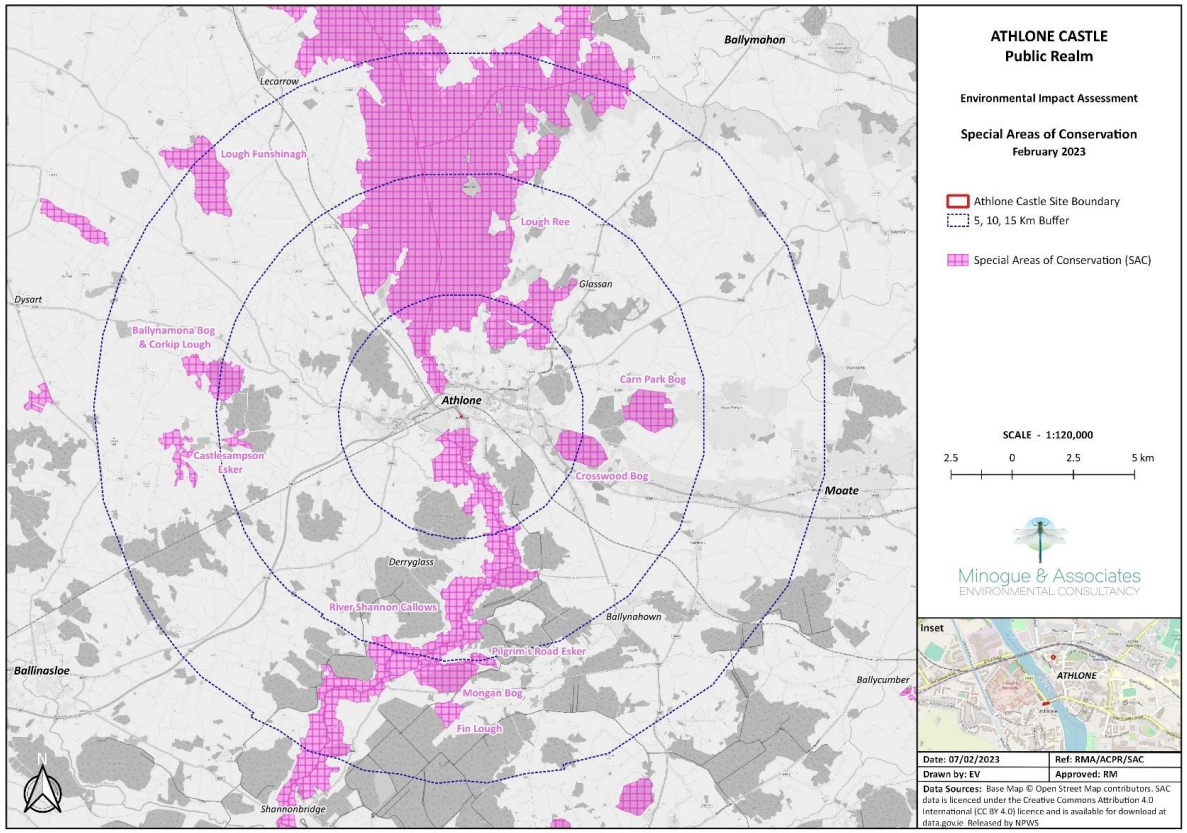


FIGURE 3-4 SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS

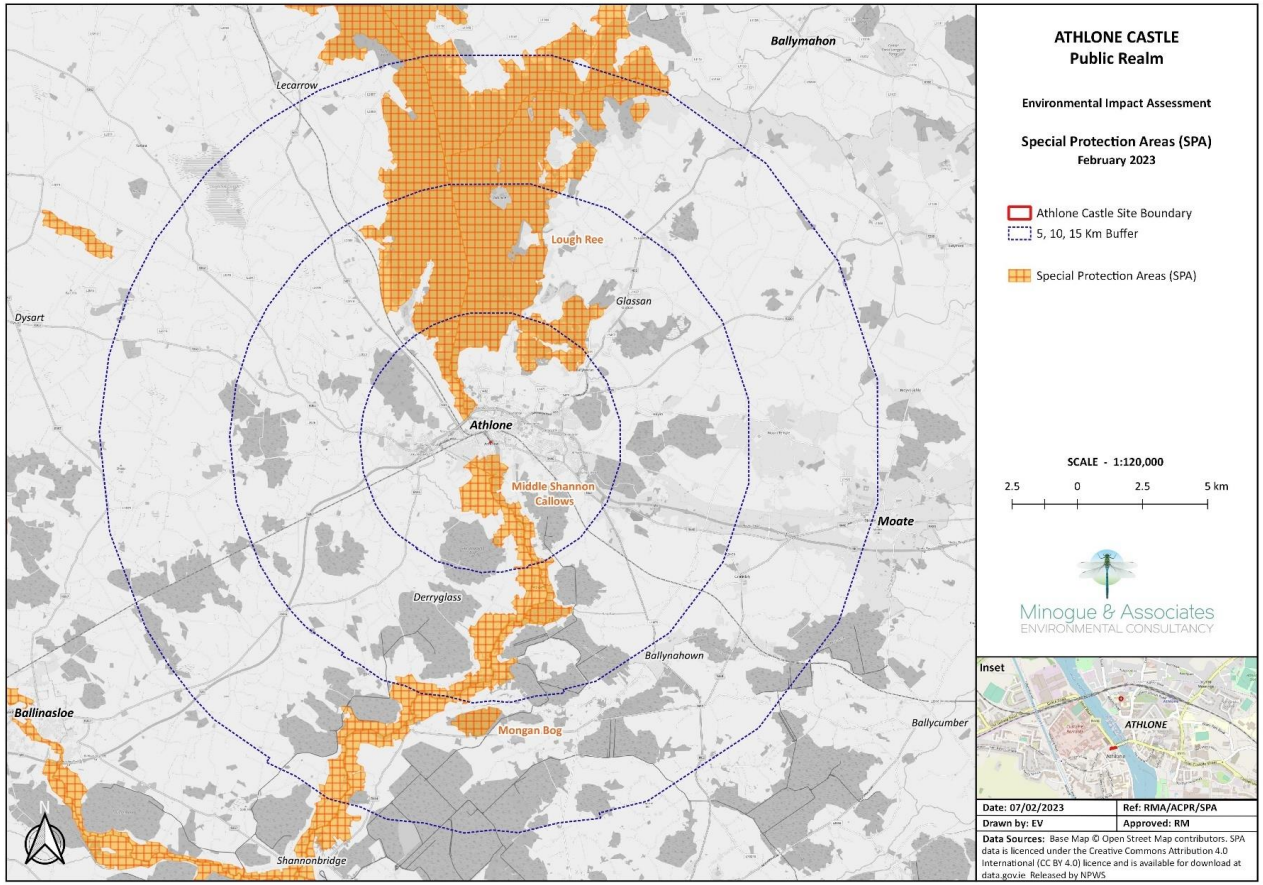
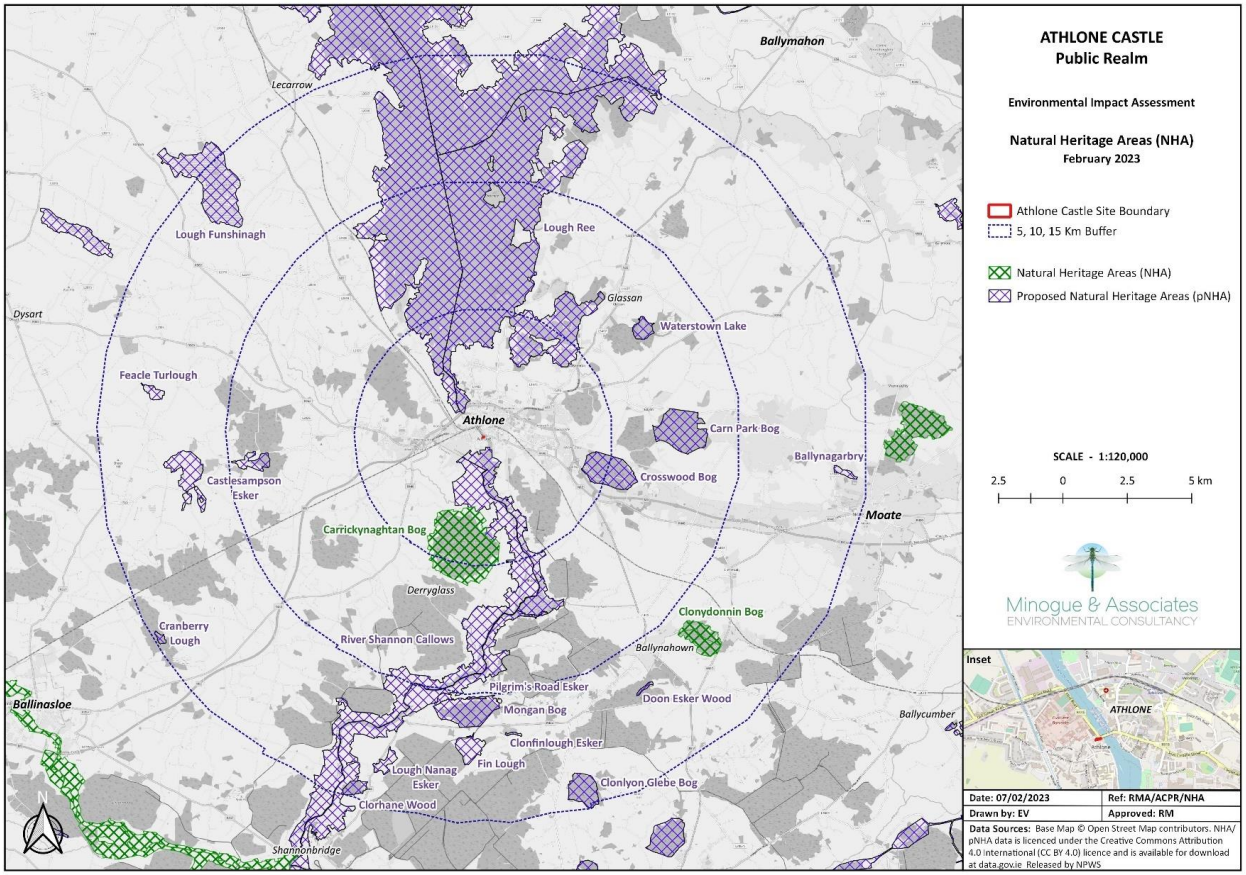


FIGURE 3-5 NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS AND PROPOSED NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS



3.1.3 Existing Habitats

Given the urban character of the project site, the dominant habitat site is BL3, Built Land and Artificial Surfaces. The River Shannon is adjacent to the site and is classified as FW2 Depositing/Lowland River. A small area at the front of the castle comprises grass and ornamental planting and may be considered as ornamental planting.

3.1.4 Fauna

No evidence indicating the presence of protected ground dwelling mammals was identified on site during the site survey on the 31st January 2022. A search of Biodiversity Ireland's database of 1km grid N0341 identified the following records of fauna.

FIGURE 3-6 GRID N0341 RECORDS -NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY DATA CENTRE

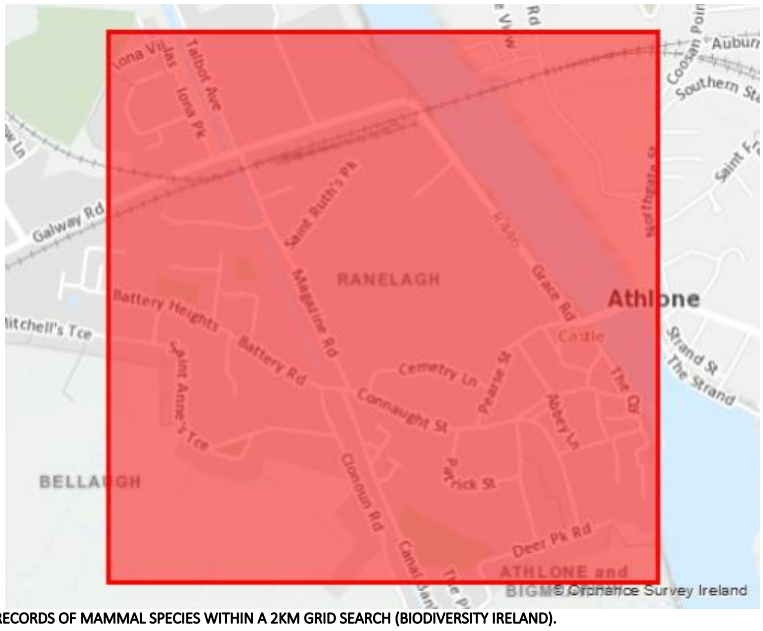


TABLE 3-1RECORDS OF MAMMAL SPECIES WITHIN A 2KM GRID SEARCH (BIODIVERSITY IRELAND).

Species name	Record county	Date of last record	Designation
European Otter (Lutra lutra)	1	13/01/1980	Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive || Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive >> Annex II || Protected Species: EU Habitats Directive >> Annex IV || Protected Species: Wildlife Acts
West European Hedgehog (Erinaceus europaeus)	3	31/05/2021	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts

TABLE 3-2 RECORD OF BIRD SPECIES WITHIN 1KM GRID SEARCH (BIODIVERSITY IRELAND)

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
Blue Tit (Cyanistes caeruleus)	1	06/03/2018	
Chaffinch (Fringilla coelebs)	1	06/03/2018	

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
Common Starling (Sturnus vulgaris)	1	06/03/2018	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Swift (Apus apus)	2	07/05/2018	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Common Wood Pigeon (Columba palumbus)	1	06/03/2018	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section I Bird Species
Eurasian Curlew (Numenius arquata)	1	31/05/2020	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section II Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
European Goldfinch (Carduelis carduelis)	1	06/03/2018	
Great Tit (Parus major)	1	06/03/2018	
Grey Heron (Ardea cinerea)	1	11/07/2017	

Species name	Record count	Date of last record	Designation
Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos)	1	11/07/2017	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex II, Section I Bird Species || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex III, Section I Bird Species
Pied Wagtail (Motacilla alba subsp. yarrellii)	1	11/07/2017	
Rook (Corvus frugilegus)	1	06/03/2018	
Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus)	1	13/10/2019	Protected Species: Wildlife Acts || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive || Protected Species: EU Birds Directive >> Annex I Bird Species || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern || Threatened Species: Birds of Conservation Concern >> Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
Winter Wren (Troglodytes troglodytes)	1	06/03/2018	

3.1.5 WATER RESOURCES INCLUDING FLOOD RISK

The application site is within the Upper Shannon Catchment (26G). This is summarised below:

"This small catchment covers an area of 383km² and is comprised of the catchment area from Athlone to Shannonbridge. The catchment is characterised by flat topography and expanses of poorly drained boggy and flood prone areas. The area of the catchment located northwest of Athlone is underlain by highly karstified rock with surface and groundwater drainage closely connected in this region. The Shannon flows into the catchment through Athlone, heading south before being joined from the west by the Cross River. This river drains the karstified part of the catchment from Lough Funshinagh to Athlone. Lough Funshinagh is located north of Curraghboy and does not have a surface outflow channel. Underground flow has been identified from this lake to the Cross River near Brideswell. Continuing south, the Shannon is then joined from the east by the westerly flowing Cloonbonny and Boor Rivers, which drain the eastern part of the catchment. The Shannon then veers southwest and is joined from the west by a series of small tributaries, the largest of which is the Ballydangan River, before flowing out of the catchment at Shannonbridge."

The project site is situated within the Shannon Upper Subcatchment (SC100). This part of the River Shannon is at risk of not meeting Water Framework Directive objectives of good status by 2027 due to its current poor status. Peat harvesting and hydro morphology have been identified as significant pressures and further investigation needed to clarify why there is poor biological community in this

waterbody. Water quality is poor at the River Shannon in this area (EPA catchments WFD Data 2013-2018). Figure 3.8 overleaf presents surface water quality data.

3.1.6 Flood Risk

Athlone Flood Relief Scheme for Flood Cell 3 has been subject to a Part 8 planning application[3] to erect a permanent flood defence along this section of the river. This work is under construction. The AA Screening and EIA Screening prepared for this part 8 determined no requirement for full EIA or AA.

[3] Westmeath CC, Part 8 Planning Application for Athlone Flood Relief Scheme, 2017 RPS

FIGURE 3-7 WATER QUALITY WITHIN WIDER AREA (WWW.CATCHMENTS.IE)

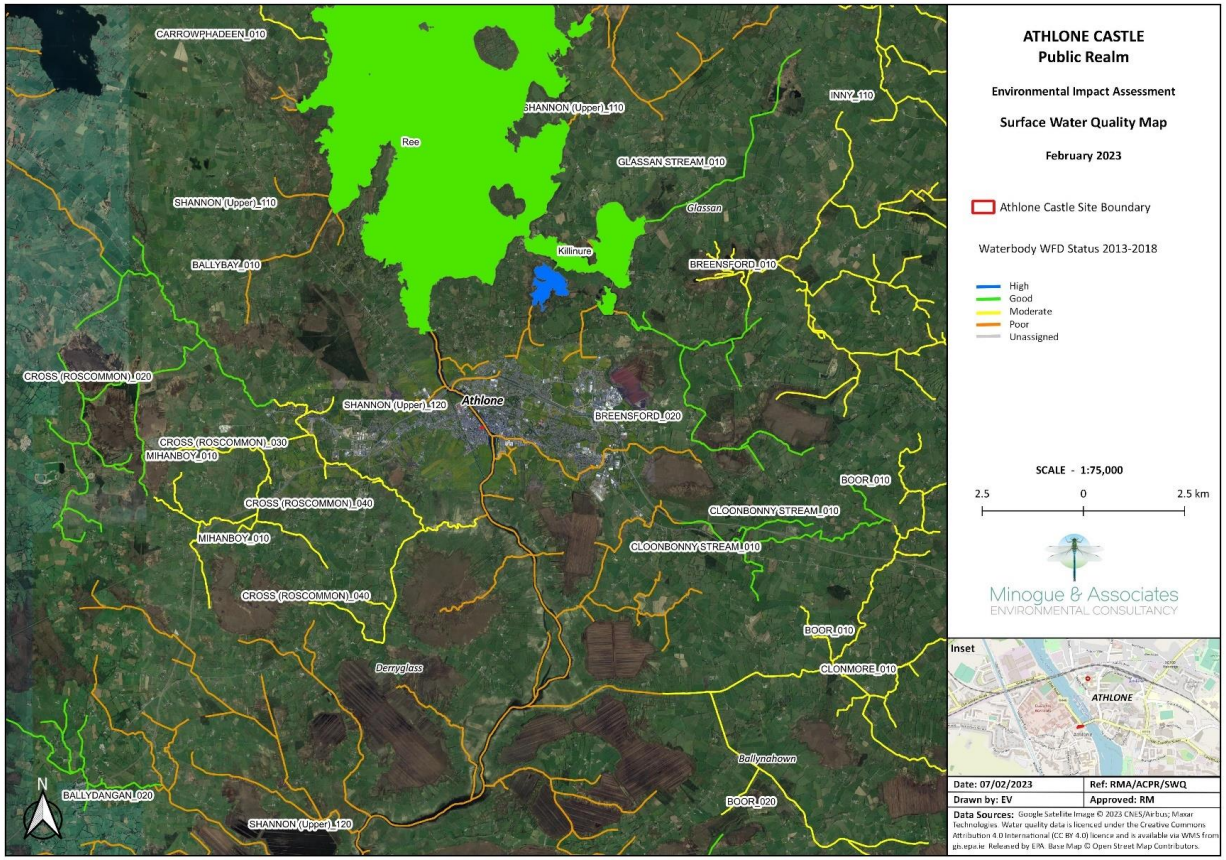
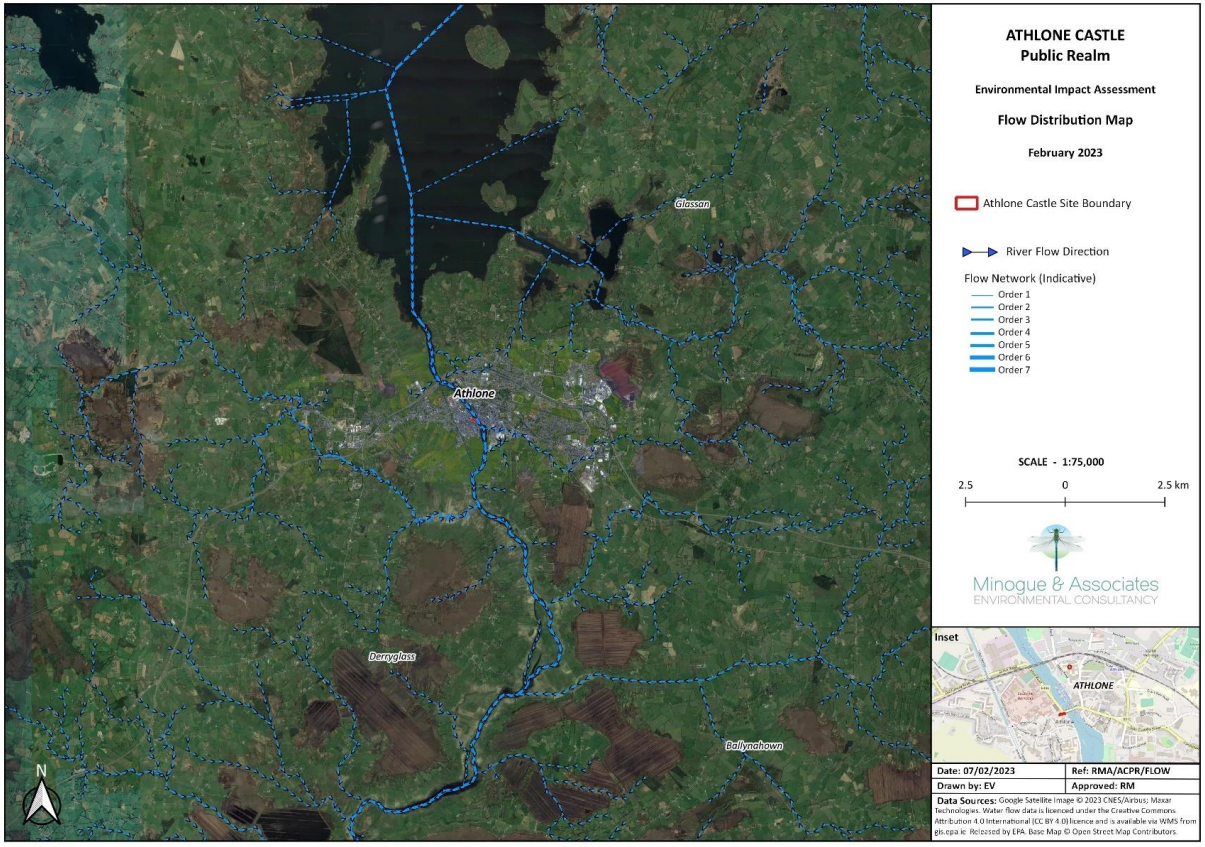


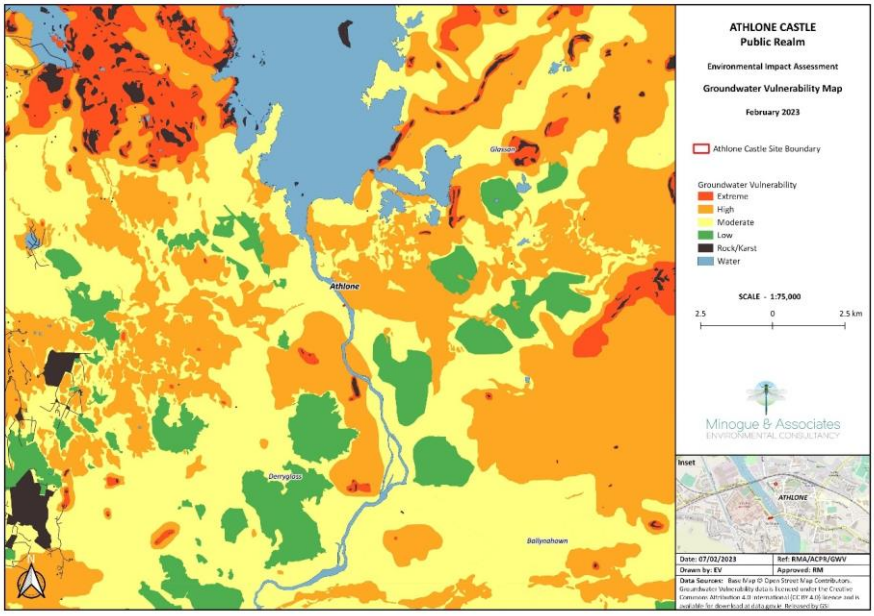
FIGURE 3-8 FLOW DIRECTION (ESTIMATED) SURFACE WATERS



3.1.7 GROUNDWATER

For groundwater bodies, the approach to classification is different from that for surface water. For each body of groundwater, both the chemical status and the quantitative must be determined. Both have to be classed as either good or poor. The WFD sets out a series of criteria that must be met for a body to be classed as good chemical and quantitative status. The status of the groundwater underlying both the town and surrounding area is currently good and meets the requirements as set out by the WFD Directive[4]. The Geological Survey of Ireland's Groundwater Vulnerability Mapping shows the groundwater vulnerability, classified as High Vulnerability. As Figure 3.9 shows the project site is located within an area of moderate groundwater vulnerability.

FIGURE 3-9 GROUNDWATER VULNERABILITY (RED -GREATEST, GREEN -LEAST; SOURCE EPA AND GSI).



3.1.8 GEOLOGY AND SOIL

Athlone is located within broad bedrock of Waulsortian Limestone, a massive, unbedded lime-mudstone. See Figure 3.4 for the underlying bedrock of the study area. The study area supports a variety of soil types, the dominant soil types within the area are glaciofluvial sands and gravels, grey, brown podzolics and peaty gleys and peat, with alluvium bordering the River Shannon.

A review of the first edition 6-inch map from 1832 indicates that the project site was used as an area of open space between a barracks (which was located to the north of the castle) and the castle. The 25-inch map from 1888 also indicates that the project site was used as an area of open space, with it being labelled on the map as a "market place". By this time the barrack to the north was removed, presumably to accommodate access to the Town Bridge which was built between 1840 – 1845

(subsequent to the publication of the first edition 6-inch map. The last edition 6-inch map from 1915 indicates the open space nature of the project site and its continued use as a market place, as labelled on this map. See figure 3.10 below for bedrock geology and soil.

FIGURE 3-10 BEDROCK GEOLOGY

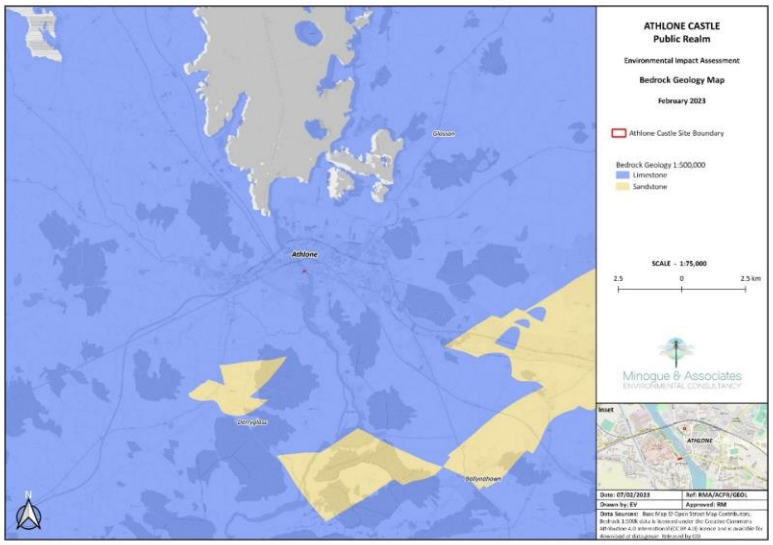
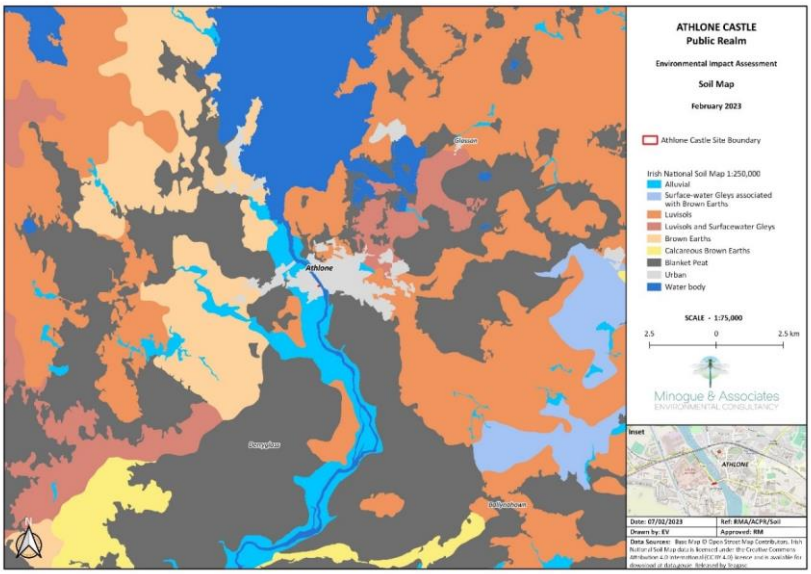


FIGURE 3-11 SOIL



3.1.9 Cultural Heritage

Athlone grew up at a fording point on the River Shannon. The first recorded bridge was built in 1120 and within a decade King Turlough O'Conor built a wooden castle to protect it. The Anglo-Normans built the first stone castle here in 1210, parts of which are incorporated into the present structure. It was built by Bishop John de Grey of Norwich, for King John of England. From 1569-1672 it was the headquarters of the President of Connacht. The Castle was occupied by Col. Richard Grace, Governor of Athlone during the first Siege of Athlone in 1690 and also played a vital role in the second Siege of 1691. In the Napoleonic era the castle was remodelled for defence and took on much of its present appearance. For almost 300 years it served as an extension of the military barracks. In 1970 it was handed over to the Office of Public Works and declared a national monument. In November 2012 the castle was re-opened following major renovations[5].

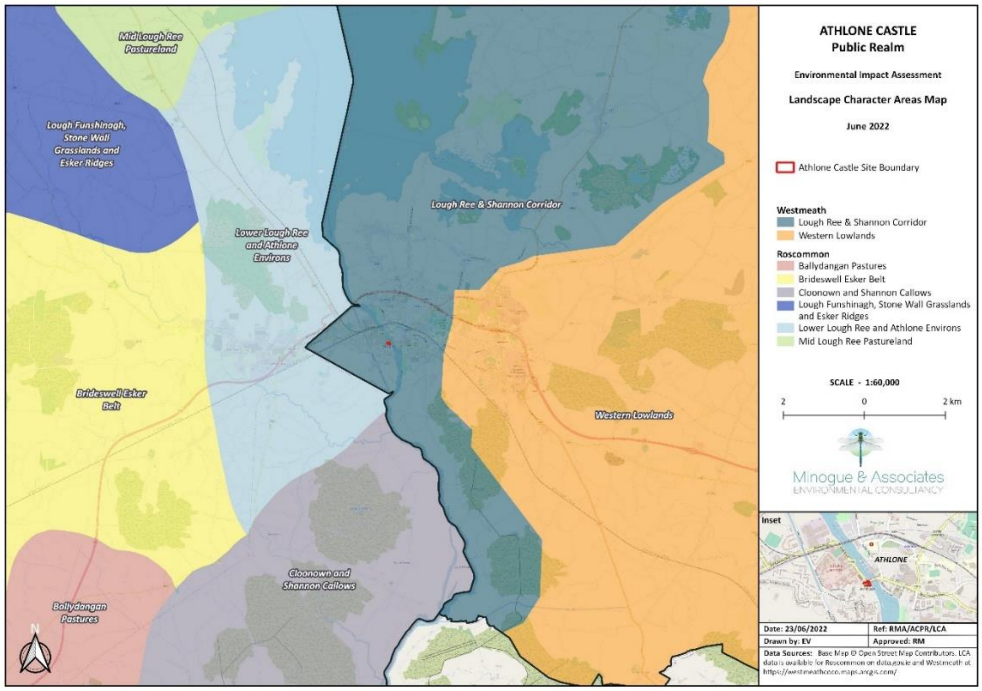
The project site is located within the Zone of Archaeological Potential and Architectural Conservation Area. A number of individual sites are located in the vicinity of the proposed works, in particular Athlone Castle (WM029-042002/WM029-042099), which is a National Monument in State Ownership (No. 520). In addition, the Shannon Road Bridge (RPS reg. no. 004/NIAH 15000010), the Shannon Navigation House (RPS reg. no. 066/NIAH 15000344, Shannon Navigation Lock (RPS reg. no. 067/NIAH 15000345) and the five cast-iron bollards along the quay (RPS reg. no. 075/NIAH 15000414) are all listed on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) for Athlone and are therefore protected under Section 58 of the Planning and Development Act 2000[6].

3.1.10 Landscape

The project site is located within a prominent town centre location, in an area popular with residents and tourists with the River Shannon, Athlone Castle and museum and the famous bar Sean's Bar. At broader scale Athlone is situated within the Lough Ree and Shannon Corridor Landscape Character Area.

[5] http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/ourservices/artsandrecreation/athlonecastle/, accessed 28.07.2022
[6] Part 8 Planning application for Athlone Flood relief works Cell 3, RPS 2017

FIGURE 3-12 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

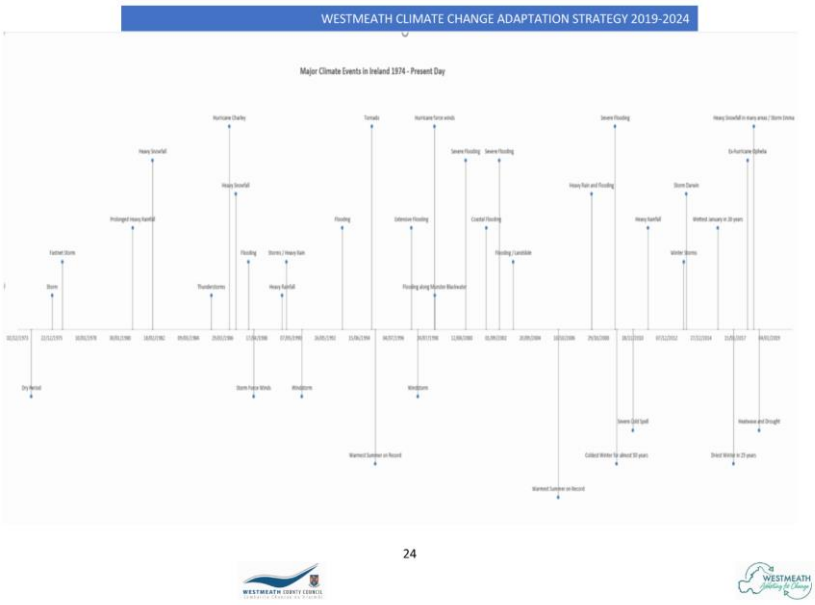


3.1.11 Climatic Factors

The Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019 2024 takes on the role as the primary instrument at local level to:

(i) ensure a proper comprehension of the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change
(ii) bring forward the implementation of climate resilient actions in a planned and proactive manner and,
(iii) ensure that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all plans and policies and integrated into all operations and functions of Westmeath County Council.
The forthcoming Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2024-2029 will be on a statutory footing. Figure 3.13 is an extract from the existing CCAP that illustrates extreme weather events at County level since the 1970s.

FIGURE 3-13 EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS COUNTY WESTMEATH (CCAP 2019-2024)



3.1.12 Material Assets

Water supply: Irish Water has identified key projects for the county which are included in Project Ireland 2040 to support planned development and maintain and improve existing services. The South Westmeath Regional Water Supply scheme will address water quality and capacity issues with the existing water supply for South Westmeath including Athlone Town and Environs, Moate and extending east towards Rochfortbridge and Mullingar. The project is due for commencement by 2020, to be completed by 2022[7].

The Athlone Main Drainage Scheme has commenced works to upgrade the Athlone sewer network. When completed, this project will reduce the risk of sewer flooding in Athlone and address non-compliant sewer overflows into the River Shannon. It will also improve the capacity of the sewer network allowing for current and future population growth. Currently, there are 18 storm water overflows within the Athlone Town main drainage system. There is frequent out of sewer flooding in the town due to insufficient capacity within the collection system. Additionally, the collection system has insufficient capacity to accommodate future population growth. The existing overflows spill untreated wastewater into the River Shannon, which is designated as a sensitive area.

[7] SEA ER of Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 -2027

Athlone is accessible by rail and are positioned on the Galway/Dublin /Westport and the Dublin/Sligo rail lines respectively. Trains operate on each route several times daily. The Dublin – Galway Greenway is proposed to run through the tunnel and pass the front of the castle area. A new cycle bridge across the River Shannon has been granted planning permission to facilitate this project.

3.1.12.1 Inter-relationships

The key interrelationship arises between water, biodiversity, soil, and material assets.

3.2 Environmental Protection Measures

The following sections present environmental protection measures.

A full Construction and Environmental Management Plan has been prepared and is provided under separate cover.

3.2.1 Ecological clerk of work

An appropriately qualified Environmental/Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will be employed for the duration of the Construction Contract. The ECoW must be a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) or equivalent body.

The ecologist performing the ECoW role will attend the site on a weekly basis to check that all works are being completed to the appropriate standards. This will form a key element in the delivery of the environmental protection measures at project stage.

In addition to supervision of works the ECoW will also undertake the following:

1. Habitat Survey within project area prior to works commencing to confirm and map any invasive species are present and develop appropriate response
2. Prior to works commencing undertake an otter survey along the river bank to confirm no otter holts are present.
3. Monitoring and reporting including remedial actions for mitigation measures.

3.2.2 Best Practice Construction Approach

All construction works, relating to the activities and construction sequence outlined in Section 2.1.1 above, will be undertaken in accordance with the following:

- Inland Fisheries Ireland's *Requirements for the Protection of Fisheries Habitat during Construction and Development Works.*
- GE-ENV-01104 The Management of Invasive Alien Plant Species on National Roads – Standard (TII)
- GE-ENV-01105 The Management of Invasive Alien Plant Species on National Roads – Technical Guidance (TII)
- CIRIA (Construction Industry Research and Information Association) Guidance Documents
  - Control of water pollution from construction sites (C532)
  - Control of water pollution from linear construction projects: Technical Guidance (C648)
  - Control of water pollution from linear construction projects: Site Guide (C649)
  - Environmental Good Practice on Site (C692)

§ Guidelines for the Crossing of Watercourses during the Construction of National Road Schemes

§ Guidelines for the Management of Noxious Weeds and Non-Native Invasive Plant Species on National Roads

§ Guidelines for the Protection and Preservation of Trees, Hedgerows and Scrub Prior to, during and Post Construction of National Road Schemes.

3.2.3 BIOSECURITY

Site security is essential to maintaining an invasive plant free site or also to contain and eradicate invasive plants on site. In order to avoid or minimise the spread of invasive and alien species particularly given the proximity of the site to the River Shannon. These measures should be included in all site induction briefings and communicated directly to relevant personnel via 'toolbox talks'. Personnel should also be informed of their legal obligations to prevent the spread of invasive species and of the penalties that apply.

3.2.4 LANDSCAPE PLAN

The landscape plan provides for planting of native species and species listed in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan. Please see landscape plan provided under separate cover.

3.2.5 LIGHTING

Street lighting will be designed in line with Westmeath County council street lighting policy[8] The lighting design has been prepared in accordance with Bat Conservation Ireland Guidance (2010) and the Institute of Lighting Professionals Bats and Artificial Lighting Guidance Note (2018).

The fittings used in the design are 3000K in line with recommendations for reducing the impact of lighting on wildlife & bats (ILP GN08).

[8] https://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/media/WCC%20Public%20Lighting%20Policy%20Document.pdf

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING EXERCISE

This Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report assesses whether this proposed development requires "full" Environmental Impact Assessment. The legislation requires screening to be undertaken to determine whether specified public or private developments are likely to have significant effects on the environment and, as such, require EIA to be carried out prior to a decision on a development consent application being made. As described in Section 1.2.1 this project does not meet the criteria or categories for mandatory EIA nor correspond to development of over 2 hectares in a business district for urban development, or 10 hectares in a built up area, nor corresponds to Roads Development under the Roads Act 1993, as amended.

As further referenced above, the 2014 EIA Directive introduces a new Annex IIA (which is transposed into Irish planning law as Schedule 7A to the 2001 Regulations) to be used by competent authorities carrying out EIA screening determinations. Schedule 7A requires that the following information be provided by a developer in respect of projects listed in Annex II:

1. A description of the proposed development , including in particular:

a) a description of the physical characteristics of the whole proposed development and, where relevant, of demolition works.

b) a description of the location of the proposed development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected.

2. A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the proposed development.

3. A description of any likely significant effects, to the extent of the information available on such effects, of the project on the environment resulting from:

a) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant.

b) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity.

4. The compilation of the information at paragraphs 1 to 3 shall take into account, where relevant, the criteria set out in Schedule 7.

4.1 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Having considered the above environmental factors, the aim of the next section is to address likely impacts on the environment by the implementation of the proposed development. Whether an EIA would be deemed relevant to the scale of the project and the environment will then be determined. The following sections presents the EIA Screening Report based on the criteria contained in Schedule 7a and are grouped under the following headings.

1. Planning Applications within the past five years – Table 4.1

2. Characteristics of the Proposed Development - Table 4.2

3. Location of the Proposed Development - Table 4.3 and

4. Characteristics of Potential Impact Tables 4.4 and 4.5

The screening process assesses the most significant potential impacts in relation to the themes outlined below in Table 4.3. These are considered as follows:

The likely significant effects of projects on the environment must be considered in relation to criteria set out in points 1 and 2 of this Annex, with regard to the impact of the project on the factors specified in Article 3(1), taking into account:

(a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);

(b) the nature of the impact;

(c) the transboundary nature of the impact;

(d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;

(e) the probability of the impact;

(f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;

(g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved projects;

(h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

A methodology was developed to formally screen the proposed development, which was based on the following:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-Threshold Development (EPA, 2003),
- Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects Guidance on Screening (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU). European Commission 2017
- Guidance issued by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2018).
- OPR Practice Note PN02 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening (2021)

4.2 Projects for the Cumulative Assessment

The proposed development was considered in combination with other projects in the area that could result in cumulative effects on the environment. The Myplan on line planning system was consulted on 8th February 2023 for the subject lands and immediate surrounds in particular development applications adjacent to the site within the past three years. Table 4.1 lists the projects that have been identified during this search and provides an assessment of the potential for the proposed project to combine with these other projects to result in cumulative significant effects to the environment. The assessment outlined in Table 4.1has found that the proposed residential project will not have the potential to combine with any other existing and/or approved projects to result in likely significant impacts on the environment.

FIGURE 4-1MYPLAN.IE PLANNING SEARCH 28TH JULY 2022

Table 4-1 Planning applications within the site within the past 3 years (2019-2022)

Planning Ref	Description	Decision
22 170	We, Irish Water, intend to apply for permission at this site for a tunnel sewer and associated shafts crossing under the River Shannon in Athlone Townland and Athlone and Bigmeadow Townland, Athlone Town Centre between The Quay Road on the western side of the river to The Strand Carpark southwest of Strand St. on the eastern side of the river including works on The Quay Road and in the Strand Carpark. The development will consist of the construction of the following: A new combined sewer (Upper Shannon Crossing), up to 1500mm diameter, tunnelled underneath the River Shannon from The Quay Road to the Strand Carpark constructed within a 10m wide construction area. 1 No.tunnel shaft on The Quay Road and all associated site works constructed within a works construction area. 1 No.tunnel shaft in the Strand Carpark and all associated site works constructed within a works construction area. Temporary works compounds at each of the 2 No. tunnel shafts. Temporary removal and reinstatement of two cast iron bollards that are listed as Protected Structures, RPS Ref No 075 and NIAH Ref. No. 15000414 along the Quay Road. Temporary carparking and occasional storage for existing commercial use located adjacent to the proposed temporary works construction compound on The Quay Road. Temporary works area up to 10m wide on a floating pontoon located on the River Shannon adjacent to the quay wall	Conditional

	on The Quay Road. A Natura Impact Statement will be submitted to the Planning Authority with the Application.	
20 741	Retention permission to regularise and retain works carried out at the premises to include changes to ground floor plan. Also, permission to develop the ground floor retail as café-takeaway including change of shop front, external signage, and all associated site works. The development will consist of work to a Protected Structure, Record of Protected Structures, Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020, Reference no.060	Approved
19 743	Permission for a change of use from ground floor retail to café-takeaway including change of shop front, external signage, and all associated site works. The development will consist of work to a Protected Structure, Record of Protected Structures, Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020, reference No.060	Approved

The projects above primarily represent small scale development with the exception of the Athlone Flood relief works (2017 but included for cumulative effects assessment), the Athlone Pedestrian and Cycleway Bridge and the Athlone Main Drainage Shannon Crossing planning application by Irish Water (2022).

The following text is extracted from the EIA Screening for the Part 8 Flood relief works:
The proposed flood alleviation works at Flood Cell 3 'The Quay' will take place along the Quay area of Athlone town. The proposed works will consist of the construction of a flood defence wall, insertion of flood gates and steel plates. It is determined that there will be no likely significant effects on the environment as a result of the proposed Flood Cell 3 'The Quay' Flood Alleviation Works. Any potential impacts can be effectively mitigated for through best practice construction and operational measures. Therefore, it is considered that an EIA is not required for the proposed Flood Cell 3 'The Quay' Flood Alleviation Works

The Athlone Main Drainage Shannon Crossing EIA Screening Statement[9] provides the following conclusion:

The report concluded, on screening the proposed development in the context of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), the proposed upgrade to the wastewater collection network in the town of Athlone including two sewer crossings of the River Shannon is not classed as a type of development requiring mandatory or sub-threshold EIA. The assessment indicated that this project is not required to undergo a full Environment Impact Assessment (EIA).

The comprehensive review of the Westmeath County Council planning register documented relevant general development planning applications within the vicinity of the proposed, most of which relate to the provision and/or alteration of existing buildings. The concluding statements of the above applications support a finding of no significant effects subject to full adherence of mitigation measures. It is reiterated that no works within the River Shannon are proposed as part of this proposed development which further reduces potential risk and emissions to sensitive environmental receptors including the River Shannon.

[9] Planning Report EIA Screening Conclusion, Athlone Main Drainage Shannon Crossing for Irish Water, 2022, MKOS

These developments were also considered in the context of potential cumulative impacts arising from the proposed road upgrade works. Given the nature of the developments i.e., residential units and access roads, the potential for ongoing environmental effects and associated potential cumulative effects with the currently proposed development are low.

4.3 ASSESSMENT

Having considered the above environmental factors, the aim of the next section is to address likely impacts on the environment by the implementation of the proposed development. Whether an EIA would be deemed relevant to the scale of the project and the environment will then be determined. The following sections presents the EIA Screening Report based on the criteria contained in Schedule 7 of S.I. 296 of 2018 and are grouped under the following headings.

1. Characteristics of the Proposed Development - Table 4.2
2. Location of the Proposed Development - Table 4.3 and
3. Characteristics of Potential Impact Tables 4.4 and 4.5

TABLE 4-2CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Screening Question	Response
1. Characteristics of projects The characteristics of projects must be considered, with particular regard to:	
(a) the size and design of the whole project	The project relates to improving the public realm in and around Athlone Castle and enhancing interpretation and signposting. These are minor in size and design.
(b) cumulation with other existing and/or approved projects;	As Section 4.4 shows the potential for cumulation with other approved projects in the study area is not identified as giving rise to significant environmental effects. It is considered that cumulative impacts, if any, are most likely to arise during the construction phase. During construction, the most significant potential for adverse cumulative impacts in the absence of environmental protection measures is the following: • Emissions to air from ground works • Increased surface run off with suspended solids • Accidental leak of hydrocarbons The adherence and full implementation of environmental protection measures including those outlined in Sections 3.2 will ensure no potential for cumulative impacts to arise. In conclusion, for the above reasons, the potential for adverse cumulative effects in relation to proposed and approved projects and the proposed development are not identified as significant for the reasons outlined above and in addition the provisions of the protection measures which are considered sufficient to avoid significant negative cumulative effects in relation to potential construction activities. It is considered that the cumulative impacts can be mitigated during construction and will not be significant during operational phases in the long term.

Screening Question	Response
1. Characteristics of projects The characteristics of projects must be considered, with particular regard to:	
(c) the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water, and biodiversity;	Natural resources relating to soil and water will be used as part of the works. Minor amounts of water and fuel will be used to clean machinery and fuel machinery required during construction works.
(d) the production of waste;	Yes. Solid waste may be produced during construction, but materials will be only ordered as required. Any wastes from the removal and construction process will either be reused within the scheme or recycled/disposed of at an authorised waste facility.
(e) pollution and nuisances;	The construction phase presents the greatest risk of pollution to water resources. Potential sources of water pollution to both surface and groundwater include fuel, lubricants, suspended solids and concrete. Potential pollution to water resources from operation include increased surface run off containing suspended solids. During the construction phase cement-based products, hydrocarbons and other aqueous solutions will be required on site. All materials will be stored in a site compound and in bunded containers. Given the small scale of the project, the quantities of these materials required on site at any one time will be small and the risk of significant contamination to surface water generated within the footprint of the project site will be low. Also, in the event of contamination of surface water with these materials during the construction phase, such contaminated surface water will drain to ground. Furthermore, it is considered that even in the event that minor traces of such materials were to discharge to groundwater baseflows, their concentrations would be diluted to miniscule levels such that they would be entirely attenuated and diluted in baseflows prior to discharge to the River Shannon. The design has allowed for attenuation/soakaway depending of ground conditions. As there is little envisaged vehicle traffic the storm system will not incorporate a petrol interceptor Surface water generated on site during the operation phase will be discharged to the existing storm water sewer network The operation phase will not involve any activities that will present a risk of generating contaminated surface water. Permeable surface paving will also allow for the infiltration of surface water to ground, reducing the volumes of runoff to the existing sewer network. Potential temporary negative impacts may arise in relation to noise, vibration, air quality and dust during the groundworks and construction phases of the development but these will be temporary in nature and again adherence to environmental protection measures will mitigate such impacts. The approach to construction is 14 weeks and the strip and construct approach will minimise disturbance over time.

Screening Question	Response
1. Characteristics of projects The characteristics of projects must be considered, with particular regard to:	
(f) the risk of major accidents and/or disasters which are relevant to the project concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge;	The risks of major accidents are not considered to be significant subject to best construction practices being followed through the construction phase. This will include proper site management, maintenance and operation of all machinery and works associated with the construction phase.
(g) the risks to human health (for example due to water contamination or air pollution).	As above, significant risks to human health are not identified for this proposal. The environmental protection measures, particularly for the construction phase are detailed in Section 2 and subject to full and proper implementation, potential risks associated with construction activity will not arise.
Will the proposed development create a significant amount of nuisance during its construction or operation?	The subject lands are situated within an established urban area. There will be noise and dust emissions relating to the construction works though this are identified as temporary in nature and duration. Standard measures to reduce construction disturbance (such as noise, dust, traffic) on residents during the construction phase will be included as well as the works taking place during daytime hours and other measures to reduce disturbance to species in and adjacent to the site. It is not anticipated that significant noise levels will arise during operation given the intended use of the site. .

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the characteristics of the proposed development.

Rationale: The scale and extent of the works proposed are in line with the existing landuse zoning that has been assessed as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Directive Assessment of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2028.

TABLE 4-3 LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Screening Question	Response
The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by projects must be considered, with regard to: (a) the existing and approved land use;	The existing landuse comprises built land and artificial surfaces with very limited ornamental planting. Wildlife utilising this area are habituated to levels of noise and light given its town centre location and high levels of human activity.
(b) the relative abundance, availability, quality, and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground	The habitats occurring within the project site is representative of the Fossitt Level 3 habitats Built Land and Artificial Surfaces (BL3) There will be an element of disturbance to the surrounding habitats as a result of the proposed works but given their scale and size, these are identified as minor in nature given the ambient background levels of noise and lighting and traffic that existing. The adherence to the best practice construction and operational measures are essential to maintain the post works regeneration capacity of the environment and public realm measures through planting will contribute positively to environment at local scale.

Screening Question	Response
(c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas: (i) wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths; (ii) coastal zones and the marine environment; (iii) mountain and forest areas; (iv) nature reserves and parks; (v) areas classified or protected under national legislation; Natura 2000 areas designated by Member States pursuant to Directive 92/43/EEC and Directive 2009/147/EC;	The proposed development is not going to significantly increase surface run off as attenuation/soakaway systems are in line with Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) measures. Attenuation/soakaway systems are in line with SUDS principals. (i) measures are provided as outlined in Section 2.4 to avoid likely significant effects on the environment. (ii) not applicable (iii) not applicable (iv) not application (v) The Screening Statement for Appropriate Assessment that accompanies this report provides the following concluding statement: *During the screening of the project it was found that thirteen Natura 2000 sites occur within a 15km radius of the project site. The project site is located less than 500m from the River Shannon Callows SAC and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA.* *All of these European Sites (and their associated qualifying features of interest/special conservation interests) are adjudged to be located outside the zone of influence of all activities associated with the project.* *There will be no potential for impacts arising from the construction or operation phase of the project to give rise to impacts on water quality on the two identified Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence of the project. Given the absence of impact pathways and the potential for interactions between the project and these Natura 2000 sites there will be no potential for the project to result in likely significant effects to these Natura 2000 sites.* *In light of the findings of this report it is the considered view of the authors of this Screening Report for Appropriate Assessment that it can be concluded by the competent authority, Westmeath County Council that the project is not likely, alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, to have a significant effect on any Natura 2000 sites in view of their Conservation Objectives and on the basis of best scientific evidence and there is no reasonable scientific doubt as to that conclusion.* *This Screening has resulted in a Finding of No Significant Effects and as such a Stage II Appropriate Assessment is not required.*
(vi) areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure;	Whilst surface water quality within the closest surface water feature River Shannon is of poor quality, there are no direct or indirect effects identified for the project and potential risks to these surface waters. The greatest risk would relate to the construction phase and measures in the CEMP will apply in addition to the commentary provided relating to water resources in Table 3.2 above.
(vii) densely populated areas;	The subject lands are located within an established urban area of Athlone. Given the scale and nature of the proposed development, no significant negative effects are identified in relation to these criteria.

Screening Question	Response
(viii) landscapes and sites of historical, cultural, or archaeological significance	Cultural heritage and landscape considerations are the most sensitive receptors for the development proposal. The careful design that improves permeability and enhances the setting of the castle contribute positively to the cultural heritage and landscape resources.

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the location of the proposed development.

Rationale: The proposed development relates to a site of 0.452 ha of low ecological habitats in an established urban area.

The screening process assesses the most significant potential impacts in relation to the themes outlined below in Table 4.4. These are considered as follows:

The likely significant effects of projects on the environment must be considered in relation to criteria set out in points 1 and 2 of this Annex, regarding the impact of the project on the factors specified in Article 3(1), taking into account:

(a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
(b) the nature of the impact;
(c) the transboundary nature of the impact;
(d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;
(e) the probability of the impact;
(f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;
(g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved projects;
(h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

TABLE 4-4 CHARACTERISTICS OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL PARAMETERS

Environmental Topic	Potential Impact
Human Beings	Potential temporary negative impacts to residents associated with construction activities. However, given the scale and nature of the development, this is not identified as significant.
Flora and Fauna	As outlined in the preceding table the ecological habitats present on site are of low value overall.
Soil and Geology	As this site represents an infill site, given the scale and nature of the development significant adverse effects are avoided.
Water	Surface water quality impacts arising from the construction and operation stage could arise in the absence of standard best practice construction measures. However due to a range of measures these effects are not identified as significant or likely. .
Air Quality and climate	Given the scale and nature of the development these are identified as minor.

Environmental Topic	Potential Impact
Noise and Vibration	Noise during the construction phase may result in temporary daytime nuisance however, noise and vibration during works phase will be minimized through best practice.
Cultural Heritage	No direct effects and public realm will contribute positive to setting of the Athlone Castle and improved the riverside frontage
Landscape	As above. No significant adverse effects are identified.
Material Assets	Improved permeability and access to the riverside frontage as well as improved pedestrian access in and around the Castle and its setting.
Interrelationship between above parameters	The key interrelationship arises between water, biodiversity, soil, and material assets. Measures to avoid adverse effects on these parameters are included in Section 2.4 Environmental Protection Measures The significance of any potential negative interactive effects is predicted to be slight and predominantly of a temporary nature. Measures as outlined in Section 2.4 will provide effective management of the project will eliminate the potential for any significant negative interactive effects to occur.

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the potential impacts on environmental parameters.

Rationale: As the preceding table shows, potential impacts relate primarily to temporary impacts at construction stage and the implementation of the Best Practice Construction measures will provide safeguards to avoid significant impacts at this stage.

TABLE 4-5CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Characteristics of potential impacts The potential significant effects of proposed development in relation to criteria set out under Tables 3.3. and 3.4 above, and having regard in particular to:	
(a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	Minor and localized temporary impacts are identified primarily at construction stage only.
(b) the nature of the impact;	The potential impacts relate primarily water quality. Measures to avoid potential effects on water quality are identified and subject to their full adherence and implementation, no significant effects are identified.
(c) the transboundary nature of the impact;	Potential transfrontier impacts are not identified subject to full application and implementation of measures in Section 3.4.
(d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;	Best practice guidelines and adherence to statutory requirements will address and mitigate for environmental parameters during the design, construction, and operation process; no such effects are identified.
(e) the probability of the impact;	The design of the proposals, best practice construction measures mitigate against significant effects arising.
(f) the expected onset, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the impact;	Subject to implementation and adherence to measures in Section 2.4 impacts identified for topics are not significant and will be temporary in nature relating to the construction phase.

(g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved projects;	The cumulative impact of the permitted developments and the proposed project are predicted to cause Negligible impacts during the construction and operational phase
(h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.	Measures are detailed in Section 2 and are derived from best practice guidelines.

Conclusion: No significant effects likely to arise associated with the characteristics of the potential impacts.

Rationale: Localised and temporary impacts are identified associated with construction. Measures as outlined in Section 2.4 are designed to ensure that should construction commence on the project; significant adverse effects are avoided.

4.4 Identification of the Relevant Assessments Available

In consideration of a recent high court case (Waltham Abbey Residents Association v. An Bord Pleanala & ORS), the following statement was made:

"The kind of assessments that should be brought together in the statement under 299B(1)(b)(ii)(II)(C) include those under the following directives:

(i) directive 92/43/EEC, the habitats directive: see EC EIA, Guidance on Screening, 2017, p. 44;

(ii) directive 2000/60/EC, the water framework directive: see EC EIA, Guidance on Screening, 2017, p. 44;

(iii) directive 2001/42/EC, the SEA directive: see EC EIA, Guidance on Screening, 2017, p. 44;

(iv) directive 2002/49/EC, regarding environmental noise;

(v) directive 2008/50/EC, the clean air for Europe directive;

(vi) directive 2007/60/EC, regarding the assessment and management of flood risks; as well of course as

(vii) any other relevant provision of EU law."

For this EIA Screening Report, the following sources are pertinent:

(i) Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2028
(ii) Natura Impact Report for the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2028
(iii) Part 8 Planning Application including EIA and AA Screening for Flood Cell 3 Athlone Flood Relief Scheme, 2017
(iv) Ecological Impact Assessment of Athlone Main Drainage Shannon Crossing, Irish Water 2022
(v) Natura Impact Statement of Athlone Main Drainage Shannon Crossing, Irish Water 2022.
(vi) EIA Screening Report of Athlone Main Drainage Shannon Crossing, Irish Water 2022
(vii) Athlone Town is one of the locations cited in a European Court Judgement Case against the State for failure to comply with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) regarding the discharge of untreated stormwater into sensitive areas. The Athlone Main Drainage Scheme has commenced works and will support a growing population, ensure

compliance with the UWWTD and the EPA Wastewater Discharge Licence, and improve and protect the River Shannon[10]

4.5 Planning Context And Other Relevant Environmental Assessments

The Strategic Environmental Assessment prepared for the CDP provided the following commentary relating to the tourism and recreational policy below, it identifies positive interactions with a number of Strategic Environmental objectives including PHH, BFF and application of relevant mitigation measures in the CDP 2021-2027.

CPO 6.36: Promote the enhancement and development of Belvedere House, Gardens and Park and Athlone Castle Visitor Centre as world-class visitor attractions, enabling visitors to have an enjoyable and engaging experience, while protecting the cultural heritage, natural environment, and landscape value.

The other assessments have been referenced and applied particularly in relation to the Baseline Summary (Section 3.1.1 to 3.1.11) and consideration of cumulative interactions (Section 4.4.)

[10] https://www.water.ie/projects/local-projects/athlone-main-drainage-scheme/

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 EIA SCREENING CONCLUSION

The EIA Screening Report has provided an overview assessment of the Proposed Development against the Schedule 7 criteria of 2011 Regulations for the avoidance of doubt.

Section 4 examined the nature of the development including the size and location of the development, and the types and characteristics of likely potential effects. Construction works are anticipated to result in temporary negative effects on certain parameters, whilst the operation phase will result in long term positive effects via improvement of permeability and public realm. The approach to construction will include best practice standard construction measures. The public realm measures will provide for improved permeability, safer spaces for walkers and cyclists and enhanced public realm overall.

The proposed development does not trigger the threshold for mandatory EIA/EIAR as set in EU Directive 85/337/EEC (as amended by Directive 97/11/EC, Directive 2014/52/EU and S.I. 454 of 2011; S.I. 464 of 2011; S.I. 456 of 2011 and S.I. No 296 of 2018) and has been assessed as a sub threshold EIA development.

This EIA Screening Assessment has determined that the characteristics of the proposed development are considered not significant due to the scale and nature of the proposed development and its footprint, which is confined to an area of 0.452ha, the characteristics and sensitivities of the receiving environment and design and measures that will be implemented as part of the construction phase and operation phase of the proposed development.

Given the scale and nature of the project and taking account of all available information, the overall probability of impacts on the receiving environment arising from the proposed development (during the construction or operational phases) is considered to be low, as summarised in the preceding tables in Section 4 above.

Significant environmental impacts are not identified, given the scale, nature and duration of the project and the Screening Statement in support of Appropriate Assessment has found that the project does not have the potential to result in likely significant effects to the qualifying features of interest of the River Shannon Callows SAC or Middle Shannon Callows SPA and will not have the potential to undermine the conservation objectives for these qualifying features of interest.

The implementation of the measures in Section 3.2 Environmental Protection Measures includes measures that are representative of standard industry environmental management that are implemented to minimise the impact of projects to the environment.

In coming to this conclusion, with which Westmeath County Council is invited to agree in making its EIA screening determination, the consultants engaged by Westmeath County Council have considered the following:

- the criteria set out in Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations;

- information specified in Schedule 7A to the 2001 Regulations;
- further relevant information on the characteristics of the proposed environment and its likely effects on the environment, including
    - where relevant, information on how the available results of other relevant assessments of the effects on the environment carried out pursuant to European Union legislation other than the EIA Directive have been considered; and
- description of the features of the proposed development and measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment of the development.

REFERENCES

Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027, and SEA environmental Report and Natura Impact Report.

Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (2018)

Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects Guidance on Screening (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU). European Commission 2017.

OPR Practice Note PN02 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening (2021)

Update re Irish Water 2022 apps

WFD Cycle 2 Catchment Upper Shannon Subcatchment Shannon[Upper]_SC_100 (2019)

Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme - Flood Cell 3 'The Quay' Part 8 Planning Report Westmeath County Council (2017) RPS

Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA)of Athlone Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement, Co. Westmeath, Blackthorn Ecology (2020)

Ecological Impact Assessment Athlone Main Drainage – Shannon Crossings, Westmeath County Council, MKOS (2022)

Natura Impact Statement Athlone Main Drainage – Shannon Crossings, Westmeath County Council, MKOS (2022)

Athlone Pedestrian and Cycleway Bridge Environmental Impact Statement, Westmeath County Council, ROD (2017)

PHOTOS FROM SITE VISIT JANUARY 2022

Plate 1: Car parking at front of castle

Plate 2: view southwards from Castle across River Shannon

Plate 3: Built land around castle