Part 8 MEMO

To:	Cathaldus Hartin, Senior Planner
From:	Ian Lacey, Senior Executive Planner
Date:	14th of April 2026
Subject:	Part 8 AA/EIA Requirements in relation to the proposed construction of 41 bungalows on an existing site with dwellings adjacent to Blackberry Lane, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

1. Project Description

The Housing Section of Westmeath County Council proposes proposes the development of 41 (no.) new residential homes, 2,3,4-bedroom single storey predominantly semidetached on individual defined plots. The works involve the provision of temporary halting site services, decanting and rehousing of 41 families over 3-4 phases of development wholly within the existing inhabited site and immediate boundary lands.

1.2 Details Received:

The documents provided for the purposes of determination are as follows:

- Drawings and Plans
- Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

1.3 Overview:

The application site is located within Athlone Town and located in the townland of Lissywollen and is an existing housing estate. The site is accessed off the regional road R916. The proposed development includes the four phased demolition of existing accommodation units and the construction of new modular units, the provision of landscaped area, play areas and open space and the temporary provision of accommodation units and communal facilities provided for each phase to enable the existing residents to remain on site.

The development includes areas of public open space and landscaped areas along with upgraded roads, footpaths and street lighting. The proposed development is located on lands zoned existing residential in the current Athlone Town Development Plan.

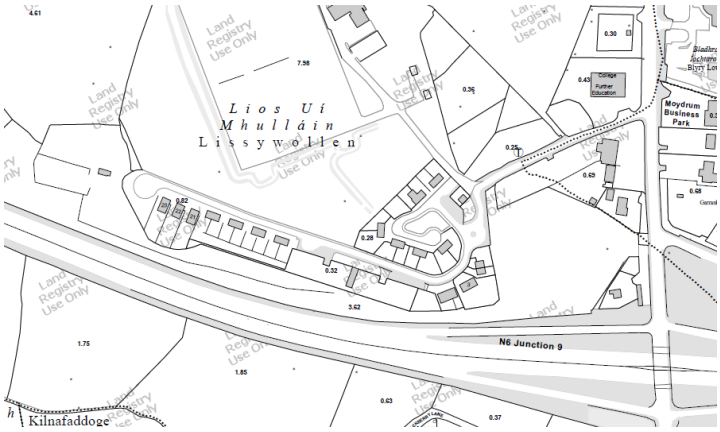


Fig 1 – existing layout of the estate

Fig 2 – proposed layout of the estate

Fig 3 – Google aerial image dated 2026

1.4 Appropriate Assessment:

The subject lands are not located within or immediately adjacent to any European Site (designated SAC/SPA). Crosswood Bog SAC 2km east, River Shannon Callows SAC and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA are the identified closest designated sites located approximately 2.3km to the south-west of the proposed development.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report submitted with the proposal concluded that the proposed development is not foreseen to have any likelihood of significant effects on any European sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

2. Recommendation:

Having reviewed the preliminary documentation associated with the above-named project which includes the proposed development of 41 No. new residential homes, 2,3,4-bedroom single storey predominantly semi-detached on individual defined plots. The development will include the phased delivery of new housing units on lands cleared and the residents moved onto temporary accommodation and the provision of temporary halting site services on lands wholly within the existing inhabited site and boundary lands located at Blackberry Lane, Lissywollen, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

It is considered, based on a preliminary assessment, that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (AA) & Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are **not** required at this time. It is therefore recommended that the project proceed to detailed application design in accordance with Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations (as amended), based on which the Planning Section will issue final determinations.

Considerations are set out as per the associate headings hereunder.

14/04/2026

Ian Lacey | Senior Executive Planner **Date**
Westmeath County Council Planning Section

14/04/2026

Cathaldus Hartin | Senior Planner
Westmeath County Council | Planning, Transportation and Economic Development

3. Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening

Stage 1 Preliminary Examination

3.1 Legislative Context

The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 which transpose into Irish law both the European Union (EU) Directive 2009/147/EC (the Birds Directive) and the Habitats Directive and list habitats and species that are of international conservation importance and require protection. This protection is afforded in part through the designation of areas that represent significant examples of habitats that support populations of listed species within a European context, known as Natura 2000 sites. An area designated for bird species is classed as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and an area designated for other protected species and habitats is classed as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Together, SPAs and SACs form the Natura 2000 network of protected sites.

The Habitats Directive requires competent authorities to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) of plans and projects that, alone and/or in combination with other plans and projects, would be likely to have significant effects on one or more Natura 2000 sites. The assessment process is divided into a Stage 1 Screening for Appropriate Assessment and where required, a full Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

3.2 Natura 2000 Sites

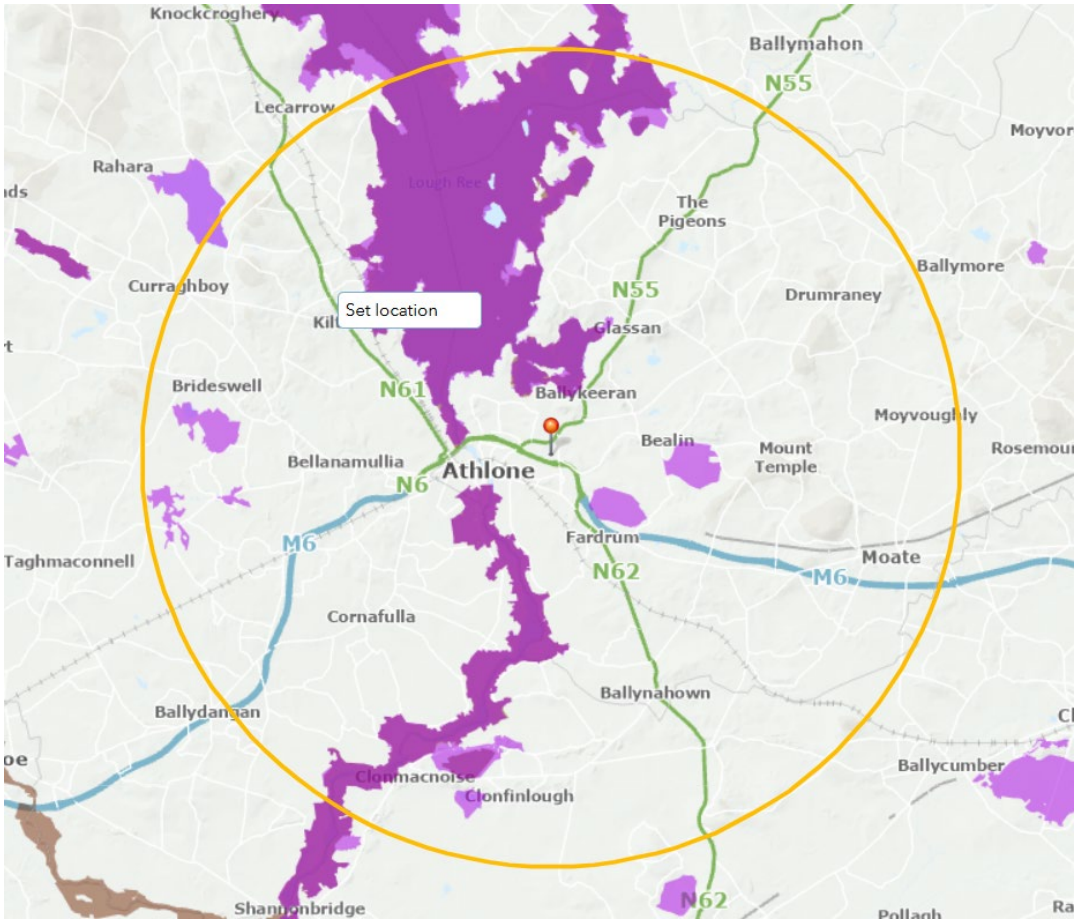
Note: European Natura 2000 sites include SACs, cSACs, SPAs and pSPAs, but not NHAs. This Stage 1 screening assessment covers Natura 2000 sites within a 15km radius of the development boundary. In addition, any other sites further than this, but potentially within its zone of influence were also considered. The zone of influence may be determined by an assessment of the connectivity between the application site and the designated areas by virtue of hydrological connectivity, atmospheric emissions, flight paths, ecological corridors, etc. The measurements used here are taken from the closest point along the proposed work area to the SAC / SPA.

Sites situated with 15km of the proposed works, are set out at **Table 1** below. The site synopsis' and details of the conservation objectives of these site are available at: https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac and https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa

Site Code	Site Name	Designation Type	Distance From (km) approx.
002337	Crosswood Bog SAC	SAC	1.92km SE
004096	Middle Shannon Callows SPA	SPA	2.32km SW
000216	River Shannon Callows SAC	SAC	2.32km SW
004064	Lough Ree SPA	SPA	2.32km N
000440	Lough Ree SAC	SAC	2.32km N
002336	Carn Park Bog SAC	SAC	4.05km E
001776	Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC	SAC	10.28km SW
000580	Mongan Bog SAC	SAC	10.68km SW
004017	Mongan Bog SPA	SPA	10.9km SW
001625	Castlesampson Esker SAC	SAC	11.2km W

002339	Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC	SAC	11.52km W
000576	Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC	SAC	12.35km S
000611	Lough Funshinagh SAC	SAC	14.23km NW

Table 1: Natura 2000 Sites within 15km



Map 1: Natura 2000 Sites in proximity to proposal.

There are an identified 13(no.) designated Natura 2000 sites situated within a 15km radius (refer Table 1 above) of the proposed site. The development works proposed are not required for the nature conservation management of these sites. It is noted that the conservation objectives for the SACs and SPAs in the vicinity are to maintain or restore favourable conservation condition of habitats and species listed as Special Conservation Interests for which the SPA/SAC has been selected.

The development site is not located within a Natura 2000 site. Consequently, there is no direct loss of habitat from within the boundaries of any Natura 2000 site and as such no loss of habitat or fragmentation of habitat for the conservation interests of any site. Therefore, it can be concluded that no direct impacts will occur on any Natura 2000 site.

There are 3 no. Natura 2000 sites in close proximity with potential hydrological connectivity between the development site area and these SPA/SAC sites - Crosswood Bog SAC, Middle Shannon Callows

SPA and River Shannon Callows SAC these sites are all approximately 2km to 2.5km away from the site and the Lough Ree SAC and Lough Ree SPA are 2.3km north and upstream of the development site.

The Appropriate Assessment states that there are no watercourses present within or near the proposed development. As such, there is no hydrological link that could act as a conduit for the transfer of polluting material between the proposed works and any Natura 2000 site. The intervening land comprises relatively flat urban and agricultural land encompassing buildings, major roads, a railway line, fields, hedgerow, scrub and embankments. Considering all of the above, it can be stated that there is no potential for the run-off of sediment or polluting material having a significant negative impact upon any Natura 2000 site, notably the River Shannon Callows SAC / Middle Shannon Callows SPA. As such, this development will not impact on its conservation objectives.

Having regard to the nature and the scale of the development works, and considering the content of the Stage 1 Screening for Appropriate Assessment prepared by Kerry Ecological Services; the proposed works, either individually or in combination with other projects and plans, will not have a significant effect on any designated Natura 2000 European Union site, notably the River Shannon Callows SAC / Middle Shannon Callows SPA. As a consequence there will be no potential for the project to result in likely significant effects to any Natura 2000 sites within the 15km zoned area and those sites outside of this area.

3.3 Relationship with other Relevant Plans and Programmes

The site of the proposed development is located on lands identified for development under the Athlone Town Plan.

An Appropriate Assessment for this Plan was carried out and concluded that, mitigation measures identified are adequate to ensure that the integrity of sites in the Natura 2000 network will not be adversely affected as a result of potential impacts of the policies contained within the Plan and with the inclusion of relevant mitigating policies in the Plan, there is no potential for significant effects either alone or in combination with other plans.

However, all individual plans/projects must also be considered for their compliance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive on a case-by-case basis.

The overall findings as set out in this screening for AA are that the Proposed Project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a site as a European Site, and it can be excluded on the basis of objective scientific information that the Proposed Project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a likely effect on a European Site.

3.4 AA Preliminary Screening Conclusions

It is considered that the proposed development is not likely to give rise to significant effect, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on any European Natura 2000 Sites in the vicinity.

4. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening

4.1 EIA Preliminary Screening Examination

Examination		
	Yes / No / Uncertain	**Comment**
Is the size of development exceptional in the context of the existing environment?	No	Works are to an existing housing estate of 41 housing units on a site of approximately 6.64ha.
Is the proposed development located on, in, adjoining or have the potential to impact on a sensitive site or location*?	No	
Will the development result in the production of any significant waste, or result in emissions or pollutants?	No	

Conclusion			
Based on a preliminary examination of the nature, size or location of the development, is there a real likelihood of significant effects on the environment? **			
There is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	EIAR not required.	✓	
There is significant and realistic doubt in regard to the likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	Stage 2 Screening Determination required.		
	Schedule 7A information required?	Yes	No
There is a real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	EIAR required.		

***Sensitive locations or features include SAC/SPA, NHA/pNHA, Designated Nature Reserves, and any other ecological site which is the objective of a CDP/LAP (including draft plans) to protect.**

**** Having regard to likely direct and cumulative effects, and the criteria set out in Schedule 7 Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).**

4.2 EIA Preliminary Screening Conclusion

On the basis of the preliminary information received, which I consider adequate in order to issue a screening determination; it is reasonable to conclude that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed housing development located at Blackberry Lane Lissywollen and an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required in this instance.