

MEMO

To:	Cathaldus Hartin, Senior Planner, Westmeath County Council
From:	Liam Currie, Senior Executive Planner
Date:	18 th November 2025
Subject:	Proposed Development of 94 residential units at Cornamaddy, 150m north of the N55, Lissywollen Td, Athlone, Co Westmeath.

Proposal

I wish to acknowledge receipt of documentation with respect to a proposal to construct 94 no. dwelling units at Cornamaddy, 150m north of the N55, Lissywollen Td, Athlone, Co Westmeath.

Details Received:

- Site Layout Plan.
- Appropriate Assessment Screening report and draft Natura Impact Statement.
- EIA Screening Report.

Overview

The proposed development is located at Cornamaddy, on the eastern outskirts of Athlone town. The site is bordered by agricultural land to the immediate east and north, parts of which are currently being developed for residential use. The N55 is situated just south of the proposed site, with several smaller residential developments and industrial estates located in the wider surrounding area. Extensive areas of agricultural land lie to the north of the site.

The site measures approximately 6.5 hectares and comprises a grassland field. The north-eastern and south-eastern boundaries are defined by mature hedgerows, while the remaining boundaries are currently undefined.

Appropriate Assessment

The subject lands are not located within or immediately adjacent to any European site (SAC or SPA). However, Lough Ree SAC (Site Code: 000440) and Lough Ree SPA (Site Code: 004064) are situated approximately 1.3 km from the proposed development at the nearest point.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report, prepared by CAAS Environmental, concludes that the proposed project may give rise to potential significant effects on the two European sites identified above, in the absence of mitigation measures. In accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, and applying the precautionary principle, the possibility of significant effects on European sites cannot be ruled out. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS), incorporating mitigation to address the likely significant effects identified, is required.

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Recommendation

Having reviewed the documentation associated with the proposed development at Cornamaddy, 150m north of the N55, Lissywollen Td, Athlone, Co Westmeath it is considered, based on a preliminary assessment that a **Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required.**

It is recommended that the proposed development proceeds to the detailed design stage in accordance with the relevant provisions set out under Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

At the next stage of the process, An Coimisiún Pleanála, as the designated consenting authority, will be responsible for the assessment and determination of the application, including all associated environmental requirements. The detailed design should therefore be advanced to a standard that facilitates the competent authority's full evaluation in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Habitats Directive, and all other applicable statutory obligations.

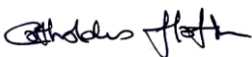
The applicant should ensure that all necessary environmental documentation, including the NIS and any updates to the EIA Screening or other supporting assessments, accompanies the detailed design submission to enable An Coimisiún Pleanála to carry out its statutory functions.



Liam Currie | Senior Executive Planner

Westmeath County Council

18th November 2025



Cathaldus Hartin | Senior Planner

Westmeath County Council | Planning, Transportation and Economic Development

18/11/2025

Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening

Stage 1 Preliminary Examination

1.1 Legislative Context

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

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

1.2 Natura 2000 Sites

Note: European Natura 2000 sites include SACs, cSACs, SPAs and pSPAs, but not NHAs. Lough Ree and its associated European sites of Lough Ree SAC (site code: 000440) and Lough Ree SPA (site code: 004064), are approximately 1.3 km from the proposed development site, at the closest point. The site synopses and details of the conservation objectives of these sites are available at: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac> and <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa>

Site Code	Site Name	Designation Type	Distance From (km) approx.
004064	Lough Ree	SPA	1.3
000440	Lough Ree	SAC	1.3

Table 1: European sites requiring screening for AA

The proposed works are not required for the nature conservation management of any European site. It is noted that the conservation objectives for the SACs and SPAs in the vicinity are to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the habitats and species for which each site has been selected.

A small agricultural drain to the north of the proposed development connects to the Kippinstown Stream, which then joins the Garrynafela watercourse and ultimately flows into Lough Ree SAC and SPA at Balaghkeeran Bay, approximately 1.6 km from the site. A direct surface-water connection is proposed between the development and Lough Ree via this drain during the operational phase to facilitate surface-water drainage.

This will create a permanent hydrological pathway from the proposed development to Lough Ree SAC and SPA. These designated sites contain Qualifying Interests and Special Conservation Interests that are sensitive to changes in surface and groundwater conditions.

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The Appropriate Assessment Screening Report therefore concludes that, in the absence of mitigation measures, the proposed project may give rise to potential significant effects on the two European sites identified above. Potential pathways for significant effects during the construction phase are identified as:

- Water quality impacts, including sedimentation or siltation arising from surface-water runoff; and
- Dust emissions.

As the Screening Report identifies source–pathway–receptor linkages with a likelihood of significant effects on European sites from the proposed development alone, the preparation of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is required. This conclusion is reached having regard to the Conservation Objectives of the habitats and species for which the sites have been designated.

1.3 AA Preliminary Screening Conclusions

The Screening Report identifies that, in the absence of mitigation, the proposed development has the potential to give rise to significant effects on two European sites:

- Lough Ree SPA (004064); and
- Lough Ree SAC (000440).

As the project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site, and the possibility of significant effects cannot be excluded, a NIS is required in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening

It should be noted that An Coimisiún Pleanála, as the Competent Authority, will make the final determination as to whether the proposed development, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

The Planning Department of Westmeath County Council has undertaken a preliminary review of the EIA Screening Report prepared by VEON Forestry, Ecology & Environment. The report has been prepared having regard to:

- Directive 2011/92/EU, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU (the EIA Directive);
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-Threshold Development (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2003);
- Environmental Impact – Assessment of Projects – Guidance on Screening (European Commission, 2017);
- Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2018).

In accordance with the EIA Directive, and in particular Annexes I, II and III, the proposed development falls below the applicable thresholds set out in Class 10(b)(i) (Construction of more than 500 dwelling units) and Class 10(b)(iv) (Urban Development) of Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. As a sub-threshold development, the proposal has therefore been assessed on a case-by-case basis with reference to the criteria in Annex III of the EIA Directive and Schedule 7 and the information provided under Schedule 7A of the Regulations, including consideration of:

- The size, scale and design of the proposed project;
- Potential cumulative impacts with other existing and/or proposed projects;
- The use of natural resources, including land, soil, water and biodiversity;
- The generation of waste;
- Potential pollution or nuisance;
- The risk of major accidents and/or disasters, including those influenced by climate change; and
- Any potential risks to human health.

Based on its preliminary review, the Planning Authority considers that the Screening Report provides a reasonable assessment of the nature and characteristics of the potential environmental impacts arising from the proposed development. The environmental effects identified are generally localised and minor in nature. Accordingly, the Planning Authority sees no reason to disagree with the conclusion of the Screening Report that the proposed development is not likely to have significant effects on the environment and, therefore, that an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) is not required.

For the avoidance of doubt, this constitutes an advisory opinion only. The final determination on the requirement for EIA rests exclusively with An Coimisiún Pleanála as the Competent Authority.
