



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

**Technical Note: Ecology  
318672:  
Garrettstown Strand,  
Coolbane, Kinsale, Co.  
Cork**

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**To:** Gary Farrelly, Planning Inspector  
**From:** Dr Maeve Flynn, Inspectorate Ecologist  
**Re:** ABP 318672 Consideration of likely connection between Annex I listed  
Chough on the development site and Seven Heads SPA (4191)  
**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024

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## **1.0 Background**

ABP 318672 refers to a planning appeal (3<sup>rd</sup> party) regarding retention permission granted by Cork County Council for the modification and completion of an aparthotel to include 20 hotel bedroom, bar, restaurant and 24 apartments over basement at Garrettstown Strand, Coolbane, Kinsale, Co. Cork. The permission allows for modifications to the building footprint and upgrade to wastewater treatment system together with associated site works.

No nature conservation issues were raised in the appeal and the site is not located within or immediately adjacent to a European Site comprising Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA). However, in considering the case, the Planning Inspector noted the record of a pair of Chough nesting in the unfinished building at the site. The Construction and Environment Management Plan (CEMP) prepared for the proposed development detailed management for the

protection of Chough at the site and a planning condition related to the species was attached to the permission by Cork County Council.

Chough is a bird species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive and is considered of medium conservation concern- Amber listed on Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020-2026<sup>1</sup>. County Cork is a stronghold for the species in Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

Chough is Special Conservation Interest (SCI) for Seven Heads SPA located 8km West of Garrettstown (at closest point) and extending Southwest along the coast from Courtmacsherry Bay. The species is also referenced in the site synopsis for the Old Head of Kinsale SPA located just over 3 km Southeast, but it is not a listed SCI for the site.

## **2.0 Scope of report**

As part of my role as Inspectorate Ecologist, I was requested to prepare a technical note on Chough and any likely connection between the breeding pair on the development site and Seven Heads SPA to assist the Planning Inspector and the Board in screening the appeal case for Appropriate Assessment.

This note to the Planning Inspector and the Board considers the likely connections between the breeding Chough at the site and the SPA and provides recommendations for management of the species at the site should the Board be minded to grant planning permission for the proposed retention and modification of the Aparthotel.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert G, Stanbury A and Lewis L (2021), "Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020 –2026". Irish Birds 9: 523—544

<sup>2</sup> [NatureScot Research Report 1291 - Review of chough management between populations - a comparison of the biotic and abiotic factors influencing chough populations across the UK and Irish range | NatureScot](#)

### 3.0 Chough

As outlined, a pair of Chough were confirmed nesting in the basement structure of the unfinished aparthotel at Garrettstown in 2023 (Section 7.8 of CEMP). I note that information from the project ecologists (Carl Dixon of Dixon Brosnan Ecologists) consider that this may be a once-off breeding location as they consider that the site is sub-optimal for the species and there is other suitable breeding habitat in the surrounding landscape, but nesting attempts may be repeated in future breeding seasons. I note that information available from NPWS<sup>3</sup> states that research by its staff suggests that around a third of the Chough population in Co. Cork is now nesting in buildings, so the occurrence is not unusual.

### 4.0 SPA sites

Data from Biodiversity Ireland<sup>4</sup> shows that there are consistent records of Chough along the coastline from Garrettstown to the Old Head of Kinsale.

The closest SPA designated for (breeding) Chough is the Seven Heads SPA located southwest of Courtmacsherry Bay and over 8 km from the proposed development site.

Site specific conservation objectives have not been set for the Seven Heads SPA. I have had regard to the targets and attributes set for Chough at Beara Peninsula SPA which is the nearest SPA for this species with conservation objectives<sup>5</sup>. Targets related to foraging habitat and disturbance levels are concentrated on the area immediate to the coastal sites where Chough breed with particular reference to a 350m area of importance.

The home range radius / foraging range of breeding Chough in Ireland is considered to be generally less than 2km (Robertson *et al* 1995) with research from Ireland and

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<sup>3</sup> [Nestflix and chill - new live stream for nature lovers from NPWS | National Parks & Wildlife Service](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Maps - Biodiversity Maps \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [CO004155.pdf \(npws.ie\)](#)

elsewhere showing that breeding birds mainly forage close to the nest site with coastal breeding pairs spending up to 80% of time within 350m of the nest. Therefore, given the distance involved (8km at closet point) the breeding pair at Garrettstown are not connected to the SPA as they are outside the foraging range distance of the SPA population and the potential for likely significant effects on the SPA can be excluded.

## **5.0 Management and Mitigation:**

The consideration of impacts on the breeding Chough pair fall outside the AA process but require consideration in the planning assessment. Measures are set out in Section 7.8 of the CEMP to prevent significant impacts on breeding Chough. The measures, stated to be agreed with the NPWS, are focused on preventing the breeding pair from attempting to nest in the building in advance of works commencing at the site. The most appropriate method to exclude the breeding pair would be formalised in advance of the commencement of any works.

It is evident that the Cork County Council Ecology office and the National Parks and Wildlife Service engaged on this matter and a related condition was attached to the granting of permission to try and ensure the continued occurrence of Chough at this site.

### **Cork County Council Planning Condition 6:**

Prior to commencement of development a site-specific ornithological plan which shall be developed in consultation with the NPWS which provides for the continued occurrence of Annex I and amber listed Chough within the same site shall be submitted for the written agreement of the Planning Authority.

The preservation of breeding Chough in the Garrettstown area is desirable from a nature conservation perspective. However, I consider that there is uncertainty as to how the condition as phrased could be implemented. I note the Project Ecologists observation that there is no significant potential to provide for replacement breeding habitat within the development site. They consider that there is more suitable habitat

present in the wider landscape of the local area and that it would therefore be ecologically unsuitable to try to accommodate the breeding pair of Chough on the Aparthotel site. I note from Biodiversity Ireland maps that there are consistent records of breeding Chough from this particular 2km Grid which predate the construction of the partially completed Aparthotel, supporting the project Ecologists view that suitable habitat occurs in the local area.

Given the constraints of the site, I consider that it's unlikely that effective measures could be put in place to ensure the continued occurrence of Chough on the site during active construction in particular, or during the operational phase of the Aparthotel. Even in the event that a form of alternative nest site is provided within the confines of the site, there is no guarantee that such a measure would be effective, and that the breeding pair would take up residence given the likely levels of disturbance. The loss of the building as a nest site for Chough would not be detrimental to the occurrence of the species in the Garrettstown area as other suitable habitat is available.

I recommend that an ornithological plan be agreed and submitted with the Planning Authority prior to commencement of development on the site which clearly defines measures to be implemented to manage impacts on breeding Chough during site preparation works and the construction phase. The implementation of the plan will be directed and supervised by an appropriately experienced Ecologist.

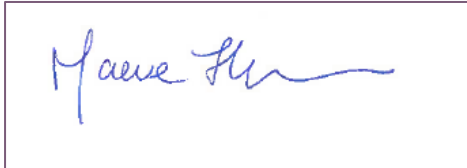
## **6.0 Conclusion:**

The breeding pair of Chough at the Aparthotel site in Garrettstown is not connected to the nearest SPA site designated for this species as they occur at a distance outside of the know home/foraging range of Chough during the breeding season. i.e. >2km. Therefore, likely significant effects on Seven Heads SPA can be excluded in view of the conservation objectives for breeding Chough as the SPA is at a distance of 8km. The proposed development would not undermine the achievement of conservation objectives to maintain or restore breeding Chough at the SPA.

Measures set out in the CEMP to avoid impacts on the breeding pair of Chough at the unfinished building should be implemented and supervised by an appropriately experienced ecologist. The measures should be agreed in advance with the NPWS

and integrated into a site-specific ornithological plan to be submitted to the Planning Authority prior to commencement of Development.

Signed:



Dr Maeve Flynn

Inspectorate Ecologist

23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024