Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

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

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for proposed

social housing development

at

Harbour Road, Mullingar

by

CAAS Ltd

for

Westmeath County Council

08 September 2025

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[1] See Appendix IV for contributor competencies

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1 Introduction

1.1. Background

CAAS Ltd has been appointed by Westmeath County Council to prepare this Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (AASR) for a proposed social housing development at Harbour Road, Mullingar, County Westmeath ('the proposed development'). This report has been prepared to assist the Council in assessing whether the proposed development should be subject to AA and whether a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) should be prepared for it.

1.2. Report structure

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

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

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

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

2 Methodology

2.1. AA Screening overview

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

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

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

2.2. Relevant guidance

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

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

2.3. Assessment methodology

See Appendix III for overviews of the legislative context for this report, the Habitats Directive, and the AA process.

2.3.1. Desktop review

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

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

The COs or Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) for each site aim to achieve and maintain the favourable conservation status[2] for a particular habitat or species at that site. COs define the requirements for the favourable conservation condition of the QIs or SCIs at a given European site by

[2] Favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when:
'*population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.*'
Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when:
'*its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable*'.

setting targets for attributes which define the healthy characteristics of a given habitat or species.

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

European site type	First Order Site-specific Conservation Objective[3]
SAC	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected
SPA	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for the SPA

The following data sources have been utilised in the preparation of this AASR: the National Biodiversity Data Centre[4]; the NPWS[5]; the EPA[6]; data collected for the most recent Article 12 and 17 conservation status reporting cycle, 2019; and, *The Status of Protected EU Habitats and Species in Ireland* report (NPWS, 2019). Along with the information obtained from these resources, the desktop review also involves the following elements:

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

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

- Ireland's Article 17 Report to the European Commission *"Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland"* (NPWS, 2019);
- Ireland's Article 12 Report to the European Commission *"Bird species' status and trends reporting format for the period 2008-2012-"* (NPWS, 2012)
- Site Synopses[7]; and
- NATURA 2000 Standard Data Forms[13].

2.3.2. Source-pathway-receptor model

The assessment of potential for significant effects on European sites is conducted following a standard source-pathway-receptor (SPR) model, where, in order for an effect to be established, all three elements of this mechanism must be in place. EC guidance[8] outlines the types of effects that may affect European sites. These include effects from the following activities:

- Land take

[3] NPWS Conservation Management Planning website.

[4] NBDC datasets available here

[5] NPWS European sites information and mapping available here and here respectively

[6] EPA datasets available here

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

[8] Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission Environment DG, 2001

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

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

Examples of a source, pathway and receptor are:

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

Thus, in the context of this report, a receptor is a QI or SCI, or an ecological feature that is known to be utilised by the QIs or SCIs of a European site. A source is any identifiable element of the proposed development that is known to interact with the QI, SCI, or any ecological processes underpinning a QI or SCI. A pathway is any connection or link between the source and the receptor[9], for example a river.

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

2.3.3. Zone of Influence

The Zone of Influence (ZoI) (as defined in the relevant guidance[10,11]) is informed by the SPR model and is the geographical area over which a proposed development could affect the ecological receiving environment in any way that could result in potential significant effects on the Qualifying Interests or Special Conservation Interests of a given European site, in view of the Conservation Objectives of each site.

2.3.4. Characterising potential significant effects

The terms used to characterise potential effects[12] in this report are as follows: -

- Direct and Indirect Impacts: An impact can be caused either as a direct or as an indirect consequence of a Plan/Project.
- Extent: the spatial or geographical area over which the impact/effect may occur under a

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

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

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

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

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

suitably representative range of conditions (e.g. noise transmission under water).

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

2.3.5. Assessment of significant effects

The CIEEM (2018)[11] guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment define an ecologically significant effect based on a variety of questions and factors, such as:

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

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

- any processes or key characteristics will be removed or changed
- there will be an effect on the nature, extent, structure and function of component habitats
- there is an effect on the average population size and viability of component species.

The OPR Guidance[13] on conducting Appropriate Assessment for developments defines likely significant effects as the following:

Likely means a risk or possibility of effects occurring that cannot be ruled out based on objective information.
Significant effects are those that would undermine the conservation objectives of the European sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects. The significance of ecological impacts depends on:

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

When the SPR models is followed and the Zone of Influence is established; European sites (and their respective QIs and SCIs) that occur within this zone are examined with supporting surveys conducted, if necessary, to ultimately determine whether or not there is a *likelihood of significant effect* on a given European site. This is carried out by assessing objective information such as: the nature of the source for effect; the nature of the pathway; the distances involved; the QIs/SCIs (or 'receptors') involved, their threats, pressures and sensitivities; and consulting best scientific evidence/literature when required.

As such, the presence of all three elements and the identification of a pathway for potential effect, does not automatically constitute the likelihood of significant effect on a European site, and is dependent on factors such as character, magnitude, duration etc. However, the absence or removal of one of the elements of the mechanism is sufficient to conclude that there is no potential effect(s) and thus no further consideration required.

Where a likelihood for significant effects on any European site is established and/or, applying the precautionary principle[14], significant effects cannot be ruled out, mitigation measures are required and the project must proceed to Stage 2 AA, where a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is compiled in order to prevent adverse effects to the QIs/SCIs of the European sites involved, in view of their Conservation Objectives.

3 The proposed development

3.1. Proposed development description

The proposed development comprises 50 residential units and associated site development works including internal roads, paths, paving, parking, drainage, landscaped public open space, street lighting and boundary treatments. A foul sewer and separate storm sewer will be provided and connect to existing drainage infrastructure. (ref Figure 3.1).

The proposed site is approximately 1.56 hectares in area. A breakdown of the proposed residential unit types is provided in the table below:

[13] OPR (2021). Practice Note PN01 on Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management.
[14] With regard to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, and case law C127/02 Waddenzee

Proposed House Types	Bedrooms	Bed spaces per unit	Target Area
4 Bed x 5 (House Block 1)	4	7	128sqm
3 Bed x 8 (House Block 3)	3	5	103sqm
2 Bed x 8 (House Block 3)	2	4	87sqm
2 Bed x 15 (House Block 2)	2	4	85sqm
2 Bed x 1 (House Block 2 – End facing)	2	4	84sqm
2 Bed x 1 (House Block 4)	2	3	67sqm
1 Bed x 2 (House Block 5)	1	2	51sqm
1 Bed x 10 (Apartment Block)	1	2	53sqm

3.2. Drainage (wastewater and surface water)

Wastewater infrastructure to serve the operational phase of the proposed development will connect to the existing mains wastewater network of Mullingar town at the local WWTP (ref Figure 3.2).

There will be an increase in hard surface area, and thus of potential surface water runoff in the operational phase as a result of the change from a greenfield site to a residential development with open spaces (Figure 3.1). Surface water will be attenuated within proposed public open space and flow controlled to greenfield runoff rates prior to out-falling to the existing public stormwater network. This network discharges into a stream which passes the northeast corner of the proposed site (ref Figure 3.3 and Figure 4.1).

Figure 3.1 Plan of the proposed development[15]

[15] Source: Westmeath County Council (see accompanying drawing set for full resolution versions of all drawings)

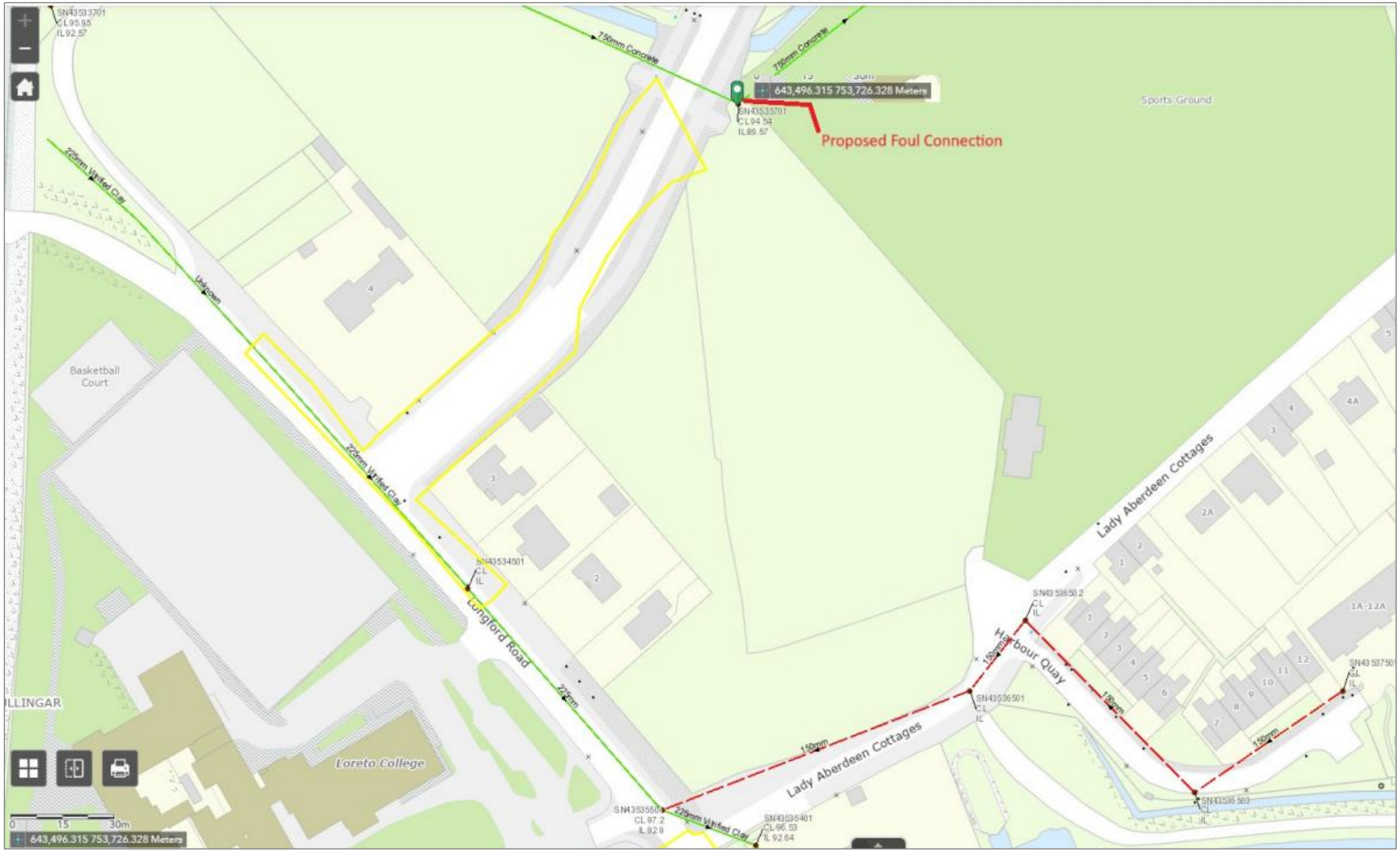


Figure 3.2 Proposed wastewater main (foul) connection[16]

[16] Source: Westmeath County Council (see accompanying drawing set for full resolution versions of all drawings)

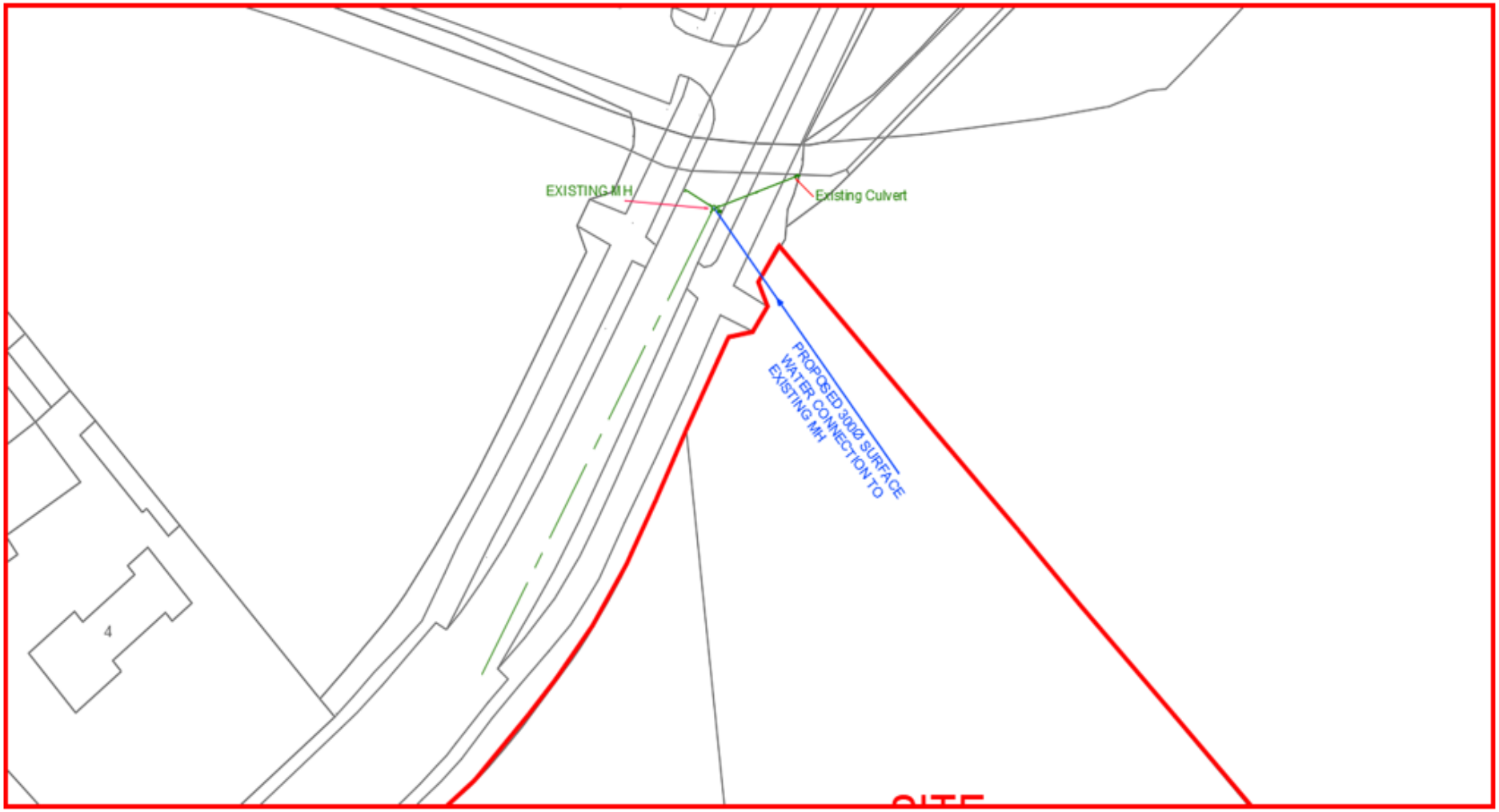


Figure 3.3 Proposed surface water outfall point[17]

[17] Source: Westmeath County Council (see accompanying drawing set for full resolution versions of all drawings)

4 The receiving environment

4.1. Overview

The proposed development site approximately 1.56 hectares in area and is located north of Mullingar town centre. An ecological walkover was conducted on the 15th of April 2025. There are no surface hydrological features within the proposed site itself. The site is surrounded by fencing and is composed of a combination of rank grassland that is intermittently grazed or cut, with one line of mature hedgerow running through the site from the NE to the SW. No invasive species were recorded within the proposed development site during the site visit.

4.2. Hydrology

As mentioned, there is no surface watercourse within the proposed site itself. There is a tributary to the River Brosna at the NE corner of the proposed site (ref Figure 4.1), which connects downstream to the River Brosna [IE_SH_25B090006]. There is a surface water outfall from the proposed site which will flow into this small tributary in the proposed development's operational phase. In addition, it is likely that the urban surface drainage infrastructure from the proposed site and surrounds connect to this tributary or the River Brosna. The River Brosna flows through Mullingar town, eventually connecting with Lough Ennell, approximately 6 km downstream. The River Brosna has a Water Framework Directive (WFD) status[18] of "poor".

4.3. Hydrogeology

The proposed development site occurs within the "Inny" groundwater body [26 – Inny/L Ree][19]. There are no European sites shared with this groundwater body. All European sites within a 5 km radius of the proposed development site occur within separate groundwater bodies (ref Figure 4.4).

4.4. Flood risk

Flood risk mapping for the area surrounding the proposed site indicates that there is no risk of flooding at or around the proposed development site.

4.5. Relationship to European sites

There are no Annex I habitats within the proposed development site. The proposed site does not occur within or adjacent to any European site. The proposed site does however has a direct downstream hydrological connection via the proposed surface water outfall connectivity with the River Brosna, which flows into Lough Ennell SAC (000685) and Lough Ennell SPA (004044) (ref Figure 4.3), and has possible connectivity to this river in both the construction and operational phases via underground surface water drainage of Mullingar town. As mentioned above, there are no European sites that share a groundwater body with the proposed development site, and thus there is no significant hydrogeological / groundwater connectivity between the proposed development site and any European sites.

[18] Waterbodies in Ireland reporting WFD Risk 2ND Cycle 2016-2021. The Environmental Protection Agency, available here.
[19] Geological Survey of Ireland database – available here.

Figure 4.1 Proposed development location relative to local surface watercourses[20]

[20] Source: EPA datasets. Accessed September 2025

Figure 4.2 European sites in the vicinity of the proposed development[21]

[21] NPWS European sites information and mapping available here and here respectively. Accessed September 2025

Figure 4.3 European sites with surface watercourse connectivity to the proposed development[21]

Figure 4.4 Local groundwater bodies[22] relative to European sites

[22] Geological Survey of Ireland datasets. Accessed September 2025

5 Identification of relevant European sites

5.1. Source-pathway-receptor model and ZoI

There is potential for flow of surface water run off during the construction phase into suburban underground drainage and via a stream which runs past the northeast of the proposed development site. This stream connects to Lough Ennell SAC and SPA approximately 5.5 km downstream. The proposed development thus has sources for potential effect via surface water run off in the construction phase.

During the operational phase, considering the scale of the proposed development, and the 25% open space allocation, which will provide attenuation through soil, it is not considered likely that there will be a potential pathway for effects from surface water run off in the operational phase.

The proposed development includes wastewater infrastructure. This will connect to the existing mains infrastructure of Mullingar town. Confirmation of feasibility of connection and capacity of the local WWTP to cater for the proposed development has been received by Westmeath County Council from Uisce Éireann. Therefore, there is no potential pathway for effects in this regard.

Considering the size, location and quality of the grassland habitat within the proposed development site, it is not considered that there is any potential for the proposed site to provide wintering or foraging habitat for any SCI species. Regarding pathways for noise disturbance to ex-situ foraging SCI species that could utilise surrounding agricultural lands; considering the small scale and location of the proposed development within a town centre which has ongoing levels of human noise disturbance, there are no pathways for disturbance to any SCI populations potentially utilising nearby agricultural lands for foraging.

Therefore in applying the SPR model (i.e., considering the nature of the proposed development and the receiving environment, and the relationship to European sites (as described in S 4)), the following sources with pathways for potential significant effect have been identified:

- Connectivity to the River Brosna and the Lough Ennell SAC and Lough Ennell SPA via surface water runoff and dust during the construction phase.

As a result of the above analysis, the ZoI for potential effects is considered to extend to Lough Ennell via surface watercourse connectivity.

Table 5.1 European sites identified for screening assessment

Receptor / European site	Qualifying interests	Distance (km)	Source(s) for potential effect	Pathway(s) for potential effect	SPR link present within ZoI?	Screening required?
Lough Ennell SAC (000685)	Alkaline fens [7230], Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. [3140]	5.54	Surface water runoff and dust in the construction phase	Surface water drainage infrastructure with connectivity to the River Brosna	Yes	Yes
Lough Ennell SPA (004044)	Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* [A061], Wetland and Waterbirds [A999], Pochard *(Aythya ferina)* [A059], Coot *(Fulica atra)* [A125]	5.90	Surface water runoff and dust in the construction phase	Surface water drainage infrastructure with connectivity to the River Brosna	Yes	Yes

The Conservation objectives that have been considered by this screening assessment are included in the following NPWS documents:

- NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives for Lough Ennell SAC [IE0000685] Version 2.
- NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives for Lough Ennell SPA [IE0004044] Version 1.

6 Screening of European sites

The European sites identified by the SPR model as being within a ZoI for significant effects are discussed, in view of their QIs and SCIs and their sensitivities (ref Appendix II), and assessed for likelihood of significant effects in Table 6.1 below. In this assessment, absence of any controls, conditions, or mitigation measures is assumed. Should a likelihood of significant effects be identified for any European site, a Natura Impact Statement (otherwise knowns as Stage 2 AA) will be required.

Table 6.1 Screening of European sites

Site name	Distance (km)	Qualifying feature[23]	Analysis for likely significant effects	Likelihood of significant effects
Lough Ennell SAC (000685)	5.54	Alkaline fens [7230], Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. [3140]	Considering the QIs and known sensitivities of this European site (detailed in Appendix II), in the context of the sources for potential effects identified in S5.1, this SAC is sensitive to hydrological interactions and pollution from wastewater and surface water runoff. Sources for potential hydrological impacts on the hydrologically sensitive QIs of this SAC have been identified due to the possibility of surface water runoff and dust in the construction phase via connectivity to the suburban drainage network and connectivity via the River Brosna and a tributary stream along the northeast of the proposed site and existing drainage infrastructure. There is a significant distance of 5.54 km between the source and this SAC and there is a sufficient dilution factor which will ensure that there will be no likelihood of significant effects as a result of construction phase run off. The project will also utilise best practice construction methods that will manage the storage and stockpiling of materials on site during the construction phase. These are best practice measures put in place for all new developments, regardless of any relationship to European sites, and are thus not intended to address or reduce potential effects to European sites[24]. In addition, the proposed development is of a minor scale with an expected short term construction period. Therefore, based on the project description (s3), the receiving environment description	No

[23] Qualifying feature is used here to represent both Qualifying Interests (of SACs) and Special Conservation Interests (of SPAs)

[24] Case law: (C-721/21 Eco Advocacy CLG)

Site name	Distance (km)	Qualifying feature[23]	Analysis for likely significant effects	Likelihood of significant effects
			(s4), and the examination of potential impact of these sources for effect in view of this SAC's sensitivities and COs; there are no sources with a likelihood for significant effects to this SAC as a result of the proposed development, and no further assessment is required.	
Lough Ennell SPA (004044)	5.90	Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* [A061], Wetland and Waterbirds [A999], Pochard *(Aythya ferina)* [A059], Coot *(Fulica atra)* [A125]	Considering the SCIs and known sensitivities of this European site (detailed in Appendix II), in the context of the sources for potential effects identified in S5.1, this SPA is sensitive to hydrological interactions and pollution from wastewater and surface water runoff. Sources for potential hydrological impacts on the hydrologically sensitive SCIs of this SPA have been identified due to the possibility of surface water runoff and dust in the construction phase via connectivity to the suburban drainage network and connectivity via the River Brosna and a tributary stream along the northeast of the proposed site and existing drainage infrastructure. There is a significant distance of 5.90 km between the source and this SPA and there is a sufficient dilution factor which will ensure there will be no likelihood of significant effects as a result of construction phase run off. The project will also utilise best practice construction methods that will manage the storage and stockpiling of materials on site during the construction phase. These are best practice measures put in place for all new developments, regardless of any relationship to European sites, and are thus not intended to address or reduce potential effects to European sites[24]. In addition, the proposed development is of a minor scale with an expected short term construction period. Therefore, based on the project description (s3), the receiving environment description (s4), and the examination of potential impact of these sources for effect in view of this SPA's sensitivities and COs; there are no sources with a likelihood for significant effects to this SPA as a result of the proposed development, and no further assessment is required.	

7 In combination effects

7.1. Overview

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires an assessment of a plan or project to consider other plans or projects that might, in combination with the plan or project, have the potential to have significant effects on European sites. Other plans or projects that are currently existing and occur in the surrounding areas of the proposed development site were examined for potential in-combination effects based on the following criteria, in the context of the characteristics of the proposed development and the receiving environment (as discussed in s 3 and s 4 respectively):

- Having direct or indirect connectivity to a European site
- Being in close proximity to a European site
- Being of a substantial scale relative to the receiving / surrounding landscape
- Having widely dispersed emissions or far-reaching sources for effects
- Having sources for effects on ecological connectivity.

In addition, projects that have not yet been granted planning permission are also examined in view of the above criteria. As such planning applications to the Local Authority; the Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage planning[25] and An Coimisiún Pleanála[26] databases were searched using a radius of 200 m from the proposed development boundary, over the past 5 years[27]. All developments in these parameters were considered for potential in-combination effects. The plans and projects that were identified as a result of the above searches are discussed in s 7.1.1 and s 7.1.2 below respectively.

7.1.1. Plans considered for in-combination effects

- Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The proposed development is in accordance with the land use zoning and housing density objectives of the above land use plan, which has also undergone the required environmental assessments. Therefore there is no risk of in-combination effects of the proposed development with the above land use plans.

7.1.2. Projects considered for in-combination effects

There are a number of other proposed developments in the vicinity including works which are at planning stage or underway on various sites. The database search found that the majority of projects within the area involve alterations of existing structures, small private home extensions, retention and change of use applications. Considering the nature of the projects examined, alongside the nature and scale of the proposed development, and the lack of any sources for significant effects presented by the proposed development; there are no sources for potential significant in combination effects to any European sites (a full list of the projects examined as part of the in-combination effects assessment is provided in Appendix I).

[25] Local Authority planning applications - available here, accessed; September 2025

[26] An Coimisiún Pleanála planning application - available here, accessed; September 2025

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

8 Conclusion

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

Given the small, localised scale of the proposed development, and the nature of the proposed development in the context of the local environment, plans and projects; the proposed development will not lead to any likely significant effects in-combination with effects arising from any other plans or projects.

It is concluded by this AA Screening Report that the proposed development is not foreseen to have any likelihood of significant effects on any European sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects – and therefore any potential for significant effects on any European site as a result of the proposed development can be ruled out.

This conclusion is made in view of the conservation objectives of the habitats or species for which these sites have been designated. Consequently, the proposed development does not need to be subject to Stage Two Appropriate Assessment and a Natura Impact Statement is not required.

Appendix I Review of planning historyin the vicinity of the proposed development for purposes of consideration of in-combination effects [28]

Local Authority planning applications

Project Code	Decision	Description	Grant Date	Distance from Proposed dev. (m)	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Likelihood of significant in-combination effects
156029	Conditional	Construction of a three storey (part two storey) Primary Care Centre, incorporating Doctors and Nurses, Multi-Disciplinary Consulting Treatment and Public Health Nursing Rooms and associated support facilities, a Mental Health Day Hospital, Dental Clinic and Retail Unit, associated car parking spaces and all associated site works, to include drainage, services and boundary treatments, ESB substation, switch room, water tank storage and service yard. This proposal is an amended scheme to the already approved planning applications 11/5040 and 12/5101	03/21/2017	Adjacent	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No
176067	Conditional	Construction of a mixed use development of 97 no. residential units, a childcare facility, commercial units and communal private and public open space at Harbour Road/Martins Lane, Robinstown (Tyrrell), Mullingar, Co Westmeath, a site of 2.75 hectares. The proposed development comprises 2 no blocks of apartments above commercial ground floor uses, Block 1 part 4/5 storey block of 16 no. apartments (9 no. 2 bed and 7 no. 3 bed units) above ground floor commercial (Classes 2 & 3) use of 475 sqm and as incorporating a communal area for the block at first floor level 63 sqm, Block 2 Part 4/5 storey block of 16 no. apartments(12 no. 2 bed and 4 no. 3 bed units) above ground floor childcare facility (245 sqm), commercial (classes 2 & 3) use of 180 sqm and as incorporating a communal area for the block at first floor level 63 sqm, construction of 65 no houses, (8no 3-bed and 57 no 4 bed) two and three storey in height with a formation of 4210 sqm of landscaped open space area incorporating , a centralized play area (pocket park) of 2,185 sqm and an open space network linked by pedestrian footpaths to Mullingar Greenway with an area of 2025 sqm 155 no car parking spaces, 50 no cycle parking spaces, primary vehicular and pedestrian access to the proposed development will be provided from a new access road from the constructed primary care centre access road, associated residential estate roads.	12/21/2017	59.60	This is a medium-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No

[28] Parameters used: planning application from within the last 10 years, within a radius of 200m around the proposed development boundary.
The majority of surrounding planning permissions are for developments which are minor projects with no risk of in-combination effects. Therefore, a summary list is provided here of the largest / most relevant proposed project(s) within the below stated parameters (i.e., excluding minor additions or edits to residential homes / existing planning permissions)

Project Code	Decision	Description	Grant Date	Distance from Proposed dev. (m)	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Likelihood of significant in-combination effects
21669	Conditional	The proposed development comprises of 95 no residential units, 1 no 3 storey block of apartments, 1 no studio, 4 no 1 bed, 9 no 2 bed and 2 no. 3 bed (total 16 no units), 43 no duplex/apartments, (21 no 2 bed and 22 no 3 bed), 36 no semi-detached (3/4 bed) units, a creche facility (212 sqm), integrated perimeter and centralised communal open space areas totaling 6,788 sqm, 123 no car parking spaces, 206 no bicycle parking spaces, the primary vehicular and pedestrian access to the proposed development will be provided from a new access road from the constructed primary care centre access road, associated residential estate roads. All associated hard and soft landscaping, boundary treatments, footpaths and ancillary works above and below ground	11/23/2022	45.0	This is a medium-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No
196195	Conditional	To construct a new single storey 5 screen cinema, of gross plan area approx. 875sqm and approx. 8.625m high and associated site works	4/7/2020	82.1	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No
22464	Conditional	construction of a new part single, part two storey restaurant (internal floor area circa. 269 sq.m), circa. 6.1m high with a raised external dining area at first floor level and associated site works/car parking	6/7/2023	82.1	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No
22507	Conditional	Consisting of construction works to demolish part of an existing two-storey toilet block; Construct 3 no. new two storey en-suite toilet extensions to existing classrooms. Insert a new passenger lift into the existing building; Construct a new single storey front entrance porch; Alter parts of the existing layout to provide new toilet facilities; and carry out associated alterations, refurbishments and site works. The existing school building is within the curtilage of protected structures - Presentation Convent RPS. No 019-148 & 019-149.	3/23/2023	145.2	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for	No

Project Code	Decision	Description	Grant Date	Distance from Proposed dev. (m)	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Likelihood of significant in-combination effects
					significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	
196295	Conditional	565m2 two storey extension at the northeast corner of Colaiste Mhuire comprising of a construction studies room with prep room, a home economics room, two interconnecting classrooms and associated circulation space and all associated works including connecting into existing building and external and internal services. The proposed development is within the curtilage of the Hevey Institute, a protected structure No 019-157 under the Record of Protected Structures of Westmeath County Council Development Plan 2014-2020	2/5/2020	144.2	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No

An Coimisiún Pleanála planning applications

Case ID	Date	Decision	Description	Distance from proposed dev. (m)	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Likelihood of significant in-combination effects
300796	31/1/2018	Grant permission with conditions	A mixed use development of 97 no. residential units, a childcare facility, commercial units and communal private and public open space	59.60	This is a medium-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No
317479	9/10/2024	Grant permission with conditions	Construction of a restaurant with a raised external dining area and all associated works.	82.1	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No
307082	17/9/2020	Grant permission with conditions	Construction of a single storey 5 screen cinema.	82.1	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No

Appendix II Supporting information on European sites considered in this assessment [7]

European sites with functional connectivity (ecological pathways) to the proposed development area

Site code	Site name	Qualifying feature	Pressure codes	Known threats and pressures
000685	Lough Ennell SAC	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. [3140], Alkaline fens [7230]	H01.05, F03.01, F02.03.02, H06.02, D01.01, J02.01, A04.03, H06.01.01, A04.02.05, A04.01.01, J02.05.02, H01.08, K03.01, B02.02	Diffuse pollution to surface waters due to agricultural and forestry activities, hunting, pole fishing, light pollution, paths, tracks, cycling tracks, landfill, land reclamation and drying out, general, abandonment of pastoral systems lack of grazing, point source or irregular noise pollution, non-intensive mixed animal grazing, intensive cattle grazing, modifying structures of inland water courses, diffuse pollution to surface waters due to household sewage and waste waters, competition (fauna), forestry clearance
004044	Lough Ennell SPA	Wetland and Waterbirds [A999], Coot *(Fulica atra)* [A125], Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* [A061], Pochard *(Aythya ferina)* [A059]	G01.02, G05.01, B, F02.03, E01, G01.01, A08, F03.01	Walking, horse-riding and non-motorised vehicles, trampling, overuse, sylviculture, forestry, leisure fishing, urbanised areas, human habitation, nautical sports, fertilisation, hunting

Qualifying Interests of SACs that have undergone assessment [29]

EU code	Qualifying interests	Article 17 report summary - threats and pressures	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures	Sensitivity of qualifying interests
[3140]	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of muskgrass *(Chara spp.)*	The hard-water lake habitat is under significant pressure from eutrophication, the primary sources of nutrient and organic pollution being agriculture and municipal and industrial wastewaters.	A25, A26, A31, B23, B27, C05, F12, F13, F33, I02	Agricultural activities generating point source pollution to surface or ground waters, agricultural activities generating diffuse pollution to surface or ground waters, drainage for use as agricultural land, forestry activities generating pollution to surface or ground waters, modification of hydrological conditions, or physical alteration of water bodies and drainage for forestry (including dams), peat extraction, discharge of urban waste water (excluding storm overflows and/or urban run-offs) generating pollution to surface or ground water, plants, contaminated or abandoned industrial sites generating pollution to surface or ground water, abstraction of ground and surface waters (including marine) for public water supply and recreational use, other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern)	Surface and groundwater dependant. Highly sensitive to hydrological changes. Highly sensitive to pollution.
[7230]	Alkaline fens	The main pressures facing this habitat are land abandonment (and	A06, A09, A26, J01, K01, K02, K04, L02,	Abandonment of grassland management (e.g., cessation of grazing or of mowing), intensive grazing or overgrazing by livestock, agricultural activities generating diffuse pollution to surface or ground waters, mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and	Surface and groundwater dependent. Highly

EU code	Qualifying interests	Article 17 report summary - threats and pressures	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures	Sensitivity of qualifying interests
		associated succession), overgrazing, drainage and pollution.	N02, N03	terrestrial), abstraction from groundwater, surface water or mixed water, drainage, modification of hydrological flow, natural succession resulting in species composition change (other than by direct changes of agricultural or forestry practices), temperature changes (e.g., rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, increases or changes in precipitation due to climate change	sensitive to hydrological changes. Inappropriate management.

Special Conservation Interests of SPAs that have undergone assessment [29]

Species code	Common name	Scientific name	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures
A061	Tufted Duck	*Aythya fuligula*	F28, F07, G07, J01, N01, D01	Modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development, sports, tourism and leisure activities, hunting, mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and terrestrial), temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure
A125	Coot	*Fulica atra*	J01, N01	Mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and terrestrial), temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change
A059	Pochard	*Aythya ferina*	F07, G07, J01, N01, D01, F28	Sports, tourism and leisure activities, hunting, mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and terrestrial), temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development

[29] Including known treats and pressures

Appendix III Legislative context and Habitats Directive overview

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

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

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive States:

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

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

Article 3(1) of the Habitats Directive States:

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

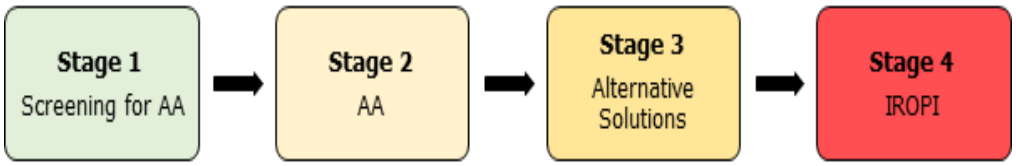
AA is an assessment of the likelihood of significant effects arising from a project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, to assess if the project will have potential for significant effect on any European site concerned, and implications in view of the European site's Conservation Objectives (COs). These sites consist of SACs and SPAs and provide for the protection and long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. Where a formal consent process applies, the AA process is concluded by the relevant competent authority

making a determination in accordance with article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Overview of the Habitats Directive and Appropriate Assessment process

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

There are four main stages in the AA process:



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

Stage two: Appropriate Assessment (AA)
The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the European site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse effects mitigation measures are required to avoid or minimise potential effects. The details of these mitigation measures are then assessed in the context of the ecological integrity of the plan/project characteristics to ensure no significant adverse effects on European sites. If this assessment process shows there are no residual significant effects, then the process may end at this stage, stage two, of the AA process which are formalised in Natura Impact Statements (NIS) reports which support the overall AA process. However, if the likelihood of significant impacts remains, then the process must proceed to Stage Three.

Stage three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions
The process that examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoids adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site.

Stage four: Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI)
An assessment of compensatory measures, where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain, but in the light of an assessment of IROPI, it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Appendix IV Contributor competencies

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

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

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