# Appropriate Assessment Screening

## Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)
## at Baylin, Co. Westmeath

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For: Westmeath County Council

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# 1. Introduction

This report comprises information in support of screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) in line with the requirements of Article 6[3] of the EU Habitats Directive (EC 92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora; the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010; and the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended, for the development of a recreational trail and boardwalk linking Carn Park Forest Walk and the Baylin Bog Trail, Baylin, Co. Westmeath.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# 2. Background to Screening for Appropriate Assessment

## 2.1. European Designated Sites

Sites designated for the conservation of nature in Ireland include:

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.2. Legislative Context

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

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

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

> "Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implication for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public."

Article 6[4] continues:

> "If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

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

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

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

**Stage 1: Screening for AA**

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

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

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Desk Study

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

The following sources of data were employed:

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

## 3.2. SPR Model

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

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

## 3.3. Field Survey

The field survey was carried out on 16th August 2023. Baseline ecological conditions were assessed. Habitats were classified according to A Guide to Habitats in Ireland (Fossitt, 2000). Where applicable, the habitat types and species usage were recorded (Smith et al. 2011; Scannell and Synnott, 1987; Wyse Jackson et al. 2016). Habitats were classified and dominant plant species noted according to the guidelines

given by the JNCC (2010) with reference to best practice guidance for habitat survey and mapping (Smith et al., 2011) and Census Catalogue of the Flora of Ireland (Scannell & Synnott, 1987).

# 4. Screening of Designated Sites

## 4.1. Site Location

The project is proposed to take place just southeast of Baylin, Co. Westmeath, where it is proposed to create a new recreational trail linking two existing routes, Baylin Bog Walk and Carn Park Forest Trail. The project is part of a wider scheme of upgrades to the latter routes. The proposed works consist of the creation of a gravel trail on an existing disused forest trail surface and the construction of a boardwalk across a section of Carn Park Bog which was previously cutover. The project lies entirely within the boundary of *Carn Park Bog SAC 002336*.

The village of Baylin lies ca 400m to the northwest; the wider landscape is composed predominately of a mosaic of improved agricultural grassland with some conifer plantations. *Crosswood Bog SAC 002337* lies ca 2.4km southwest. The project lies within Upper Shannon 26E WFD catchment, Breensford_SC_010 subcatchment.


*Figure 1 Overview of the works area*

## 4.2. Receiving Environment

A description of the habitats of significant ecological value that were observed within the immediate surroundings of the works area are listed below, with descriptions adapted from "A Guide to Habitats in Ireland" by Julie A. Fossitt, 2000 (Figure 2

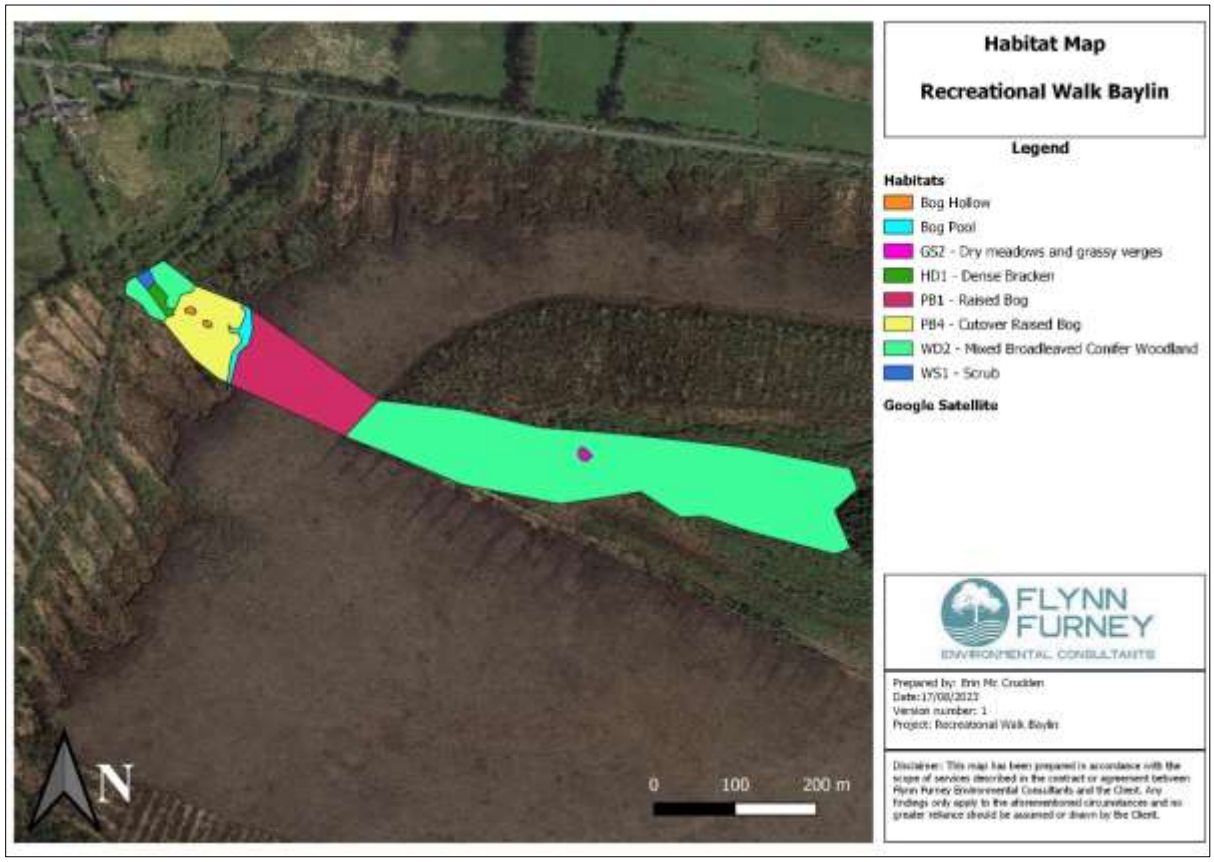


*Figure 2 Habitat Map of the proposed works*

### WS1 Scrub

The first habitat encountered was WS1 off the walking path of the Baylin Bog Trail. A small stream runs parallel to the path. This habitat was dominated by Nettle. Cleavers were abundant and Hoary Willowherb were frequent. Marsh Woundwort and Bramble were noted as frequent also. Bracken and Ivy were occasional. Bush Vetch, Angelica and Creeping Buttercup were rare.

### WD2 Mixed broadleaved/conifer woodland (Next to Baylin Walk)

WD2 was surrounding the scrub habitat, trees that were frequent included Downy Birch and Willow sp. Lodge Pole Pine was occasional but toward the outskirts of the woodland became frequent. Ash was occasional at the outskirts of the woodland boundary. A 4m x 5m patch of Rhododendron was noted in this habitat. Large patches of dead wood were observed. Dog wood was also noted as present on the outskirts of the proposed route. Chaffinches and Siskins were heard in this area.

**HD1 Dense bracken**

The scrub habitat then transitioned into an open are of dense bracken habitat with a height of up to 6 ft. Greater Willowherb was occasional.

**PB4 – Cutover Bog (Adjacent to Woodland/Baylin Walking Trail)**

This habitat was encountered after leaving the WD2 habitat. Ling heather was abundant with Lodgepole Pine occasional encroaching as saplings throughout this section of the bog. Birch and Gorse were rare. Sphagnum species observed were dry, but patches of healthier sphagnum were scattered around the area showing more water uptake and saturated zones. Purple Moore grass was frequent in the bog area adjacent to the woodland. Bell Heather was also noted to be rare. The surrounding woodland is encroaching on this cutover area with various saplings and shrubs.

However, there were patches of the degraded raised bog that were saturated (but shallow) and multiple frogs were observed adjacent to these areas. In these hollows Sphagnum species (*S. papillosum* and *S. cuspidatum*) appeared healthier regarding water uptake and density. This area had moderate Sphagnum cover. Bog Cotton sp. and Bog Asphodel were occasional around these

hollows. Round-leaved Sundew was rare and found within the damp areas of the hollows. Molinia was frequent adjacent to the hollows. Compact Rush was occasional. One of these areas had a water level testing pipe which would be from previous research on monitoring the water table. There were a few small patches scattered around the area.

Buzzards, Barn Swallows and Siskins were heard/seen in this area. Otter spraint was noted. Large Marsh Grasshopper observed. Frogs were frequent.

An extensive pool area was observed at the foot of a high ridge leading onto the high bog. This habitat was dominated by Molinia and was deeper compared to the hollows. This area was quite saturated and had a high coverage of Sphagnum sp. Bog Asphodel was frequent in this area and Ling Heather was occasional. Round Leaved Sundew was occasional. This pool was adjacent to a shelf of peat (1m) from previous cuttings which then led onto the high bog section which was more open.

### Degraded Raised Bog (High Bog)

After the 1m shelf, the area is more open. Ling heather was abundant in this area and the peat was quite dry. Lodgepole Pine Willow sp. and Birch saplings were rare. British Soldier lichen was occasional. Bell heather was also rare. Molinia was occasional whilst Lichen was frequent. Bog Asphodel was more frequent closer to the woodland on the other side. The peat became slightly more saturated on the outskirts of the woodland on the other side. Multiple drains were noted around the forestry.

### WD2 Mixed Broadleaved Conifer Woodland (Carn Park Forest)

In this habitat Lodgepole Pine was frequent on the outskirts and became more occasional deeper in the woodland habitat. Bog Bilberry was frequent throughout the forest. Ling heather was noted to be occasional. Saplings of Ash and Holly were rare with Bracken occasional. Purple Moore Grass was frequent throughout the woodland. Willow and Birch trees were frequent. Tormentil and Knapweed was occasional throughout the ground flora of the forest. Lady's Bedstraw, Bush Vetch, Pignut and Common Twayblade were rare. Two patches of Rhododendron were observed along the route. These were 4m x 5m and 6m x 4m.

**Dry meadows and grassy verges GS2**

The informal pathway transitions into an open area of neutral grassland. In this habitat species such as St. John's Wort, Ragwort, Knapweed, Willowherb are occasional. Red Clover was frequent. A patch of Knapweed was frequented by many butterflies (Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Green Veined butterflies).

### 4.2.1. Surface water

A small stream leaves Carn Park Bog, draining into the Breensford River and then into Lough Ree some 12km downstream from the proposed works. The Breensford is currently classified as Not at Risk under the latest WFD characterisation, with Good water quality; the latest Q-value assessment returned a value of Q4 downstream where it crosses the R390 in 2020. There was no evidence of the stream on the surface in the vicinity of the works area during the survey; it likely collects diffusely before leaving the bog to the east.

### 4.2.2. Breeding Birds

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

No dedicated bird survey was carried out as part of this investigation. There is ample habitat for both ground- and tree-nesting bird species along the route and were vegetation to be disturbed (which should not be the case) a pre-works nesting survey is recommended. A number of species were noted during the survey; chaffinch, siskin, barn swallow and buzzard were seen and/or heard on the day.

### 4.2.3. Amphibians

The cutover bog provides ample habitat for both common frog *Rana temporaria* and smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*; common frog was frequently observed in the cutover bog habitat during the survey.

### 4.2.4. Mammals

The habitat along the route provides habitat for many mammal species, both in the bog area and the woodland. A dedicated survey was not carried out as part of the present study, but otter spraint was noted within the cutover bog habitat, and Article 17 reporting recorded otter in 2017 2km to the northwest on the Breensford river. Many of the trees within the mixed woodland could provided habitat for bats and were they to be disturbed during the proposed works, a dedicated survey is recommended.

### 4.2.5. Invasive Species

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

One 3rd schedule species, *Rhododendron ponticum,* was noted in several patches during survey within the mixed conifer woodland adjacent to the existing Carn Park Forest. The proposed works should not interfere with these, but a management plan should be drawn up to remove them as part of the works in order to prevent their further spread.

## 4.3. Proposed Works

The proposed works involve the creation of a boardwalk and gravel trail connecting the existing Baylin Bog Walk and Carn Park Forest (Figure 3). It has been proposed that this link would consist of a 975 m walking route, including an upgraded and extended gravel road (625m, Section 7 - 8) and a new raised boardwalk (350m Section 8 - 9). The envisaged widths are 2.0m for the gravel road and 1.8m for the Boardwalk. The 625 m proposed gravel road section will be constructed on a natural trail that has fallen into disuse in recent years.

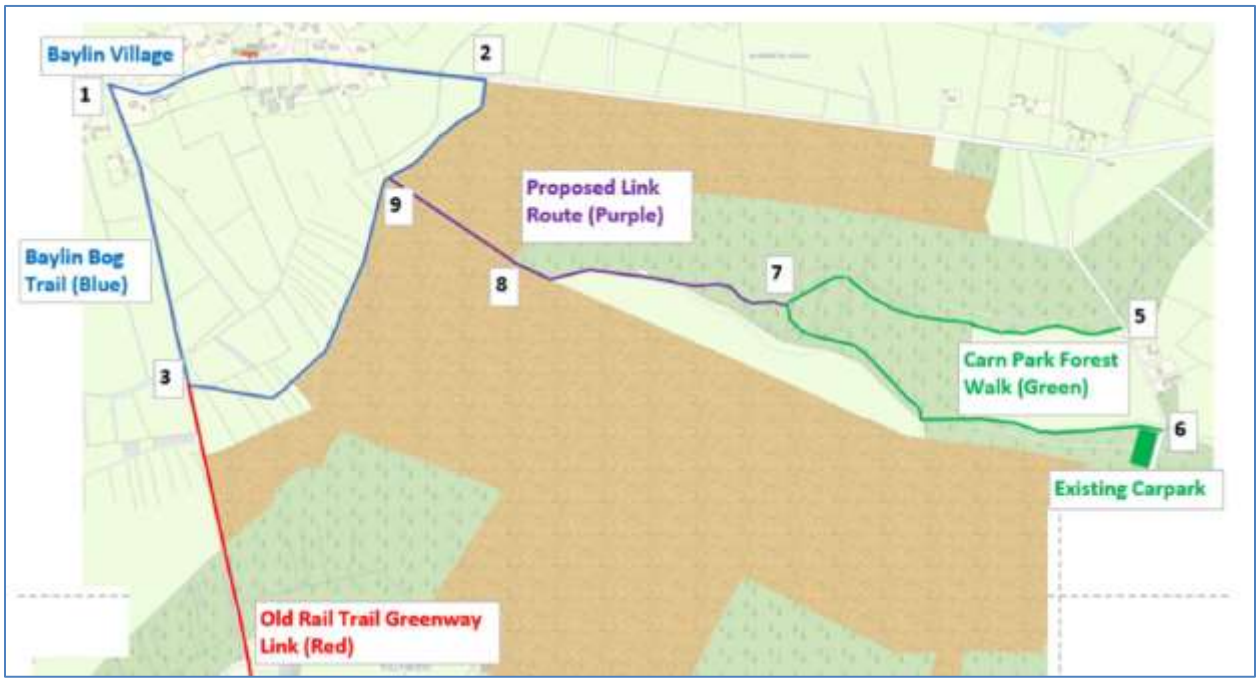


*Figure 3 Baylin Area Amenity Map*

The boardwalk is proposed to consist of timber deck planks on timber joists spanning c.4m between timber 'goalposts.' The goal posts would be 2 No. 150x150mm timber posts, driven into the bog, with a timber cross head between the top of the posts supporting the joists. With the proposed length of the boardwalk spanning c.350m and the timber goal posts positioned at 4m increments, it would amount to 88 posts on either side of the boardwalk (as pairs) which would be driven into the bog to support the structure of the boardwalk. The total of 88 pairs (resulting in 176 150x150 timber posts) will allow pedestrians utilising the trail to safely cross the Bog by the newly constructed boardwalk as opposed to walking directly on the Bog. It is further envisaged that this will be constructed from the western side linearly towards the east to not require the construction material or vehicles to encroach over the SAC.

## 4.4. Nearby Designated Sites

All sites within 15km of the proposed works (and beyond) were initially considered as part of this screening (Figure 4). After the initial consideration, three European sites were considered to have a reasonable pathway for impact (Table 1).

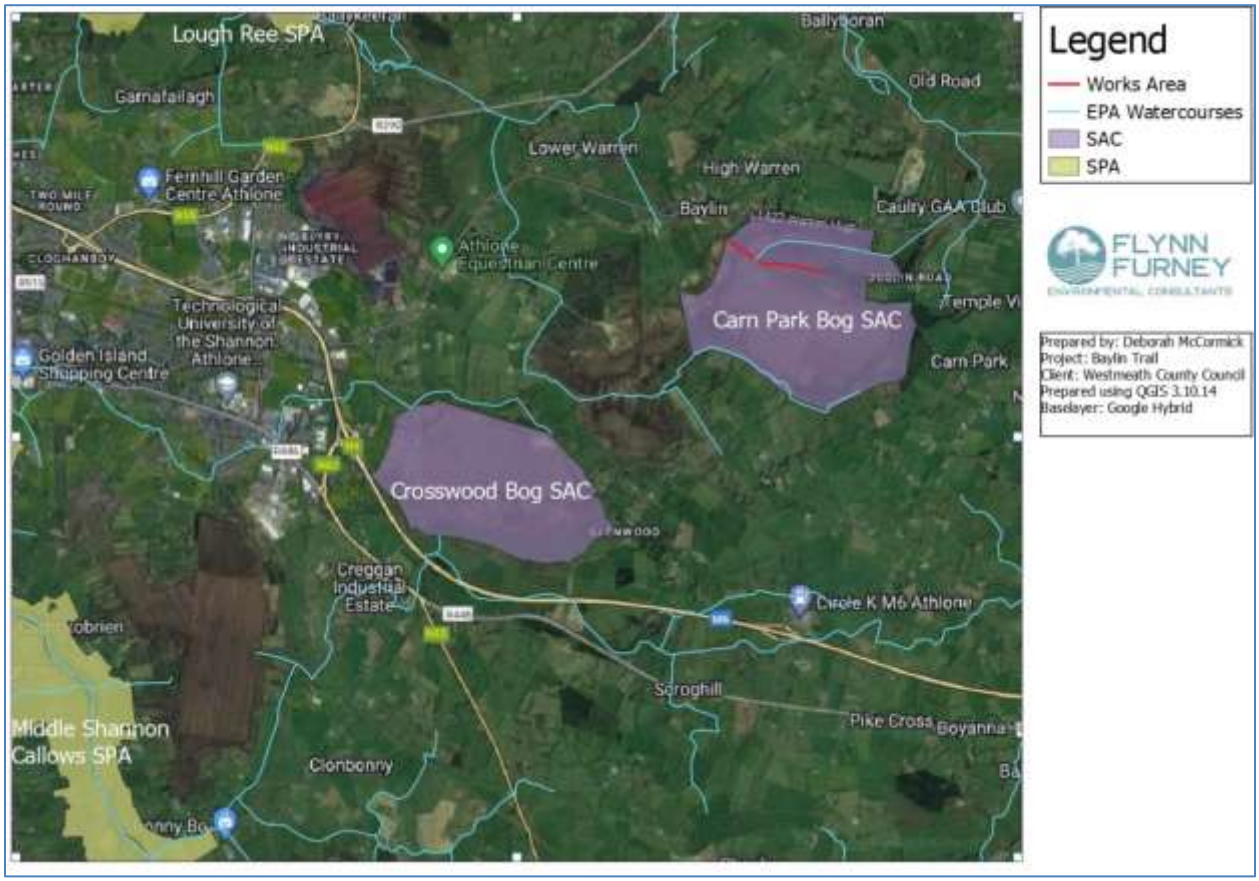


*Figure 4 Natura 2000 sites in the vicinity of the proposed works*

*Table 1 Assessment of Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence of the proposed works*

| Site | Distance (km) | Screening Assessment |
|---|---|---|
| Carn Park Bog SAC 002336 | 0 | Proposed works lie entirely within the European Site. Further consideration is necessary. |
| Lough Ree SAC 000440 | 13 | Proposed works lie ca 12km from the European Site with only a tenuous hydrological connection – the bog is drained by a small stream which eventually connects to Lough Ree, but the Breensford River passes through several small lakes before entering the European Site. No reasonable pathway for impact |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | exists given the nature and scale of the work and the distance to the site. |
| Lough Ree SPA 004064 | 13 | As above, no reasonable pathway for impact exists given the nature and scale of the work and the distance to the site. Furthermore, the proposed works lie 13km from the SPA, well outside the core foraging range for any of the SCI species for which the site is designated. |

After the initial screening exercise, only one site, *Carn Park Bog SAC 002336,* was considered to have the potential to be significantly impacted by the proposed works. This site is considered in further detail below.

### 4.4.1 Carn Park Bog SAC

This European Site lies 8km west of Athlone, comprising a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. The bog has developed in a basin, which is almost divided in two by a ridge of mineral material; the majority of the bog is to the south of this. Areas of active raised bog, a priority habitat, have been mapped throughout the site, most of it in the southern section – a further 9ha of the high bog area has been identified as having the potential for restoration through e.g., drain blocking (Figure 5).

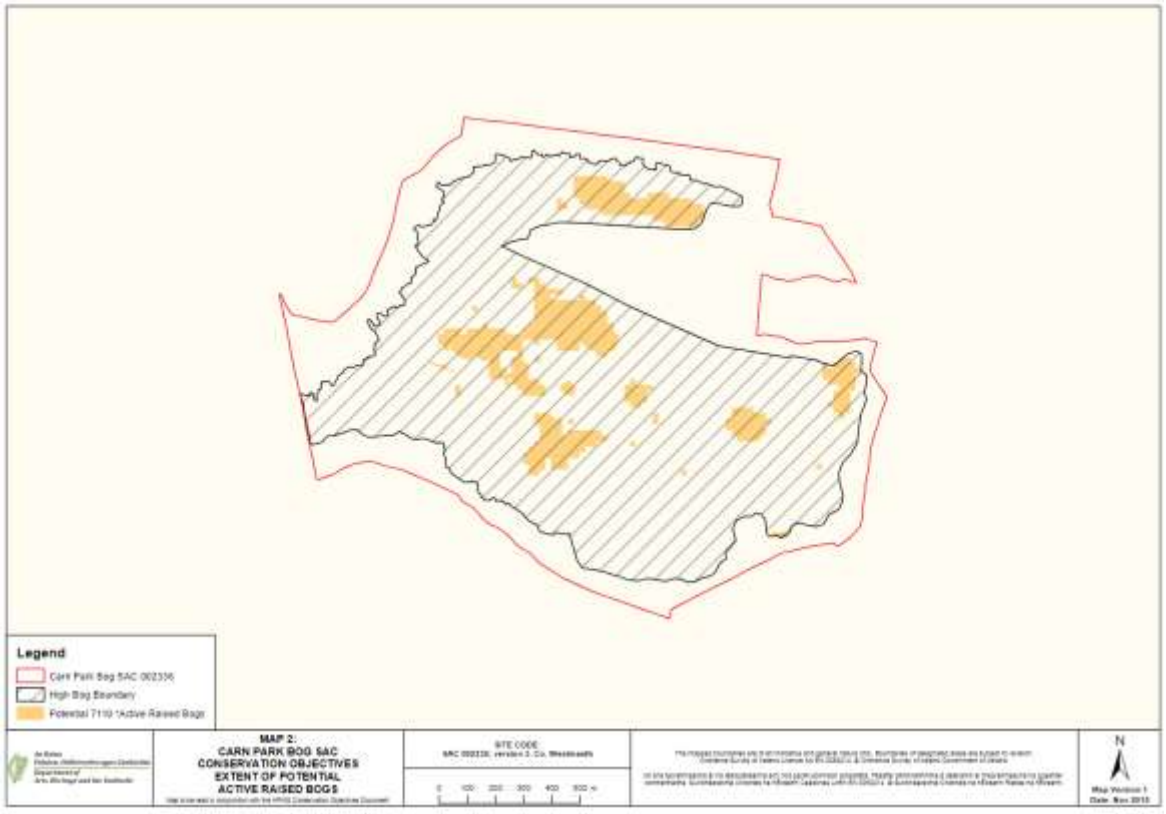


*Figure 5 Habitats within Carn Park Bog SAC*

The proposed boardwalk will cross the high bog at its narrowest point, along the ridge of mineral till in the northern half of the Site.

# 5. ARTICLE 6(3) SCREENING ASSESSMENT

This section of the report focuses solely on the potential for the proposed works to impact upon Natura 2000 sites. The European Commission has set guidelines for the assessment of a project's potential to impact on a designated site (EC, 2001). The consideration of this project in this context is detailed below.

## 5.1 Article 6(3) Assessment Criteria

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

While the entirety of the project lies within the boundary of the European Site, the aspect of the proposal likely to give rise to impacts is the construction of the 350m boardwalk across the bog habitat. The gravel trail will be laid over an existing disused trail within the mixed conifer forestry, away from any of the habitats for which the site is designated and is not considered to have the potential for impact.

### 5.1.1 Description of any likely direct, indirect, or secondary impacts of the project on the Natura 2000 sites

Any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the proposed works, both alone and in-combination with other plans or projects, on the designated sites by virtue of the following criteria: size and scale, land take, distance from the Natura 2000 site or key feature thereof, resource requirements, emissions, excavation requirements, transportation requirements and duration of construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the works are detailed in the table below (Table 2).

*Table 2 Assessment of likely impacts on Carn Park Bog SAC.*

| **Assessment of Likely Impacts** | |
|---|---|
| Size and scale | The proposed works footprint is 1.8m x 350m, small relative to the Natura 2000 site. |
| Landtake | The work takes place within the European site; the boardwalk however will be raised over the surface of the bog, while the gravel trail will be laid over an existing trail within the forestry. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site | The project passes over the site. It will be raised over the surface however and does not cross any of the active raised bog for which the site is designated. |
| Resource requirements | No materials for construction will be sourced from within any Natura 2000 site. No water will be abstracted from the site during the construction or operation of the site. |
| Emissions | No other emissions to air or water other than those associated with a small construction project are likely, and none that will impact on any Natura 2000 site. The gravel trail will not require significant excavation and is constrained within the boundary of the existing forest; no emissions are considered likely from the boardwalk construction. |
| Excavation requirements | No excavation of material or landscaping will take place within the boundary of any European site. |
| Transportation requirements | No access requirements are necessary for the proposed projects that will impact upon any Natura 2000 site. The boardwalk will be constructed from the western end so that no construction work occurs on the surface of the bog itself, nor will any construction material be carried across it. |
| Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning | As yet unknown but will be of short duration due to the nature and scale of the project. |
| Timing of works | As yet unknown |
| Cumulative or In-combination Impacts with other Projects and Plans | A search of Planning Permissions for the area within which the project is located did not indicate any plans for projects that are likely to lead to significant cumulative or in-combination impacts to any Natura 2000 sites. Four permissions have been granted during the last two years for small one-off residential constructions (see file refs 2333, 22455, 22134 and 21661, Westmeath County Council). |

### 5.1.2 Description of any Likely Changes to the Natura 2000 sites

Any likely changes to the Natura 2000 sites are described in the table below (Table 3) with reference to the following criteria: reduction of habitat area, disturbance to key species, habitat or species fragmentation, reduction in species density, changes in key indicators of conservation value and climate change.

*Table 3 Likely changes to Carn Park Bog SAC*

| **Assessment of Likely Changes** | |
|---|---|
| Reduction of habitat area | While the work will take place within the boundary of the SAC, the boardwalk will be raised over the surface of the bog and will therefore not reduce the habitat area. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Disturbance of key species | The impact of the boardwalk upon the QI raised bog habitat will be minimal, given the size and nature of the construction. No other species or habitats are under consideration. |
| Habitat or species fragmentation | The boardwalk will be raised off the surface of the bog, supported by timber posts and will therefore not disrupt the hydrology or habitat connectivity of the raised bog habitat. |
| Reduction in species density | No reduction in species density is considered likely within the SAC as a result of the works. |
| Changes in key indicators of conservation value | No pathway for impact on any key indicators of value associated with any Natura 2000 site exist. A key feature associated with the integrity of the active raised bog is its hydrology, which will not be impacted by the proposed works due to the nature of the construction. Furthermore, the construction of a boardwalk within this amenity area will prevent users from walking directly on the surface of the bog, protecting it from trampling and will constitute a positive change. |
| Climate change | No damage to any Natura 2000 site as a result of or in combination with enhanced climate change is predicted as a result of the proposed development. |

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

It is considered that there will be no interference with the key relationships that define the structure and functions of the Natura 2000 site. The boardwalk construction will not interfere with the surface of the bog nor negatively affect its hydrology.

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

Indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects are set out below in terms of loss, fragmentation, disruption, disturbance and changes to the key elements of the site (Table 4).

*Table 4 Indicators of significance of impact to Carn Park Bog SAC*

| **Indicators of Significance** | |
|---|---|
| Loss | No habitat will be lost as a result of the proposed works. |
| Fragmentation | No habitat fragmentation to any Natura 2000 sites is predicted. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Disruption | No risk of disruption to any Natura 2000 site is predicted, due to the nature and scale of the proposed works. |
| Disturbance | No risk of disturbance to any Natura 2000 site is predicted, due to the nature and scale of the proposed works. |
| Change to key elements of site (e.g. water quality etc.) | No potential for change to the key elements of the European site exists due to the nature of the proposed works as designed. |

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

Based on a consideration of the likely or potential impacts arising from the proposed works and a review of their significance in terms of the conservation interests of *Carn Park Bog SAC 002336*, it is considered that the project does not have the potential to impact the European site significantly negatively, and has the potential to positively impact the conservation interests of the site due to the

- nature of the construction being raised over the surface of the bog without disrupting its hydrology or impacting upon the surface.
- new gravel trail being constrained within the existing modified mixed conifer plantation within the footprint of an existing disused trail.
- positive impact of the boardwalk reducing the number of recreational users that traverse the bog directly on the surface.

# 6. Screening Conclusions

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

(i) A stage II AA of the proposed development is required if it *cannot* be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European Designated Sites.

(ii) A stage II AA of the proposed development is not required if it *can* be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European Designated Sites.

**Name of project or plan:** Baylin Recreational Trail (Link Route)

**Name and location of Natura 2000 sites:** *Carn Park Bog SAC*

**Description of project or plan:** Construction of linking gravel trail and raised boardwalk.

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

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

**Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site:**
No negative impacts on any Natura 2000 site are predicted; a positive impact in the reduction of users of the site trampling the surface of the bog is likely.

In conclusion, no impacts are likely as a result of the proposed works on the conservation objectives or overall integrity of *Carn Park Bog SAC 002336* due to the scale and nature of the works, and the lack of any pathways for indirect impact on any other European site. **It is therefore recommended that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required, and the project is screened out.**

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