



Forestry, Ecology & Environment

Environmental Impact Assessment Screening

Proposed Residential Development at
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath

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Prepared for: Westmeath County Council

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Twenty years' experience conducting research and working in the field of ecology, with extensive stakeholder engagement and survey skills. Amy has obtained funding and lead independent research on three mammal related projects through her PhD and subsequent post docs. She has disseminated her research through several mediums including 40 publications in peer reviewed journals, presenting at international conferences, stakeholder workshops, teaching and through the popular press. Since joining Veon, she has been involved in a number of large projects, collecting data for ecological assessment as well as for specific bird and mammal surveys. These have informed subsequent reports such as Natura Impact Statements (NIS), Environmental Impact Statements (EclA), Biodiversity Management Plans (BMP), Winter Bird and Breeding Bird Survey Reports and Non-Volant Mammal Reports, which Amy has produced.

We confirm that the professional judgement expressed herein is the true and bona fide opinion of our professional ecologists. The information provided is accurate as of the issue date of this report and has been prepared in accordance with the CIEEM Code of Professional Conduct ('the Code').

Section 1: INTRODUCTION

Veon Ltd. (Veon Ecology) has been appointed by Westmeath County Council to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening (EIA) to support a planning application for a proposed residential development on 6.496 hectares of land, approximately 2.3 km northeast of the Athlone town centre, hereafter referred to as the “proposed development site”.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) requirements derive from EU Directives. Council Directive 2014/52/EU amended Directive 2011/92/EU and is transposed into Irish Law by the European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018.

Proposed development which falls within one of the categories of development specified in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, which equals or exceeds, a limit, quantity or threshold prescribed for that class of development must be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). Where a project is of a specified type but does not meet, or exceed, the applicable threshold then the likelihood of the project having significant effects (adverse and beneficial) on the environment needs to be considered.

The purpose of this Screening Report is to provide supporting information to assist the competent authority (Westmeath County Council) to determine whether an EIAR is required to accompany the application for permission.

The criteria for determining whether development listed in Part 2 of Schedule 5 should be subject to an EIA are set out under Schedule 7. The information to be provided by the applicant or developer for the purposes of screening sub-threshold development for environmental impact assessment is set out under Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended by the 2018 Regulations. Paragraph 4 of Schedule 7A requires that: *‘The compilation of the information at paragraphs 1 to 3 shall take into account, where relevant, the criteria set out in Schedule 7.’* In this report, the information has been set out under the more detailed headings provided for under Schedule 7. In effect, this ensures that all of the information required under Schedule 7A has been addressed and facilitates Westmeath County Council in its screening assessment.

Section 2: Screening Assessment

2.1 Mandatory EIA

The subject development does not fall within any of the specified classes of development set out in Part 1 of Schedule 5.

The proposed development for 94 no. residential units and ancillary development falls within the category of an 'Infrastructure Project' within Schedule 5 (10) (b) of the Planning and Development Regulations, which provides that a mandatory EIAR must be carried out for the following projects:

- (i) Construction of more than 500 dwellings*
- (ii) Construction of a car-park providing more than 400 spaces, other than a car-park provided as part of, and incidental to the primary purpose of, a development.*
- (iii) Construction of a shopping centre with a gross floor space exceeding 10,000 square metres.*
- (iv) Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district (area where the predominant land use is retail or commercial), 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere.*

The proposed development is for 94 units, on a site area of approximately 6.5 ha which is not within a business district. The proposed development does not trigger a requirement for a mandatory EIAR because:

- The number of accommodation units, at 94 units, falls below the threshold of 500 dwellings; and
- The site area of c.6.5 ha falls below the area threshold for sites which are not within business districts.

2.2 Sub-threshold EIA

In cases where a project is mentioned in Part 2 but is classed as "sub-threshold development", it is necessary for Westmeath County Council to undertake a case-by-case examination to determine whether the proposed development is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

The criteria for determining whether development listed in Part 2 of Schedule 5 should be subject to an EIA are set out in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 ('the 2001 Regulations'), as inserted by Article 7 of the European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 ('the 2018 Regulations') and the information to be provided by the Applicant for the purposes of screening sub-threshold development for EIA is set out in Schedule 7A.

Section 3: Methodology

According to European Commission Guidance (2017) *“Screening has to implement the Directive’s overall aim, i.e. to determine if a Project listed in Annex II is likely to have significant effects on the environment and, therefore, be made subject to a requirement for Development Consent and an assessment, with regards to its effects on the environment. At the same time, Screening should ensure that an EIA is carried out only for those Projects for which it is thought that a significant impact on the environment is possible, thereby ensuring a more efficient use of both public and private resources. Hence, Screening has to strike the right balance between the above two objectives.”*

As identified in **Section 2**, the proposed development is a ‘project’ for the purpose of the EIA Directive and implementing Regulations. However, it does not meet the applicable mandatory threshold as the number of units falls below the 500 dwellings threshold and urban development which would involve an area of 10 hectares in the case of other parts of the built-up area.

The key issue for the competent authority in the context of the possible need for EIA of sub-threshold is whether or not such development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. Consideration of significant effect should not be determined by reference to size only. The nature and location of a project must also be taken into account.

This EIA Screening Report is therefore being undertaken to determine in light of the criteria listed in Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations whether or not this proposed development will require full EIA.

According to the Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (2018) *“For all sub-threshold developments listed in Schedule 5 Part 2, where no EIAR is submitted or EIA determination requested, a screening determination is required to be undertaken by the competent authority unless, on preliminary examination it can be concluded that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment. This is initiated by the competent authority following the receipt of a planning application or appeal. A preliminary examination is undertaken, based on professional expertise and experience, and having regard to the ‘Source – Pathway – Target’ model, where appropriate. The examination should have regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7 to the 2001 Regulations. Where, based on a preliminary examination of the information submitted with the application and any other supplementary information received, the competent authority concludes that, having considered the nature, size and location of the proposed development, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment, this should be recorded with reasons for this conclusion stated, and no EIA required or formal determination made. The recording of the competent authority’s view should be brief and concise, but adequate to inform the public. In many cases this considered view will be included in the planner’s/inspector’s report on*

the planning application and this may be cross-referenced in the competent authority's decision. Normally, this will be published at the time of the decision of the competent authority."

Section 4: Project Description

4.1 Proposed Development Site

The location of the proposed works is approximately centred at 606069, 742590 (ITM) (**Figure 4.1**) approximately 2.3 km northeast of the Athlone town centre and is within a residential zoned area.

The proposed development site consists of a number of agricultural fields and is bordered by the same along the north of the site. To the east, the lands are currently being developed for residential developments. The Cornamagh Cemetery is to the west of the proposed development and the N55 borders the south of the site, as well as some single residences. The rest of the surrounding areas are characterised as residential developments, industrial premises and farmland.

The fields are bounded by a mixture of mature trees and a stone wall between the graveyard and the proposed development. A drainage ditch runs along the northeast of the proposed development between the site and the current residential development.

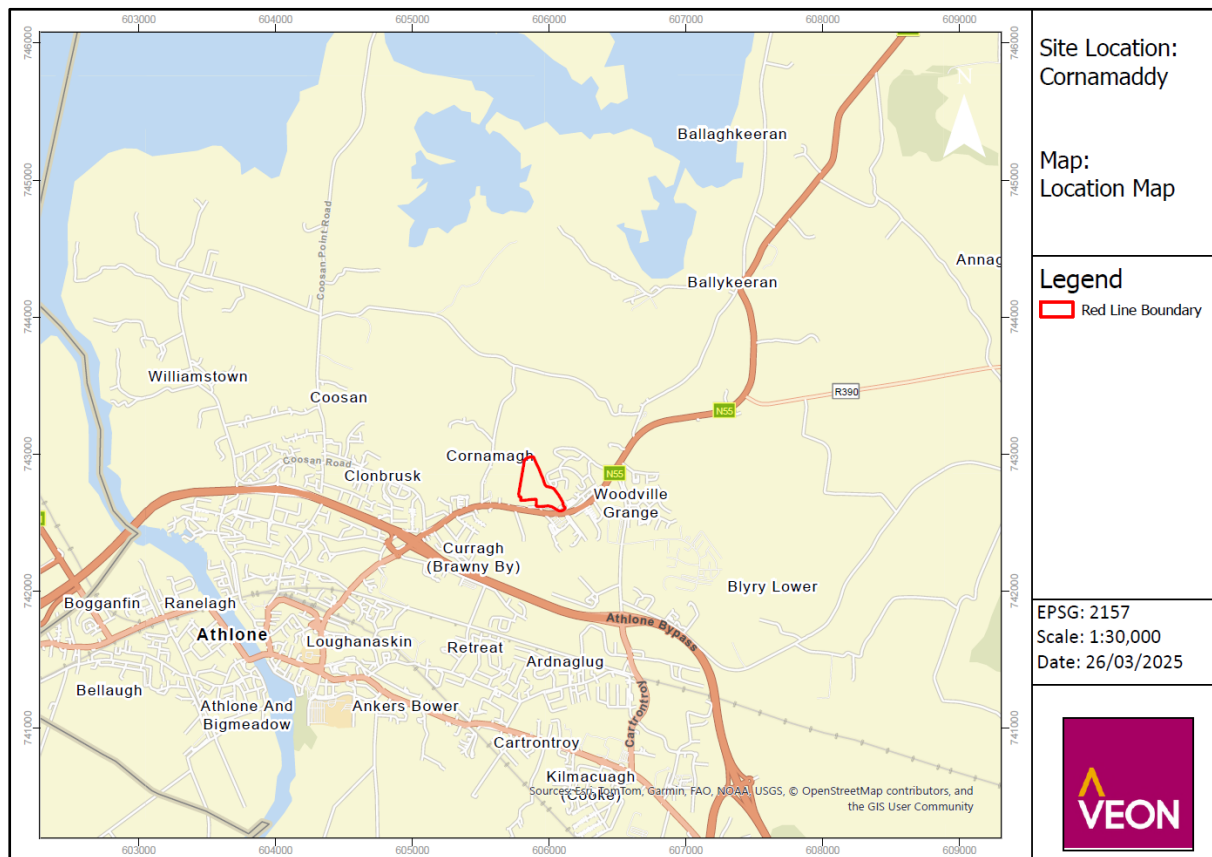


Figure 4.1: The location of the proposed development northeast of Athlone town.

4.2 Proposed Development Description

The proposed development is comprised of a series of 8no. apartment blocks and 86 houses on a mostly level, sheltered site, enclosed by existing boundaries of trees hedges and a stone wall (**Figure 4.2**). The proposal retains a large percentage of the existing trees and hedgerows; specific attention will be given to retaining/protecting and enhancing the existing approximately 2m high stone wall boundary shared with the Cornamagh Cemetery.

Additionally, there are 3 no. isolated very large fully mature trees randomly located within the site which have now been incorporated into the design, 2no. have become focal points within apartment courtyards and the third in the green open space retained to enhance views from the housing development.

The development will consist of a residential development and public open space of the following:

Construction of 94 no. residential units comprising of the following:

- 55 no. 2 bed (4 person) terraced houses (c.86m² each),
- 14 no. 3 bed terraced houses (c. 100 m² each)
- 2 no. 4 bed 2 story semi-detached houses (c. 120m² each)
- 15 no. 4 bed 3 story semi-detached houses (c. 148m² each) all with associated private gardens.
- 4no. 1 Bed Ground floor Apartments, 2 Person UD / Age Friendly (c. 51.5m²)
- 4no. 1 Bed first floor apartments, 2 Person (c. 51.5m²) with private amenity spaces on ground floor terraces or first floor balconies.
- Vehicular access to the east through the neighbouring residential development.
- Connection to wastewater infrastructure as part of ongoing coordination with Uisce Éireann and Glenveagh Developments along the northern boundary of the proposed site (ABP 318510).
- All associated infrastructure works including amenity spaces, landscaping, open space, boundary treatments, vehicular parking, bicycle parking, utilities, internal roads, footpaths and shared surfaces, site clearance and temporary construction development.

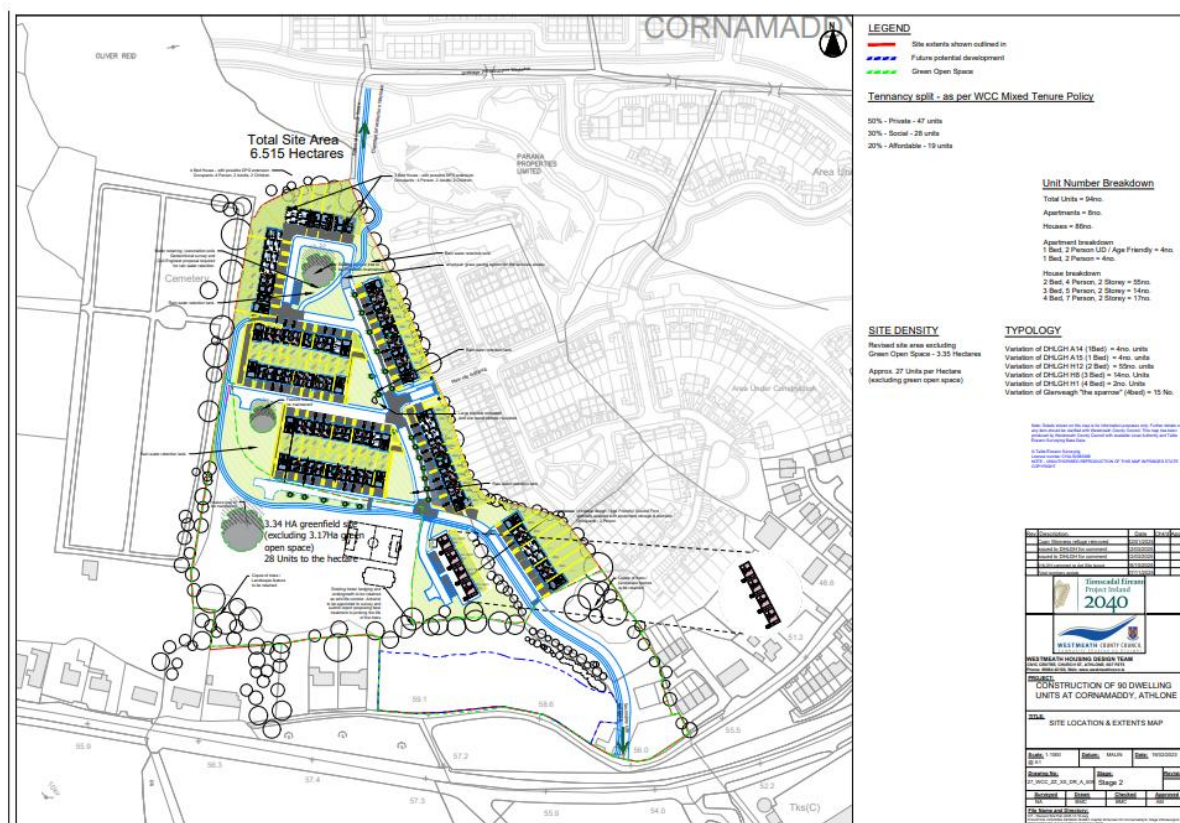


Figure 4.2: Proposed layout of the residential development at Cornamaddy.

4.2.1 The National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040

The NPF seeks to deliver 550,000 homes by 2040. It sets out a target of at least 40% of all new housing to be delivered within the existing built-up areas on infill and/or brownfield sites. Whilst the NPF targets development on infill and/or brownfield sites this does not preclude the development of greenfield sites but instead emphasises that the reliance on greenfield sites only, should be avoided. While the development is located on greenfield land, it is zoned for residential development and will deliver upon progressing supported sustainable development located in proximity to Athlone town. With an emphasis on accessible units, the proposed development will assist in achieving National Policy Objectives (particularly Objective 10) providing services for older people to enable an improved model of care for older persons to be delivered.

4.2.2 Cumulative Impacts

In August 2018, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government issued “Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment”. These Guidelines were issued pursuant to section 28 of the 2000 Act and planning authorities and the Board are required to have regard to same when carrying out their functions under the Act.

The Guidelines summarise “cumulative effects” as:

“Effects are not to be considered in isolation but cumulatively i.e. when they are added to other effects. A single effect on its own may not be significant in terms of impact on the environment but, when considered together with other effects, may have a significant impact on the environment. Also, a single effect which may, on its own, have a significant effect, may have a reduced and insignificant impact when combined with other effects”.

Cumulative effects may arise from: - The interaction between the various impacts within a single project; - The interaction between all of the differing existing and/or approved projects in the same areas as the proposed project.

The proposed development site is c.6.5 ha and is situated to the north-east of Athlone town. The Site is zoned ‘residential. The site is currently used for agricultural practices.

A search of the Westmeath County Council planning enquiry system (<https://www.eplanning.ie>) and An Bord Pleanála, was conducted on the 26th May 2025. Finalised applications submitted within the vicinity of the proposed development in the last 5 years were examined. These applications primarily consist of medium to large-scale residential development both bordering and in close proximity to the proposed development. These projects are in various stages of development with the residential development bordering the proposed development to the east currently in an advanced stage of development. As a result of the scale of development in the local area, and the potential effects regarding surface water runoff and dust to Lough Ree’s SPA and SAC, the risk for in-combination effects with these developments cannot be reasonably excluded and mitigation is required.

Table 5.1: In-combination Assessment with regards to the proposed development.

Planning reference	Proposal	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Is there a risk of in-combination effects
ABP Ref: LH25M.319902 Planning Authority Ref: 2660374 Granted with revised conditions: 23/9/24	Large Scale Residential Development on a site of total c. 7.31 ha comprising of a residential development and public open space comprising the following: Construction of 177 no. residential units on a gross site area of 7.31 ha, ranging in height from 2-3 storeys comprising detached, semi-detached, and terraced houses, maisonettes and 3 storey duplex apartments. 65 no. 2 bed houses, 71 no. 3 bed houses and 9 no. 4 bed houses will be provided. 24 no. 1 bed maisonette apartment units and 8 no. 3 storey duplex apartment units will be provided included all associated development works. This development will form part of a larger phase of permitted and proposed development. This planning application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report and Natura Impact Statement	This project is part of a wider, large scale residential development for the area, the consent process for which was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the proximity of the project to the proposed development and elevated levels of development ongoing in the immediate area of Cornamaddy, the possibility of in-combination effects cannot be ruled out for dust and surface water runoff and mitigation is required. applicable EIA and AA requirements.	Yes

<p>ABP Ref: PL25M.318510</p> <p>Planning Authority Ref: 22577</p> <p>Granted with revised conditions: 23/4/24</p>	<p>Amendments to permitted application. Construction of 70 residential units and all associated site works. The planning application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report and Natura Impact Statement.</p>	<p>This site is adjacent to the proposed development and is part of a wider, large scale residential development for the area, the consent process for which was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the proximity of the project to the proposed development and elevated levels of development ongoing in the immediate area of Cornamaddy, the possibility of in-combination effects cannot be ruled out for dust and surface water runoff and mitigation is required. applicable EIA and AA requirements.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>ABP Ref: LH25M.318736</p> <p>Planning Authority Ref: 2360074</p> <p>Granted with revised conditions: 16/4/24</p>	<p>Large scale residential development: 10 year permission for 332 residential units along with provision of a creche, car parking, electric vehicle charge points bicycle and bin storage facilities, link road, footpath, open space areas, residential communal open space areas and site development works. Natura Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Assessment Report submitted to planning authority.</p>	<p>This project is part of a wider, large scale residential development for the area, the consent process for which was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the proximity of the project to the proposed development and elevated levels of development ongoing in the immediate area of Cornamaddy, the possibility of in-combination effects cannot be ruled out for dust and surface water runoff and mitigation is required. applicable EIA and AA requirements.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>ABP Ref: PL25M.313637</p> <p>Planning Authority Ref: 22103</p> <p>Granted with revised conditions: 11/12/23</p>	<p>Retain the change of use of a former wholesalers/warehouse building to the use as a shop including ancillary staff offices and canteen, changes to the external finish of the building including door openings to the North, South and East elevations, car parking and associated site works</p>	<p>The scale of the works and the distance from the proposed development, including being buffered by the N55 means that any potential interactions are not envisioned.</p>	<p>No</p>

<p>ABP Ref: PL25.244826</p> <p>Planning Authority Ref: 22253</p> <p>Granted with revised conditions: 6/12/22</p>	<p>The development will consist of the following: Construction of 75 no. residential units comprising: 51 no. 2 storey semi-detached and terraced houses (consisting 4 no. 2 bed houses and 47 no. 3 bed houses, ranging in size from c.78 sq.m – 120 sq.m each), and 24 no. 3 storey apartment/duplex units (consisting 12 no. 2 bed apartments and 12 no. 3 bed duplexes, ranging in size from 84sq.m to 121 sq.m each), with associated private gardens and east/west facing terraces; All pedestrian and vehicular access roads and footpaths including a section of the planned east/west distributor road connecting to a section of the distributor road to the south east of the site. All associated site development works, services provision, drainage works, residential open space (c.0.28ha) and public open space (c.0.82ha), landscaping, boundary treatment works, public lighting, 1 no. esb substation cabinets, bin stores, car and bicycle parking provision; Provision of a new detention basin on the eastern portion of the site designed to cater for the proposed development. This development will form part of a larger/future phase of the development; No changes to the existing pumping station located outside the northern site boundary; A Natura Impact Statement has been prepared in respect of this application.</p>	<p>This project is part of a wider, large scale residential development for the area, the consent process for which was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the proximity of the project to the proposed development and elevated levels of development ongoing in the immediate area of Cornamaddy, the possibility of in-combination effects cannot be ruled out for dust and surface water runoff and mitigation is required. applicable EIA and AA requirements.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
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4.2.3 The Nature of Any Associated Demolition Works

The Site is a greenfield site currently used for agricultural purposes. No demolition works are required.

4.2.4 Use of Natural Resources

The proposed development is on a greenfield site which has not been previously disturbed due to construction activities. Development of the proposed scheme will necessitate the stripping of topsoil and excavation of subsoils. It is intended to retain the majority of excavated material to be re-used on site as fill and landscaping materials, subject to testing to verify its suitability. Where excess spoil or soil material is left over from the landscaping works, this material will be brought to a licensed waste facility for disposal following appropriate waste classification.

The development is for 94 no. residential units and there will be no activities on-site which would have a high demand for water resources. Natural resources may be used in the construction process (i.e. stone, gravel, water), but during the operational phase there are no uses proposed that will require the out of the ordinary use of natural resources.

4.2.5 Production of Wastes

Best practice procedures including good site management will be taken to limit the quantity of waste generated during construction phase. Waste such as excavated material on-site will be recycled where possible.

Residues and emissions from the construction phase of the development will be related to construction waste and emissions from construction plant. No out of the ordinary residues, or emissions, are likely during the construction phase of the development and an environmental construction waste management plan will include details of any mitigation measures, if required. The applicant will seek to optimise reusing and recycling of generated waste during the construction phase. All waste will be segregated on site and stored separately prior to removal to an accredited facility. This will have a positive environmental effect as waste to landfill will be minimised.

No residues are likely during the operational phase of the development. Emissions will be linked to air conditioning and heating systems and will fall within regulated standards for modern residential developments. Operational waste generated will be domestic waste from the residential units. All domestic waste will be disposed of by a licensed waste contractor.

4.2.6 Pollution

Considering the proposed development site's location, layout, and existing topography, the primary potential water pollution receptor is the drainage ditch at the northeast of the proposed development which is connected to the Kippinstown stream (EPA code: 26K74) which flows into the Garrynafela River (EPA code: 26G51) which in turn flows into Lough Ree SAC and SPA at Balaghkeeran Bay, approximately 1.6 km from the proposed development site. Without mitigation, the stripping of vegetation, ground disturbance, and the storage of stripped soils and aggregates near the drainage ditch, increases the risk of materials being washed into these connected waterbodies during periods of heavy or prolonged rainfall and flood events. This could lead to potential impacts on water quality through increased turbidity levels and sedimentation, as well as the potential mobilisation of a variety of substances that may be contained within the soils. The contractor will ensure that no direct discharge of surface water occurs to the relevant waterbodies. A temporary positive drainage system shall be installed prior to the commencement of the construction works. This temporary surface water management facility will throttle runoff and allow suspended solids to be settled out and removed before being discharged in a control manner. Alternatively, a 'siltbuster' silt control unit can be used on the outfall. The surface water will then be discharged into the below ground attenuation tank before outfalling into the public surface water network via the permanent outfall for the site. By directing the surface water from the construction works through this temporary drainage system and then through the permanent attenuation tank and outfall it will ensure that:

- site disturbance is minimised;
- build-up of sediment is controlled;
- the potential for erosion is minimised; and,
- sediment-contaminated water is prevented from leaving the site.

A site representative responsible for matters relating to dust management will be appointed prior to construction on site. The site representative responsible for dust management shall ensure that dust management procedures are followed.

Other sources of pollutants include fuels, oils, concrete and chemicals. The management of these will be subject to best construction practice relating to storage and use and any risk of accidental spillage is low. If a spillage does occur, it is likely to be localised and will be dealt with by the contractor using best construction practice.

During the operational stage it is considered that the proposed residential development, given the small scale, would not have any negative impact in terms of pollution.

4.2.7 Risks of Accidents

The Site, of c. 6.5 ha, is located to the north east of Athlone town. The surrounding area is made up of agricultural; land, Cornamagh graveyard, single residences and a residential development to the east. A Natura Impact Statement was conducted by CAAS Ltd (October 2024). This concluded that that the proposed development will not have a significant impact on the qualifying interests and conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites, and that the integrity of these sites will not be adversely affected as long as appropriate mitigation is implemented.

The Site is not located within a Flood Zone and no mapped indicative fluvial, pluvial, coastal or groundwater flood zones have been recorded within or adjacent to the boundary of the proposed development site.

The contractor's Construction Management Plan (CMP) will be informed by a detailed risk assessment, and the implementation of standard proven construction mitigation measures will negate the risk of major accidents or disasters arising during the construction phase.

4.2.8 Risks to Human Health

Access by the public would be considered trespassing. Assuming observance of private property, no health and safety impacts to the public would be anticipated.

A description of the measures to manage construction traffic on the public road to ensure the protection of human health will be provided in the CMP.

To reduce the potential for health and safety risks, the project developer would require that all contractors prepare a site-specific health and safety plan before initiating construction activities. The

plan would inform those on site of the measures to take in the event of an emergency and would be maintained for the duration of the construction phase.

During the operational phase the risk to human health is considered to be negligible. The proposed design provides for the segregation of pedestrians and traffic and incorporates the principles of universal access and the requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations so that the development will be readily accessible to all, regardless of age, ability or disability.

Section 5: Location of the proposed development

5.1 Existing and Approved Land Use

The Site, of c.6.5 ha, is located to the northeast of Athlone town. The surrounding area consists of the Cornamagh Cemetery to the west, agricultural land to the west and north, an existing residential development to the east, which is in the advanced stages of development and single residences and a road to the south. There have been no planning applications recorded in relation to the Site.

The proposed site is on lands zoned *residential* in the Westmeath Development Plan 2021-2027. This objective aims to:

“Provide for high quality residential development and associated services in line with the provision of the necessary social and physical infrastructure.”

The proposed development is in line with this objective.

5.1.1 Transboundary Impacts

Given the location of the proposed development there will be no transboundary impacts.

5.2 Natural Resources & Absorption Capacity

5.2.1 Landscape Character

The site currently consists of agricultural land (dry meadow and grassy verge GS2 and wet grassland GS4) with mature oaks and a border of mature trees (WL2). A drainage ditch (FW4) is also located at the north east of the site.

It is entirely appropriate that the Site be developed for residential use and this is consistent with the Site’s zoning objective and compatible with its existing surrounding environment. The proposed landscaping scheme has taken into account the existing mature trees, with plans built around the mature oaks and plans to retain the exiting treeeline as ecological corridors.

The proposed development will consist of:

- 94 units consisting of 6no. apartments and 88 houses.
- Vehicular access to the east though the neighbouring residential development;
- Connection to wastewater infrastructure as part of ongoing coordination with Uisce Éireann and Glenveagh Developments along the northern boundary of the proposed site (ABP 318510).
- All associated infrastructure works including amenity spaces, landscaping, open space, boundary treatments, vehicular parking, bicycle parking, utilities, internal roads, footpaths and shared surfaces, site clearance and temporary construction development.

5.2.2 Visual/Amenity Impact

During the construction phase, plant and machinery will be required on-site. The impact of the construction phase is considered to be neutral, not significant and temporary.

A significant slope separates the north and south of the proposed development, with construction taking place in the north where the ground is flat and therefore visual impact will be screened. The area to the south which is raised will be retained as amenity space. As well as maintaining amenity open space, landscape plans conserve the existing mature oaks and mature treeline as ecological corridors which will further screen visual impacts.

5.2.3 Biodiversity

A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been conducted by CAAS Ltd (October 2024) and an ecological impact statement (EclA) by Veon Ecology (May 2025), with respect to the proposed development. The NIS concludes that, subject to specified mitigation measures being implemented, there will be no significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 site(s) within the proposed development's likely Zone of Influence (Zol). The EclA concluded that provided that the proposed development is constructed and operated in accordance with the design, best practice and mitigation measures outlined, significant residual effects are not anticipated on any key ecological receptors at any scale.

5.2.4 Land & Soil

The proposed development has been designed to minimise the impact of land movement. No basement works are proposed, and the disturbance of soil will be minimal. This will include the stripping of topsoil and excavation of the underlying subsoils at this Site. Development of the Site will necessitate the stripping of topsoil and excavation of the underlying subsoils. Considering that the underlying bedrock and soils are well drained, and the area to the north where the majority of construction will take place, is relatively level, it is expected that most rainfall on the Site would percolate to ground rather than flow into surface-water drainage features.

Given the location of the Site, within an existing built-up area, the loss of both land-use and soils is considered appropriate. The proposed scheme retains a significant amount of land for open space and the excavated topsoil will be reused for landscaping.

5.2.5 Water Environment

There are no watercourses within the proposed development site. The closest hydrological feature to the proposed development is the Kippinstown Stream (EPA code: 26K74) north of the proposed development which flows north into the Garrynafela River (EPA code: 26G51) and into Lough Ree SAC (000440) and SPA (004064) at Balaghkeeran Bay, approximately 1.6 km from the proposed

development site. The Kippinstown Stream is connected to the proposed development site via the drainage ditch northeast of the site. This was dry at the time of the site walkover.

There is no basement proposed as part of this development and so the risk to groundwater is not deemed likely. It is not considered that the construction stage would pose a significant risk to the local surface water environment, subject to standard proven construction mitigation measures being implemented. The underlying bedrock and soils are well drained, and the Site is relatively level, it is expected that most rainfall on the Site would percolate to ground rather than flow into surface-water drainage features.

The proposed development's operational phase will connect to the Kippinstown stream directly via a small open drain north of the site in order to facilitate surface water drainage from the proposed development. However, best practice SuDS measures will be implemented as part of the proposed development's operational phase. These include:

- Limiting surface run off in the operational phase to greenfield run off rates (Qbar); attenuation on site via 3 (no.) underground eco bloc attenuation systems with capacity for 1-in-100 year rainfall event with additional allowance for climate change and increased development;
- 3 (no.) petrol interceptors with a peak flow of 100 L/S and storage capacity of 1000L.

These are standard measures, recommended as part of objectives of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027²⁴ and best practice guidance on SuDS²⁵, and are installed regardless of relationships to European sites and thus not intended to address potential effects²⁶. Therefore, there are no sources for effect in this regard.

5.2.6 Flood Risk

There is very low potential for surface water run-off from the neighbouring residential development to the east due, to the drainage ditch separating the two sites. The Office of Public Works (OPW) Flood Maps identifies that the Site or its surrounds have not flooded in the past. Overall, the flood risk to the proposed development Site is low and is not considered to result in an adverse impact to the hydrological regime of the area or increase flood risk elsewhere. The Site is considered appropriate for development from a flood risk perspective.

5.2.7 Cultural Heritage

The nearest archaeological sites to the proposed development are a promontory fort (WM029-047) approximately 1km northwest of the proposed development and a pair of standing stones (WM029-002) approximately 1.22 km northwest of the proposed development (**Figure 5.1**). There are no items listed on the national inventory of architectural heritage located in the immediate vicinity of the Site.

Therefore, there will be no impacts on Cultural Heritage in the area as a result of the proposed development.



Figure 5.1: Archaeological features in the vicinity of the proposed development. Map from Archaeology.ie

Section 6: Type & Characteristics of Potential Impacts

This section of the report focuses on those effects that are likely to occur during both the construction and operational stages, post the application of mitigation measures. The potential for impacts arising during the construction and operational phases has already been considered in the report above. The characteristics of the likely effects arising from the proposed development are rated using the descriptive terminology presented in the EPA (2017) *Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports – Draft*.

We note the criteria of paragraph 3 of Schedule 7, *Characteristics of Potential Impacts*;

• *The potential significant effects of proposed development in relation to criteria set out under paragraphs 1 and 2 above, and having regard in particular to:*

- the extent of the impact (geographical area and size of the affected population),
- the trans frontier nature of the impact,
- the magnitude and complexity of the impact,
- *the probability of the impact,*
- the duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact.

These criteria are dealt within the report above and the predicted post-mitigation significance, quality and duration of the identified likely effects are listed below (**Table 6.1**).

It should be noted that given the nature and scale of the proposed development, there is no likelihood of transfrontier impacts arising from either the construction or operational phases.

Table 6.1: Anticipated post-mitigation impacts.

Characteristic	Possible Effect	Probability	Extent	Significance of Effect	Quality of Effect	Duration
Landscape	Loss of open space character as a result of development of greenfield area	Unlikely	Local	Not significant	Neutral	Permanent
Visual	Emergence of plant and machinery associated with the construction phase	Likely	Local	Not significant	Neutral	Temporary
Land	Change in land use from vacant to residential	Likely	Local	Not significant	Neutral	Permanent
Soil	Stripping if topsoil and excavation of subsoils (Soil is intended to be reused on-site)	Likely	Local	Not significant	Neutral	Temporary
Water	Potential increase in surface water run-off	Likely	Local	Not significant	Neutral	Permanent
Air	Dust emissions associated with construction works, wind blow from stockpiles, or machinery movement may lead to reduction in air quality. Exhaust emissions from construction vehicles may result in a reduction in air quality.	Likely	Local	Not significant/ imperceptible	Neutral	Temporary
Noise	Increase in noise during construction phase	Likely	Local	Imperceptible	Neutral	Temporary
Cultural Heritage	Damage to unrecorded subsurface archaeological features that may exist within the site	Unlikely	Site	Imperceptible	Neutral	Permanent

Section 7: Conclusion

The proposed development does not trigger the threshold for mandatory EIA. This report provides the information required under Schedule 7A of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) to assist the planning authority to screen the proposed development for Environmental Impact Assessment.

This Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report has determined that the characteristics of the proposed development are considered not significant due to the scale and nature of the proposed development, the characteristics and sensitivities of the receiving environment and design and standard proven construction measures that will be implemented as part of the construction and operational phase of the proposed development.

Development of the Site for residential use is appropriate in the context of the applicable zoning objective and national policy. With proposed mitigation measures in place, it is not anticipated that the construction or operational phases of the proposed development, whether considered on its own, or in-combination with surrounding projects or plans, will give rise to likely significant environmental effects. This was also concluded by the accompanying NIS (CAAS Ltd) and EclA (Veon Ecology).

The provision of areas of amenity grassland and the retention of the mature oaks and the conserving and enhancement of the mature treeline for ecological corridors will result in a positive biodiversity impact. While the development, with an emphasis on accessible housing, will provide much needed residential support.

The Natura Impact Statement Report that accompanies the planning application demonstrates that the proposed development will not impact on identified European Designated Sites within the zone of influence of the proposed development either alone, or in combination with, other plans or projects, once mitigation is implemented. The accompanying EclA concluded that provided that the proposed development is constructed and operated in accordance with the design, best practice and mitigation measures outlined, significant residual effects are not anticipated on any key ecological receptors at any scale.

Having regard to the scale and nature of the project and based on a considered assessment taking account of all available information, the proposed mitigation measures outlined in the various detailed technical documents which are routine and known to work, the overall probability of impacts on the receiving environment arising from the proposed development (during the construction or operational phases) is considered to be low.

The overall conclusion of this screening exercise is that there is no requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed development.