Proposed Application for a Greenway Recreation Hub, Grange South, Mullingar, County Westmeath

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

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PREPARED ON BEHALF OF;
WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL
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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Maurice O'Connor has recently been commissioned by Westmeath County Council to provide ecological consultancy services for the development of Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub at Grange South, Mullingar, County Westmeath. A full description of the proposed amenity area are given in Section 2.

1.2 Project Rationale

The proposed development is Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub which comprises of walking and cycling trails, (linked to two significant international scale greenways, the Royal Canal Greenway and the Old Rail Trail Greenway, part of the Dublin to Galway, Coast to Coast Cycleway project), at Grange South, Mullingar, County Westmeath. The purpose of the proposed site is to provide a safe area for the public to walk and cycle and the junior bike trails will provide a safe area for children and teenagers to cycle.

Figure 1 Grange South Linear Park Recreational Hub Site Development

1.3 Requirement for Appropriate Assessment

Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 437 of 2011) (as amended) transposes Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) into Irish law. The regulations require that where a public authority wishes to progress a project (which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European Site), a screening for Appropriate Assessment of the project must be carried out by the public authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the site, if that project,

individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on the European site.

The Regulations require that a screening for Appropriate Assessment must be carried out before a decision to undertake the project is taken.

1.3.1 Natura 2000 Sites (European Sites)

In accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), Member States have identified a network of sites of conservation importance, hosting habitats and/or species identified in the Directives as needing to be either maintained at or returned to favourable conservation status. These sites are known as the Natura 2000 network and in Ireland, Natura 2000 sites comprise areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and candidate Special Protection Areas (cSPAs).

These Directives require that where a project is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 Site, while not directly connected with or necessary to the nature conservation management of the site, it shall be subject to 'Appropriate Assessment' to identify any implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives . Specifically, 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".*

The proposed development is for the Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub which comprises of walking and cycling trails, (linked to two significant international scale greenways, the Royal Canal Greenway and the Old Rail Trail Greenway, part of the Dublin to Galway, Coast to Coast Cycleway project), at Grange South, Mullingar, County Westmeath. **The application is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any Natura 2000 sites and must therefore be subjected to screening for Appropriate Assessment.**

This report is a screening for Appropriate Assessment for the proposed development of the Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub and is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 437 of 2011) (as amended). The

intention of this screening for Appropriate Assessment is to determine whether the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site(s), either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Where significant effects are determined to be likely the proposed works are statutorily required to be subjected to Appropriate Assessment.

This screening for Appropriate Assessment has been carried out in accordance with the following European Commission Guidance:

- EC (2000) 'Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC';
- EC (2001) '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'.

1.4 Statement of Authority

This AA Screening Report has been prepared by Maurice O Connor, Environmental Consultant. Maurice holds BSc (Hons) degree in Wildlife Biology from Institute of Technology Tralee and an MSc in Ecological Assessment from National University of Ireland Cork (UCC). Maurice is an experienced ecological consultant with over 6 years' professional experience in Ireland, working independently and as an employee within consultancy. He has strong generalist ecological field skills in terrestrial and riparian environments and through his experience can demonstrate undertaking a range of ecological surveys including habitat, invasive and protected species survey, delivering initial site appraisals and identification of ecological constraints to inform Ecological Impact Assessments (EcIA) and AA. Maurice has undertaken ecological assessments and surveys on a variety of project types (e.g. road schemes, waste, water, energy and housing) involving survey, mitigation and enhancement. During his time as an environmental consultant, Maurice has completed numerous AA assessments for both plans and projects.

2 Description of the Proposed Development and Receiving Environment

2.1 Guidance

Both EU and national guidance exists in relation to Member States fulfilling their requirements under the Habitats Directive, with particular reference to Article 6(3) and 6(4) of that Directive. This AA has been undertaken in line with the following guidance:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities. DoEHLG (2010);
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPWS 1/10 and PSSP 2/10. National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) (2010);
- 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 (2001);
- Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission (2000a);
- Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle. European Commission, (2000b); and
- 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. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg. European Commission (2002).

Definitions of conservation status, integrity and significance used in this assessment are defined in accordance with *'Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC'* (EC, 2000):

- The conservation status of a natural habitat is defined as the sum of the influences acting on a natural habitat and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long-term survival of its typical species;
- The conservation status of a species is defined as the sum of the influences acting on the species concerned that may affect the long-term distribution and abundance of its population;
- The integrity of a European Site is defined as the coherence of the site's ecological structure and function, across its whole area, or the habitats, complex of habitats and/or populations of species for which the site is or will be classified;

- Significant effect should be determined in relation to the specific features and environmental conditions of the protected site concerned by the plan or project, taking particular account of the site's conservation objectives.

2.2 Description of the Proposed Development

The proposed development is not connected with or necessary to the management of any European site. The proposed Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub development comprises of walking and cycling trails, (linked to two significant international scale greenways, the Royal Canal Greenway and the Old Rail Trail Greenway, part of the Dublin to Galway, Coast to Coast Cycleway project), on Council owned land at Grange South, Mullingar, County Westmeath. There are no further construction works planned for the site.

These works will make the amenity area more attractive for children and teenagers, it gives them a safe area to be active. It is currently an amenity grassland and it will be converted into a recreational hub with a junior bike trail as shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 2 Proposed Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub

2.3 Site Access

Access to the site is via R390 road.

2.4 Site Activities

Construction of a Junior Bike Trail. Site activities will include the following:

- Foundations will be laid for bike ramps.
- No interference with the natural riparian boundary. A temporary fence will be erected to prevent contractors unintentionally depositing or damaging the Royal Canal (pNHA 002103).
- Stockpiling subsoil and top soil will be on levelled ground and kept to a minimum height to prevent runoff. All onsite soil will be reused as infill for the restoration phase.

- Areas cleared for hardcore will be filled from transporting materials on site to pre-identified locations for storage of construction materials located away from any watercourses in the interest of pollution prevention.
- After delivery of heavy materials, machinery used will comprise of a concrete mixer, small hand held tools, wheel barrows etc. Possible sources of runoff are the active mixing area and exposed areas of soils.
- All construction waste; wrapping, pallets, plastic, wire, containers, off cuts will be stored appropriately until removal to a licensed waste management facility.
- The final stage is landscaping bare soils, no stockpiles of soils to be left on site, any remaining construction/demolition waste to be removed appropriately.

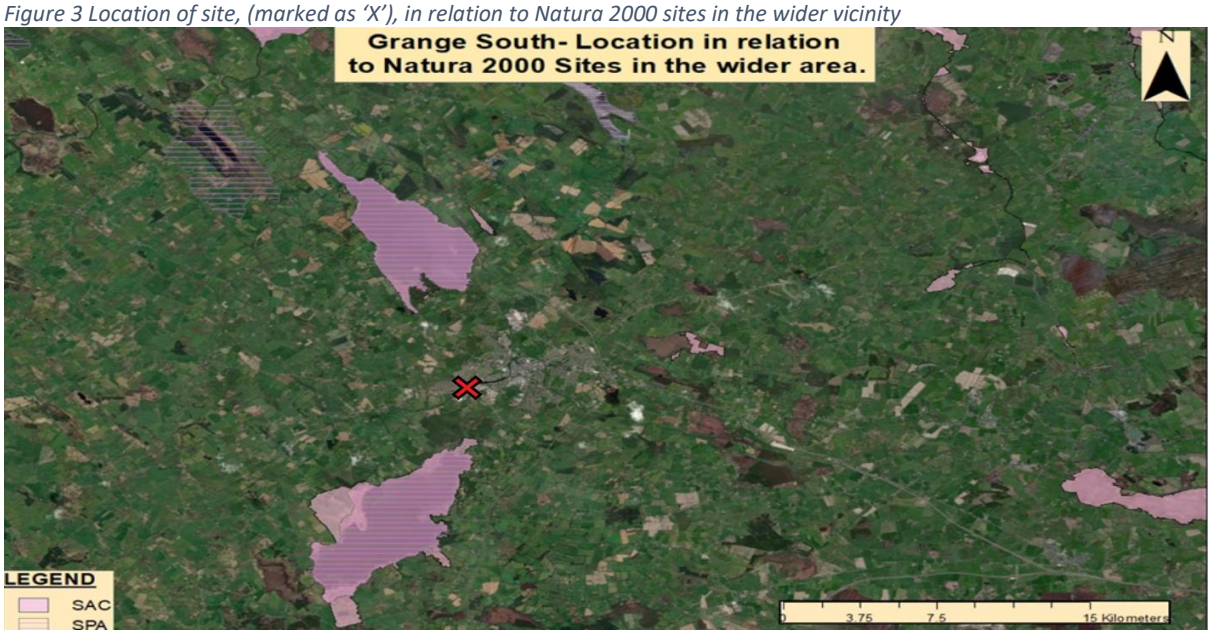
2.5 Site Description and Receiving Environment

The proposed development site is located at South Grange, Mullingar, Westmeath. Land use in the surrounding area is predominantly urban with a mix of housing estates, retail outlets and industrial estates. Access to the site is gained via a R390 road. The proposed project will consist of a junior bike trail and walking trails. The proposed development site is alongside the Proposed Natural Heritage Area (PNHA) Royal Canal (Site Code: 002103) and the nearest European Sites are:

- Approximately 3.3km from Lough Owel SAC (Site Code 000688)
- Approximately 2km from Lough Ennell SAC (Site Code 000685)

No Annex I habitats or Annex II species were recorded within or immediately surrounding the site during the site survey.

Figure 3 Location of site, (marked as 'X'), in relation to Natura 2000 sites in the wider vicinity



2.6 Elements of the Project with Potential for having Significant Effects

There is a potential for pollution of watercourses due to sediment loading or a pollution event from contaminants entering the watercourses.

2.7 Baseline Environmental Condition

2.7.1 Overview of Baseline Data

The proposed development site is located at Grange South, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. The total survey area was comprised of approximately 3ha and was predominantly composed of amenity grassland, with a small area of broad-leaf woodland which was located at the western boundary of the site. Surrounding land use is chiefly urban with a mix of housing estates, retail outlets and industrial estates. Access to the site is via the R390 road. Habitats recorded within the site and immediate area are discussed in detail in Section 2.1.5 and presented in a habitat map, (see Figure 2).

The entirety of the site is encompassed with a proposed National Heritage Area (PNHA), Site Code: 002103, see Figure 1. The Proposed Natural Heritage Area spans the entire length of the Grand Canal (approx. 174km in length). No Annex I habitats or Annex II species were recorded within, or in the immediately surrounding areas of the site during the site survey. There are several other European Sites within the wider vicinity of the site at Grange South and these are shown in Figure 3.

2.7.2 Habitats

A detailed walkover of the site was carried out on June 17th 2020 by Envirico ecologists. Habitats and flora within the site were classified using the Heritage Council's Guide to Habitats in Ireland (Fossitt, 2000). Within each habitat, dominant and abundant plant species and indicator species were recorded. A description of the habitats within the vicinity of the site boundary and the immediate surrounding area is presented hereunder. A habitat map is presented in Figure 4 which presents the habitats present within the footprint of the proposed development.

Amenity Grassland (GA2)

This was the dominant habitat type that was recorded within the survey area. The majority of the grass appears to be regularly mown thus the sward was relatively short during the time of the field survey. Plants recorded included common species of broad leaved herbs and grasses such as Common Daisy (*Bellis perennis*) Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Ragwort (*Jacobaeae vulgaris*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Dandelion (T*araxacum* agg)., Perennial Rye Grass (*Lolium perenne*), Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and Crested Dogs-tail Grass (*Cynosurus cristatus*).

Mixed Broad-leaved Woodland (WD2)

This habitat type was recorded at the western boundary of the site and included a small area of woodland. Tree species recorded within included Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Birch (*Betula* sp) Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), and Hornbeam (*Circinus* sp). The ground layer was chiefly dominated by Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) and Cleavers (*Galium aparine*). Ash and Hawthorn were noted to be regenerating within.

No Annex 1 habitats or habitats of significant conservation importance were identified within the proposed development site. No protected or invasive flora was recorded onsite during the site survey.

Figure 4 Habitat Map

2.7.3 Mammals and Aquatic Species

No mammals were recorded on site during the course of the field study

2.7.4 Invasive Species

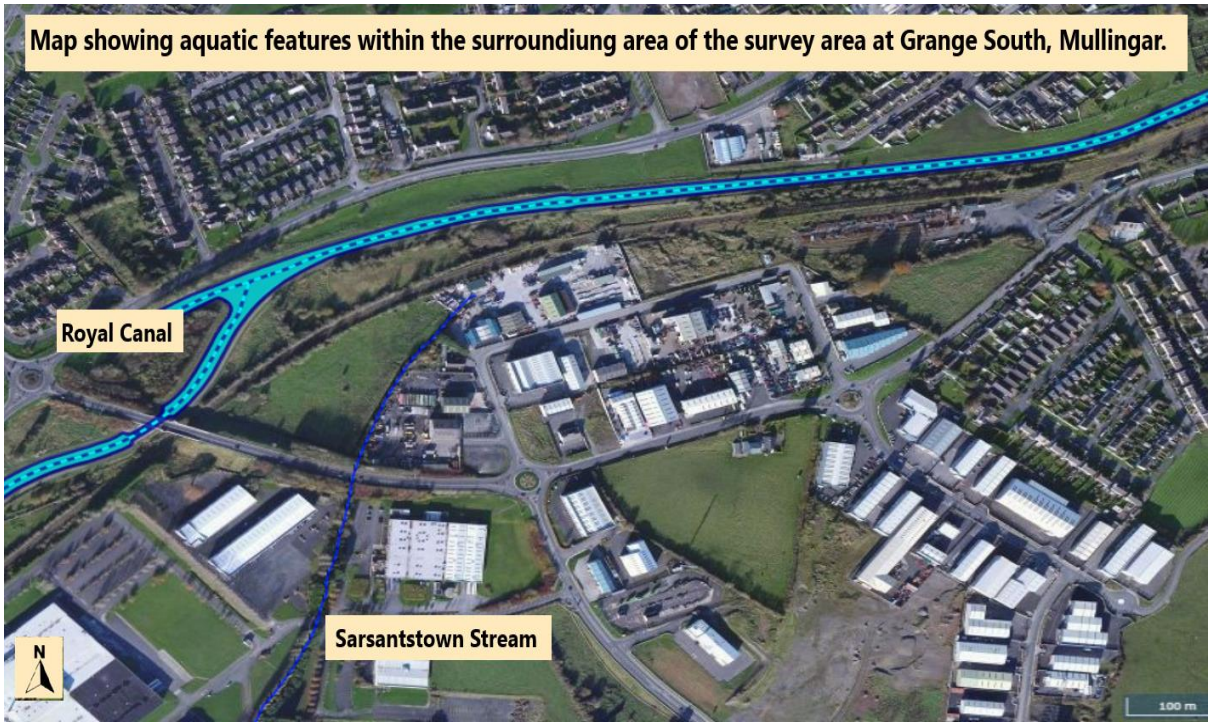
No invasive species were recorded over the course of the field study.

2.7.5 Aquatic Environment

Two water courses occur within 1km of the site, the largest of which is the Royal Canal which runs for almost 147km from Cloondara in County Longford, as far as the River Liffey in Dublin, where the former watercourse discharges into Dublin Bay. The Royal Canal is classified as having a good ecological potential, and is not classified as being an 'at risk' canal waterbody (EPA, 2020)

The Sarsantown Stream is a first order waterbody which runs south of Grange South before merging with the Brosna watercouse, which is a third order system. Both the Sarsantown Stream and the Brosna watercourse are classified as 'poor' under the Water Framework Directive .

Figure 5 Aquatic Environment



3. Distance from Natura Sites or Key Features of the Sites

3.1 Zone of Influence (ZoI)

DEHLG Guidance states that screening for Appropriate Assessment should be carried out for any Natura 2000 site within the likely Zone of Influence of a plan or project. For projects, the guidance recommends that the Zone of Influence must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis regarding the nature, size and location of the project, and the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in combination effects. Projects have the potential to impact on European sites beyond the confines of the individual sites themselves.

The Zone of Influence of a project is the area in which qualifying interests are present which are sensitive to the ecological impacts that may be caused by the activities associated with the project. The zone of influence will therefore vary relative to the scale of the impact and relative to the ecology of the sensitive receptor.

The potential Zone of Influence is defined as:

- Areas directly within the land take for the proposed development;
- Areas which will be temporarily affected;
- Areas likely to be impacted by hydrological disruption; and
- Areas where there is a risk of pollution and disturbance (e.g. noise).

To establish the zone of influence, nationally available data on protected habitats and species was mapped using GIS. This data was interrogated for any physical, hydrological, or ecological connectivity to the activities associated with the proposed bridge repair works.

The desk based assessment of available records of protected species and habitats included the following sources:

- Conservation Status Assessment Reports [1] (CSARs), Backing Documents and Maps prepared in accordance with Article 17 of the Habitats Directive;
- Published and unpublished NPWS reports on protected habitats and species including Irish Wildlife Manual reports, Species Action Plans, and Conservation Management Plans; and
- Existing relevant mapping and databases e.g. waterbody status, species and habitat distribution etc. (sourced from the Environmental Protection Agency - http://gis.epa.ie/, the National Biodiversity Data Centre - http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie and the National Parks and Wildlife Services - http://www.npws.ie/mapsanddata/).

The findings of the desk-based assessment were investigated and verified by ecological field assessment, carried out on June 17th by ecologist, Maurice O Connor. The spatial scope of the field assessment was relative to the physical, hydrological, or ecological connectivity of the bridge repair works and the qualifying features of the Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence.

3.2 Natura 2000 Sites within Zone of Influence

The Natura 2000 sites which have a physical, hydrological or ecological connection to the activities associated with the project are presented in Table 1 below and described hereunder.

Table 1 Natura 2000 Sites within ZoI

Natura 2000 Site	Site Code	Distance from Works
Lough Owel SAC	000688	3.3km North
Lough Ennell SAC	000685	2km South

3.2.1 Characteristics of Natura 2000 Sites within ZoI

Table 2 Lough Owel SAC Qualifying Interests

Annex I Habitats	Annex II Species
Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140] Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. [3140] Alkaline fens [7230]	*Austropotamobius pallipes* (White-clawed Crayfish)

Table 3 Lough Ennell SAC Qualifying Interests

Annex I Habitats
[7230] Alkaline fens

3.2.2 Lough Owel SAC 000688

Lough Owel SAC supports one species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, White-clawed Crayfish. Lough Owel SAC supports habitats listed on Annex I of this Directive. Lough Owel is a large hard water lake located approximately 4 km north-west of Mullingar in Co. Westmeath. It is a relatively shallow lake with a rocky, marl-covered bottom.

In places, the quaking mire grades into alkaline fen. Some characteristic species such as Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*C. lepidocarpa*) occur, as well as brown fen mosses. Scarce fen species have been recorded here, including Fen Bedstraw (Galium uliginosum) and Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*). The Bunbrosna wetland area contains a number of rare plant species, namely Marsh Pea (*Lathyrus palustris),* Marsh Fern and Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*). In addition, four other rare plant species are found along the lake margins - White Sedge (*C. curta*), Fibrous Tussock-sedge *(C. appropinquata*), Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*) and Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*). Tullaghan fen hosts the uncommon Bog-sedge (*C. limosa*), Fibrous

Tussock-sedge and Marsh Fern. Lough Owel is one of the most important fishing lakes in the midlands and is especially good for Trout. Scharff's Char (*Salvelinus scharffi*), a distinct race of char which was once found only in Lough Owel and Lough Ennell, is now thought to be extinct.

White-clawed Crayfish, a species listed in Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, is found at this site. There are small populations of Mallard, Shoveler, Pochard and Tufted Duck present at Lough Owel. Farmland adjacent to the lake provides feeding grounds for internationally important numbers of Greenland White-fronted Goose. Potential threats to the conservation interest of Lough Owel include the increasing level of water supply to Mullingar, overfishing, eutrophication caused by local farming practices and pressure from amenity uses such as boating and fishing.

With the exception of Lough Carra in Co. Mayo, Lough Owel is the best example of a large, spring-fed calcareous lake in the country. The site is of major conservation significance and contains three habitats that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, i.e. alkaline fens, transition mires and hard water lakes. Additionally, the site supports bird populations of conservation significance.

3.2.3 Lough Ennell SAC 000685

Lough Ennell supports a diverse aquatic flora. Seven stonewort species have been identified, including two Red Data Book species, *Chara denudata* and *C. tomentosa*. Much of the lakeshore consists of dry, stony ground colonised by calcareous grassland. These areas were formerly part of the lake bed but are now exposed as a consequence of drainage. Species such as Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica)*, Hairy Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis subsp. vestita*), Frog Orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) occur here. Alkaline fen is also found on the lake shore, with species such as Grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*), Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*). Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*), a rare plant listed in the Red Data Book, has been recorded in the woods along the eastern shores of Lough Ennell. This is the only record for this species outside the south-east of Ireland.

The rare Myxomycete fungus*, Licea castanea*, has been recorded from woodland in the site. A species of blue-green alga (*Schizothrix fasciculata*), which forms little pebbles of lime that are cast up on the lakeshore, occurs in Lough Ennell and has not been recorded elsewhere in Ireland. Scharff's Char (*Salvelinus scharffi*), a distinct race of char which was once found only in Lough Owel and Lough Ennell, is now thought to be extinct.

This site shares an internationally important Greenland White-fronted Goose flock with Loughs Iron, Glen and Owel. The numbers of geese which visit Lough Ennell are lower than for the other lakes: 9l birds (3 year average peak). Nationally important bird populations which have been recorded on Lough Ennell are: Cormorant (average peak l49; absolute maximum 448); Mute Swan (average peak

424); Pochard (average peak 889; maximum 2,600 on 8/ll/85); Tufted Duck (average peak 720) and Coot (average peak 639). All of these data were compiled from counts made over three seasons, l984/85 - l986/87. A single count of 522 Golden Plover was obtained in that period, constituting a regionally important population.

Lough Ennell is of significance as a highly productive lake which supports a rich variety of lower plant and invertebrate species. Its lakeshore habitats, which include alkaline fen, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, support a diverse flora. These habitats also provide important refuges for wildfowl.

4 Screening

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of Screening is to determine whether AA is required. This is done by examining whether:

- A plan or project which is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site can be excluded from AA; and
- The potential effects of a plan or project, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, on a European site in view of its conservation objectives and considering whether these effects will be significant.

4.1.1 The Likely Significant Effect Test

Screening is underpinned by an interpretation of LSE, as this interpretation provides the benchmark for a finding of likely effects. Any assessment of significance must satisfy the principles that underpin a satisfactory determination for LSE with regard to the accumulation of impacts and an understanding of the nature, probability and severity of potential impacts. The terms 'likely' and 'significance' have been defined variously by governments and through the courts. The following sections seek to provide clarification on the current interpretation of these key terms as determined by recent guidance and case law.

4.1.2 An interpretation of 'likely'

European case law has established that the benchmark requirement of 'likely' should not be regarded as a measure of probability in the context of an AA. Rather, a LSE finding is an acknowledgment that the risk of a significant effect occurring exists. This approach is consistent with the findings in the Waddenzee judgement, which found that "[…] *if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that it will have a significant effect on that site* […]" then a LSE finding is appropriate.

More recently, this position was upheld in the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Case C-258/11 (Sweetman v An Bord Pleanála (Ireland), where the judgment interprets "likely" to mean "may"; *"the test is set at a lower level […]*" and *"there is no need to establish such an effect; it is […] merely necessary to determine that there may be such an effect"* (emphasis original). In cases where there is a determination that there is no significant effect, the Waddenzee judgment establishes that there must remain *"no reasonable scientific doubt as to the absence of such effects."*

4.1.3 An interpretation of 'significant'

It was clarified in the ECJ Case C-127/02 (the Waddenzee judgment) that the measure of significance should be made against the ecological objectives for which the site was designated: *"where a plan or project […] is likely to undermine the site's conservation objectives, it must be considered likely to have a significant effect on that site".*

The proposed development is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site therefore Screening for AA is required. This involves the following:

- Proposed development description;
- European site (s) identification, qualifying interests and conservation objectives;
- Ecology baseline conditions within and in close proximity to proposed development
- Assessment of likely effects; and
- Screening conclusion.

4.2 Identification of Potential Effects on European Sites

Based on the project description as set out in Section 2.2 and the ZoI over which the effect could occur, i.e. the distance at which the proposed development could have potential effects, using professional judgement and published guidance, potential effects can be identified. Table 4 focuses on the potential effects that could occur during the operational phases of the proposed development.

4.3 Qualifying Interests Potentially Exposed to Risk from the Proposed Development

4.3.1 Alkaline fens [7230]

Drainage, either within or surrounding the fen habitat can result in the drawdown of the alkaline fen groundwater table. The depth, geometry and density of drainage (hydromorphology) will indicate the scale and impact on fen hydrology. Drainage can result in loss of characteristic species and transition to drier habitats. However, to undermine the conservation objectives and integrity of the SAC there would need to be a large-scale or persistent pollution event that degraded water quality to such an extent that would give rise to a change in hydro morphological conditions.

4.3.2 White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) [1092]

Potential impacts to White-clawed Crayfish could result from changes in water quality associated with pollutants emanating from the proposed development site. Sediment releases could affect the species, either directly or through the deterioration of clean gravels at spawning grounds downstream.

4.4 Conservation Objectives

To determine how the project would affect Lough Ennell SAC 000685 and Lough Owel SAC 000688 qualifying interests, this assessment has focused on the effects that may possibly occur that could undermine the conservation objectives for the SACs. The conservation objectives of Lough Ennell SAC 000685 and Lough Owel SAC 000688 are provided by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS, 2017) and aim to define the parameters for 'favourable conservation condition' for the species within the sites. The overarching objectives for these sites is to:

'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'.

Table 4 Appraisal of Potential Impacts on Lough Ennell SAC and Lough Owel SAC

European site name and code	Distance of site from projects	Conservation Objectives and Qualifying Interests(*=priority habitat).	Pathway	Potential for Likely Significant Effects
Lough Ennell SAC 000685	Proposed development site within 2km of the boundary of the 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 (NPWS, 2017).*** **Annex I Habitats** [7230] Alkaline fens	The proposed SAC boundary as already stated is approx. 2km from the proposed area of works. During field surveys, no Annex I habitats were recorded within the proposed area of works or the immediate surrounding area. The SAC is listed for the Annex I Habitat [7230] Alkaline Fen The above habitat is a sensitive habitat and susceptible to run-off, sedimentation or pollution events (e.g. from oils and other hydrocarbons).	**Extremely Unlikely** The main source of inflow to Lough Ennell is from the river Brosna (which is also fed from Lough Owel). The Brosna is positioned to the south of the Royal Canal, and this development is on the North bank of the Royal Canal. The canal has an impermeable puddle clay liner that will ensure that any accidental spill will be fully retained within the canal, and therefore cannot leach through a groundwater pathway to Lough Ennell. There is no hydrological link between the development at Grange South that could have any impact on the Lough Ennell SAC. There is no potential for direct impacts on Annex I habitats as none are present within the footprint of the proposed development or the immediate environs.
Lough Owel SAC 000688	Proposed development site within 3.3km of the boundary of the 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 (NPWS, 2017).*** **Annex I Habitats** [7230] Alkaline fens. **Annex II Species** [1092] White-clawed Crayfish *(Austropotamobius pallipes)*	The proposed SAC boundary as already stated is approx. 3.3km from the proposed area of works. During field surveys, no Annex I habitats were recorded within the proposed area of works or the immediate surrounding area. The SAC supports three Annex I Habitats; Alkaline Fens, Transition mires and quaking bogs and Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. The SAC supports one aquatic Annex II species, White-clawed Crayfish. They're extremely susceptible to effects of pollution events. The above aquatic specie is sensitive and susceptible to run-off, sedimentation or pollution events (e.g. from oils and other hydrocarbons). No operational impacts are predicated as a result of the proposed development.	**Extremely Unlikely** Lough Owel is the significant feeder source for the Royal Canal. A purpose built 2km long gravity feeder canal was developed at the time of the canal construction to ensure that canal system worked appropriately. This feeder channel enters the Royal Canal north of Mullingar, 1.5km away from Grange south. Accordingly, the hydraulic gradient from Grange South to Lough Owel is significantly upstream, and hence there can be no effect from the proposed development at Grange south on the Lough Owel SAC.

4.5 Plans and Projects Which Might Act In Combination

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that:

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.*

The Westmeath County Council planning database was searched to determine if any plans or projects were likely to have an in-combination effect on the site. There were no plans or projects listed on the database likely to have an in-combination effect on the site.

This is a small development, which can be easily managed without any potential for significant risk to the environment. The site is sufficiently away from other commercial development of any scale in the locality such that there is no significant cumulative environmental impact likely during the ongoing period for development, given the low annual throughput.

5 Assessment of Significance

5.1 General

The significance impact is assessed relative to the existing condition/conservation status of the Lough Owel SAC and the Lough Ennell SAC and to the scale of the impact in space and time. Impacts are assessed as significant where the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site are undermined.

Where it is determined that a likely effect of the proposed development will have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 site, the project must be assessed through full Appropriate Assessment. The precautionary principle must be applied in determining significance of an impact. Where the significance of an impact cannot definitively be ascertained on the basis of the information available it is required to progress to full Appropriate Assessment i.e. a measure cannot be screened out unless there is certainty that no significant impact is likely.

Impacts on the Lough Owel SAC and the Lough Ennell SAC have been assessed as extremely unlikely. There will therefore be no impacts on the conservation condition of the Natura 2000 sites within the Zone of Influence.

6 Screening Statement

The current assessment investigates the potential adverse effects on the qualifying interests of the Natura 2000 network, specifically the Lough Owel SAC (000688) and the Lough Ennell SAC (000685) arising from the proposed development at Grange South, Mullingar, County Westmeath. The assessment considers whether development alone or in combination with other projects or plans, will have adverse effects on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites.

It is concluded that there is no potential for significant effects on the integrity of the Lough Owel SAC and the Lough Ennell SAC from the proposed development, either alone or in-combination with other plans and/or projects. The findings of this screening for Appropriate Assessment are summarised in the Findings of no Significant Effects Matrix hereunder.

Table 5 Screening Assessment

Findings of No Significant Effects Screening Matrix		
Name of project or plan	Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub development	
Name and location of Natura 2000 site	Lough Owel SAC (000688) and Lough Ennell SAC (000685)	
Description of the project or plan	The proposed Mullingar Greenway Recreational Hub development comprises of walking and cycling trails, (linked to two significant international scale greenways, the Royal Canal Greenway and the Old Rail Trail Greenway, part of the Dublin to Galway, Coast to Coast Cycleway project), on Council owned land at Grange South, Mullingar, County Westmeath.	
Is the project or plan directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site?	No	
Are there other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the site?	No	
The assessment of significance of effects		
Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site.	No likely effects determined. All potential impacts are determined as extremely unlikely.	
Explain why these effects are not considered significant	No impact have been determined therefore there can be no alteration of the conservation condition or objectives of the Natura 2000 sites due to the proposed works	
Data collected to carry out the assessment		
Who carried out the assessment?	**Sources of data**	**Level of assessment**
Maurice O Connor, Ecologist	Refer to references section	Desk study plus field assessment

7 References

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