



P2288

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT
VOLUME 1: NON-TECHINICAL SUMMARY**

RIVERINE COMMUNITY PARK

LIFFORD-STRABANE

CLIENT: McADAM

AUGUST 2021



the paul hogarth company



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council



Derry City & Strabane
District Council

Comhairle Chathair
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Donegal County Council (DCC) and Derry City & Strabane District Council (DCSDC) are jointly planning the development of the Riverine Community Park (hereafter referred to as the 'Project') following the award of funding by the SEUPB PEACE IV Shared Space & Services, with DCC acting as the applicant.

This document comprises the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the Environmental Impact Report (EiAR) prepared in support of the planning application made for the Project. The EiAR is presented as separate documents comprising the main text and figures (Volume 2) and the accompanying technical appendices (Volume 3). The full planning application and accompanying EiAR can be found at www.riverine-planning.com.

1.1 Project Overview

The Project site straddles the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, being located on either side of the River Foyle, partly adjacent to Lifford, Co. Donegal and partly adjacent to Strabane, Co. Tyrone, with a pedestrian and footbridge connecting the two sides. The proposed location is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Site Location



(Source: Google Earth)

The site is partially located within the River Finn and the River Foyle and Tributaries Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The location of these SACs in relation to the Project and the potential for the project to impact upon them has been assessed throughout the EIAR.

The proposed project is described in detail in Section 3, but will include a cross-border community park, comprising complementary facilities located on the Lifford and Strabane banks of the river Foyle and linked by a pedestrian and cycle bridge.

1.2 Transboundary Context

Given its location across two jurisdictions, it is necessary to submit planning applications to both An Bord Pleanála (ABP) and Derry City & Strabane District Council (DCSDC). As such, it has also been necessary to submit an EIAR in support of each of these applications.

It was recognised from the outset of the EIA process that it would not be appropriate to undertake an EIA only for the Lifford side and an EIA only for the Strabane side, as the two sides of the development are so inextricably linked. Following consultation with both ABP and DCSDC, the agreed rationale was to prepare a single EIA which considers the development as a whole and to tailor the necessary elements, such as policy considerations, to the particular jurisdiction.

1.3 Contents of the EIAR – Statutory Requirements

The EIAR has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the following legislation and having regard to the following Guidance:

- European Commission Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (codification) as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU;
- UNEC Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, 1991;
- The Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2000-2019;
- European Commission, Guidelines for the Assessment of Indirect and Cumulative Impacts as well as Impact Interactions (May 1999);
- European Commission, Guidance – EIA Scoping (2017);
- European Commission, Guidance – EIA report (2017);

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- EPA, Advice Notes on Current Practice (in the preparation of Environmental Impact Statements) (September 2003);
 - EPA, Guidelines on the Information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (Draft, August 2017);
 - European Commission, Guidance on Integrating Climate Change and Biodiversity into Environmental Impact Assessment (April 2013);
 - European Commission Guidance on the Application of the Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure for Large-Scale Transboundary Projects (2013);
 - Circular Letter PI 1/2017: Implementation of Directive 2014/52/EU on the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (EIA Directive);
 - The European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 296 of 2018),and;
 - The Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on Carrying Out Environmental Impact Assessment (2018).

1.4 Methodology

The broad methodology framework used in each environmental chapter includes the following:

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Existing Environment
- Potential Impacts
- Mitigation Measures
- Residual Impacts

Introduction

This section introduces the environmental topic to be assessed and the areas to be examined within the assessment.

Methodology

Specific topic related methodologies are outlined in this section. This includes the methodology used in describing the existing environment and undertaking the impact assessment. It is important that the methodology is documented so that the reader understands how the assessment was undertaken.

Existing Environment

In order to predict any likely impact of the Project it is necessary to first accurately establish and describe the existing environment. Any available existing baseline environmental monitoring data can also be used as a valuable reference for the assessment of actual impacts from a development once it is in operation.

To describe the existing environment, desktop reviews of existing data sources have been undertaken for each specialist area. Desktop studies are also supplemented by specialised field walkovers or studies, where appropriate, to confirm the accuracy of the desktop study or to gather more baseline environmental information for incorporation into the EIAR.

The existing environment is evaluated with particular consideration given to the character of the existing environment that is distinctive and what the significance of this is. The significance of a specific environment can be derived from legislation, national policies, local plans and policies, guidelines or professional judgements. The sensitivity of the environment is also considered.

Potential Impacts

In this section, the EIAR predicts how the Project will interact with the receiving environment. Impacts from both the construction and operation phases of the proposed development are outlined. The evaluation of the significance of the impact is also undertaken.

Mitigation Measures

If significant impacts are anticipated mitigation measures are devised to minimise impacts on the environment.

Residual Impacts

The assessment identifies the likely impacts that will occur after the proposed mitigation measures have been put in place.

1.5 EIA Study Team

MCL Consulting and McAdam have coordinated the EIA with MCL Consulting compiling the EIA. Sub-consultants have undertaken specialist assessments where necessary.

The study team members and the chapters they have prepared within the EIA are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: EIA Study Team

Chapter	Company
Introduction	MCL Consulting
Need for the Development	Donegal County Council
Proposed Development	McAdam
Screening, Scoping and Consultation	MCL Consulting
Alternatives Considered	McAdam
Policy	TOBIN Consulting Engineers
Population and Human Health	MCL Consulting
Biodiversity	MCL Consulting
Land, Soils and Water	MCL Consulting, McCloy Consulting Ltd and Bryne Looby Ltd
Air and Vibration	AONA Environmental Consulting Ltd
Noise and Vibration	AONA Environmental Consulting Ltd
Material Assets	McAdam and Hoy Dorman
Cultural Heritage	John Cronin Associates
Landscape and Visual Impact	Park Hood Ltd
Cumulative Impacts, Interrelationships and Major Accidents & Disasters	MCL Consulting

2.0 NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT

The need for the Project has been identified for a considerable time by both DCC and DCSDC with the key aims of Cross-Community Engagement, Good Relations and Reconciliation – particularly the engagement of the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) community in this area. The site is located in a previously contested area and is now identified as a neutral space by the Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) and PUL communities.

Robust evidence of demand for the programmed activity and services has been demonstrated through stakeholder consultation and 77 letters of support from local groups confirming intent to use and to participate, including commitment from PUL stakeholders. The Project has established a community forum consisting of 32 group representatives – 16 from the Lifford area and 16 from the Strabane area. The communities are continuously engaged in the Project through this forum.

This significant new infrastructure development will facilitate:

- Connection - (improved access) across the border, between settlements, and places of education, employment, worship, recreation, leisure and infrastructure facilities.
- Amenity Creation - the development will provide a safe and pleasant amenity for walking and cycling, to facilitate commuting, socialising, and use as a recreational and leisure facility, and which promotes active lifestyles, physical exercise and participation in outdoor activities.
- Tourism - Facilitate cycle tourism with improved access to visitor attractions and tourism initiatives.

The Project presents an opportunity to meet the changing demands of the local and international tourism market in order to promote economic opportunity.

The Project will maintain and create a viable demand for local services, such as retail and transport linkages, which are vital for the future of sustainable development in this border area.

The Project will unlock the economic and tourism potential associated with the local assets of the area including its border location, its spectacular and unique local scenery, heritage and environment. The Project represents a community driven initiative which has the potential to make more marginal proposals viable and to stimulate growth of tourism, local services as well as walking, cycling related provision.

The Project is being progressed collaboratively through joint planning and development by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council. It will facilitate the creation of new community park infrastructure in excess of 22 hectares by utilising agricultural land and wetlands along with side of the border connected through the creation of a new pedestrian and Cycle Bridge between Lifford and Strabane. The park on the Lifford site will be a designed landscape incorporating indoor and outdoor recreational features, smaller meeting and events spaces for programmed activity, complemented by the use of the naturalised flood plain environment on the Strabane site for informal recreation and environmental education/conservation activities. This diversity of offering makes for a more inclusive and freeing sharing experience.

3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Lifford Proposals

Development of the western portion of the new Riverine Community Park (i.e., the area of the development falling within the Donegal County Council area) and the creation of new community park infrastructure with multi-purpose community facilities and amenities will include:

- Construction of a single storey community resource building with a gross internal floor area 305m², for use as community space including office and refreshment use;
- Construction of a 300m² maintenance compound, surround by 2.25m high ibex fencing to include installation of an approximate 4.0m high by 6.0m wide by 9.0m long prefabricated maintenance shed vehicle storage, washdown area and material storage, surround be ibex fence and access gates;
- Provision of a multi-functional outdoor space and external stage area to accommodate a variety of outdoor events;
- Creation of play areas, a river walk and river access;
- Construction of walkways and cycleways;
- Associated landscaping inclusive of the wetlands of the River Foyle;
- Amenity lighting;
- Provision of car parking with 74 spaces and provisions for cycle parking;
- Site Security including estate style fencing, 2.4m high security fencing and lockable vehicle and pedestrian gates
- Construction of a one way traffic access road 4.5m in width and a 2 way traffic access road 6m in width, with a combined length of 265m to be provided internally within the park;
- Demolition of the existing spectator stand and the construction of a new spectator stand to accommodate 123 spectators;
- Relocation of existing hare coursing track and the construction of greyhound training runs;
- Provision of an informal parking area to accommodate 8 cars;
- Provision of a new 10kV ESB Substation and diversion underground of existing MV (10kV/20kV) ESB overhead cables traversing the site;
- Provision of ground mounted electrical kiosk;
- Provision of a new wastewater pumping station for onward transfer of foul wastewater to the local network;
- Reconfiguration of existing cinema drainage soakaway;

-
- Works on the foreshore including construction of a cast in-situ concrete slipway, 5m wide, with adjoining steps of natural stone paving and the provision of a reinforced grass path to a new timber fishing pod; and,
 - all ancillary development, accommodation works and site services; on a site extending to 14.9 hectares.

3.2 Strabane Proposals

Development of the eastern portion of the new Riverine Community Park (i.e., the area of the development falling within the Derry City & Strabane District Council area) and the creation of new community park infrastructure with multi-purpose community facilities and amenities. The development will include:

- a new area of open space;
- vehicle, cycle and pedestrian access;
- car parking area;
- amenity lighting; and,
- all ancillary development and site services; within the site extending to 7.8 hectares.

3.3 Bridge Proposal

The pedestrian and cycle bridge will be a transboundary structure, providing the iconic and symbolic connection between the two currently separated lands either side of the border.

The proposed bridge location is positioned to ensure best connection between both sides of the park. The bridge design takes inspiration from the historic railway proposing a steel truss design.

The pedestrian and cycle bridge will be a steel truss structure with an overall length of approximately 115m. It will have two spans. The larger span will extend across the river with a length of approximately 88m. The second span will extend over land from the Lifford riverbank to raised ground. The second span will have a length of 27m.

3.4 Accommodation Works Proposal

The operational boundary of the Riverine Community Park on the Lifford side is entirely located within lands belonging to East Donegal Coursing Club (EDCC), with the proposed Park boundary occupying approximately fifteen acres of this property, which is currently populated with existing infrastructure associated with Club activities. In order to facilitate the proposed development on the Lifford site, it is therefore necessary to relocate and/or replace all existing infrastructure belonging to the Club. These relocation and/or replacement works are defined as the Accommodation Works and are as follows:

- Demolition of the existing spectator stand and the construction of a new spectator stand to accommodate 123 spectators;
- Relocation of existing hare coursing track and the construction of greyhound training runs;
- Provision of an informal parking area to accommodate 8 cars; and,
- all ancillary development and site services; within the site extending to 6.5 hectares.

4.0 SCREENING, SCOPING AND CONSULTATION

4.1 EIA Screening

A Screening for Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the project, which recommends an EIA Report is prepared on the basis that there is a real likelihood the Project may have a significant effect on the environment and an EIA will be required based on the potential the proposed development has to impact upon the surrounding environment, particularly that of the River Finn SAC and the River Foyle and Tributaries SAC.

In addition to the above, the development falls within a number of overlapping legislative provisions, which are set out below:

- The proposed pedestrian and cycle bridge at 115m in length falls within the definition of a road development which requires a mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in accordance with Section 50 (1)(a) of the Roads Act, as amended.
- The proposed development will involve works within the Foreshore, specifically the construction of the proposed bridge and slipway.
- The project is set across two planning jurisdictions in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and as such is considered “transboundary” under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Following consultation, An Bord Pleanála confirmed that the proposed pedestrian and cycle bridge should be directed to An Bord Pleanála under section 51(2) of the Roads Act 1993, as amended.

In addition, the remaining proposed park, which involves works partially within the Foreshore of the River Foyle, requires to be assessed by An Bord Pleanála under Section 226(1) and Section 177AE(3) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).

4.2 EIA Scoping

As part of the scoping process for this EIAR, a Scoping Report was prepared to identify the issues, as set out in Article 3 of the Directive, which are likely to be important during the EIA process. The scoping process identified the sources or causes of potential environmental effects, the pathways by which the effects can happen, and the sensitive receptors, which are likely to be affected. As well as identifying which issues should be examined in the EIAR, the scoping process also considered the level of detail that is appropriate to consider for each issue.

A comprehensive scoping consultation process has been carried out to gather feedback and guidance on the requirements for inclusion within the EIAR. A scoping report was prepared and has been used to internally inform the direction of the EIAR.

4.2.1 Scoping Requests

Scoping requests were also issued to prescribed and non-prescribed bodies in which they were invited to provide comments or observations they may have on the proposed development, relevant to their area of expertise. These requests were issued via email with a letter request and the completed Screening Report attached to provide information on the Project. Whilst a Scoping Report would usually be the document included with the scoping request, time restraints in this case did not allow for this. The Screening Report however was very robust and contained adequate information on the Project for the consultees to form an opinion and give feedback on the Project.

Table 2 below lists the bodies that a scoping request was issued to with a ✓ marking those which issued a response.

Table 2: Scoping Requests Issued

Prescribed Bodies	Response
The Office of Public Works (OPA)	✓
Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	✓
Minster for Communications, Climate Action and Environment	
Loughs Agency	✓
Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)	✓
National Transport Authority (NTA)	✓
Northern & Western Regional Assembly	
Fáilte Ireland	✓
Inland Fisheries Ireland	✓
An Taisce – The national Trust for Ireland	
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta - The Heritage Council	
Córas Iompair Éireann (CIE)	✓
An Chomhairle Ealaíon - The Arts Council	
Environmental Protection Agency	
Irish Water	✓
Dept. of Agriculture, Food & the Marine	✓
National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)	✓
Non-Prescribed Bodies	Response
Geological Survey Ireland	✓
Marine Institute	
Farmers Association	

4.2.2 Further Consultations

In addition to the formal request for scoping opinions detailed above, informal consultations have taken place between various bodies and the EIA and design team throughout the project design and EIA preparation process. These consultations have mainly been in the form of virtual and on-site meetings. The meetings have been extremely valuable in allowing the Project team the opportunity to update the interested parties on the latest design strategies and for feedback to be given which has been used to further guide the design of the Project.

As the Project is transboundary in nature, consultations have also taken place within Northern Ireland.

4.3 Public/Community Consultation

As the end users of the Project are to be the general public and mainly the local community, it was crucial to engage with them throughout the design process of the Project. A Project Animator has led community involvement from the initial concept stage, through to the final design. This public consultation has been extremely informative and provided the community groups, the client and the design team a platform to have regular discussion to manage expectations and create the opportunity to raise queries. They also positively influenced the design proposals with a confidence that enabled progress to be made in advance of each meeting.

5.0 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

This section outlines the main park layout and design considerations examined during the development of the proposal, including the reasonable alternatives considered and the main reasons for the selection of the proposed park layout and design, taking into account the effects of the project on the environment.

5.1 Assessment Methodology

In assessing the layout and design proposals, the following scenarios were considered:

- Assessments of Proposals where there may be Conflicts and/or Opportunities with Other Developments
- Assessment of Specific Layout and Design Proposals against the 2017 CWMF Stage 2(i) / RIBA Stage D Concept Design, i.e., The Alternative Layout and Design Proposal
- Assessment of Specific Layout and Design Proposals following Statutory Consultation.

In assessing the layout and design proposals, the following influences were considered:

- Environment
- Health and Safety
- Policy Hierarchy
- Landscape and Engineering
- Construction Costs

5.2 Alternative Site Locations

In consideration of the specific and unique opportunities present by the site, no alternative locations were considered for this proposal.

5.3 Presentation of Findings

The alternative layout and design options considered for the key infrastructure proposals were summarised in the following tables within the Main EIAR Text (Volume 2):

-
- Table 1 Assessments of Proposals where there may be Conflicts and/or Opportunities with Other Developments including:
 - Table 2 Assessment of Specific Layout and Design Proposals against the 2017 CWMF Stage 2(i) / RIBA Stage D Concept Design, i.e., The Alternative Layout and Design Proposal
 - Table 3 Assessment of Specific Layout and Design Proposals following Statutory Consultation.

5.4 Conclusion

Based on the assessment of alternatives, the layout and design options proposed were assessed in the EIA.

6.0 ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS COVERED IN THE EIA

6.1 Population and Human Health

As the Project is transboundary in nature, the Population and Human Health impacts have been considered for both sides of the border. The Population and Human Health Chapter involves a desktop study examining the most recently available Central Statistics Office (CSO) data, for the Lifford area and beyond, and the most recently available Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) data, for the Strabane area and beyond, as well as any relevant maps, indexes and development plans in order to establish the baseline conditions of the local populations, including population trends, land use and settlement structure, employment status, deprivation levels, and tourism and amenity. An examination of the same data at the national level of both Ireland and Northern Ireland has also been considered in order to provide a comparison.

As the two towns are located so close together, the baseline conditions of both Lifford and Strabane were found to be similar. Population trends were found to differ slightly with the Strabane area population growing slowly whilst the Lifford area has seen a reduction in population figures. Employment figures were similar with both areas having higher rates of unemployment than their national averages. Similarly, deprivation levels within both the Lifford and Strabane areas were shown to be higher (i.e. more deprived) than the national averages.

Just as the baseline conditions for both sides of the Project share similarities, the impacts on the both sides are likely to be similar due to the transboundary nature of the Project. It is likely that once complete, the Project will have long term positive impacts for the surrounding population and its health. This Project will provide a high-quality community park for people of all ages to use and will contribute to a greater sense of community across the border. The construction of the foot and cycle bridge will create better connectivity between the towns of Strabane and Lifford, increasing accessibility for both populations.

Furthermore, the Project will provide employment opportunities across a number of sectors, during the construction and then operation of the park and its facilities. Employment opportunities will also be created through servicing the additional numbers of tourists that will be attracted to the area as a result of the Project.

This Project can help the surrounding areas become less deprived by contributing to higher quality of life through the provision of high quality outdoor and indoor public space, amenities and long-term

job creation. The Project will deliver good quality facilities for children and young people living in rural environments and deprived border areas. The Project will engage young people in activities which will stimulate personal development thereby increasing their capacity to engage in civic society.

The new facilities to be provided as part of the Project include The Hub, the playparks, water sports, fishing and the significant areas of new publicly accessible open space. Together these will ensure the joint Strabane/Lifford tourism offer is enhanced and will succeed in attracting more visitors to the area and result in increased visitor spend. Capitalising on its location, the provision of facilities will expand the regional tourism offer.

As the Project will not have any adverse impact to population and human health with respect to the surrounding areas, no mitigation measures specific to the chapter were proposed.

Mitigation measures pertaining to the potential for air and noise impacts during the construction phase are set out, where necessary in Chapters 10 and 11 of the EIAR, respectively. Temporary traffic disruption during the construction phase of the Project and the relevant mitigation measures have been considered within the Traffic Statement (Volume 3 of the EIAR).

6.2 Biodiversity

MCL Consulting was commissioned to facilitate a handover of the ecological investigation surveys for the proposed Riverine Community Park development project in Strabane and Lifford in order to determine the potential impacts to the site's local biodiversity and to recommend suitable mitigation to preserve the local wildlife and habitats.

Ecological investigations have involved an evaluation of the proposed developments impacts to the wider environment and habitats including distance Natura 2000 sites due to its hydrological links, and species-specific surveys identifying key species sensitive to developments of this nature. Stage 1 appropriate assessment was carried out by Eamonn Delaney of Delichon Ecology as part of the screening process to determine and assess the potential negative impacts to local Natura 2000 sites by the proposed development, while identifying components which would require further screening and assessment. MCL Consulting carried out a Stage 2 appropriate assessment to further assess the potential impacts and suggest suitable mitigation measure in order to demonstrate the proposed development would not have any large or long-term impacts on the local Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

Eamonn Delaney of Delichon Ecology also carried out various ecology surveys from 2020-2021 to form a baseline for the proposed site's ecological features and biodiversity, helping to identify areas for further investigation and any protected/priority species within the proposed site area. Various desk studies have been carried out by MCL Consulting in order to help identify historical data indicating the presence of priority species, such as:

- Badgers
- Otters
- Wild birds
- Bats
- Habitats and flora
- Aquatics

While others have been carried out as in-depth investigations as a compromise to restrictive deadlines in order to help indicate the current ecological value of habitats and certain risk factors so suitable mitigation can be suggested or risks negated where data acquisition was not possible, such as:

- Collision risk
- Breeding bird survey
- Aquatic desk study

Multiple site walkovers and surveys have also been carried out over a number of months in order to confirm or rule out a variety of species on site.

Overall, the proposed Riverine Community Park site is considered to yield a high level of biodiversity with established priority species such as badgers who have set up permanent residence in the historical railway embankment and otters utilising the River Foyle SAC as a commuting and foraging route to gain access to extended foraging grounds within the wet woodland of the proposed Riverine Community Park site. However, it was determined that the Strabane side of the site catered to a wider variety of biodiversity on site providing more suitable habitat to host priority species throughout the area.

The results from the ecological investigation surveys have informed some design changes to the project in order to cater for sensitive species such as badgers and Atlantic salmon. These design changes have allowed the proposed development to evolve in a manner that allows for local wildlife to remain unimpeded by the proposed development and has taken into consideration the potential

long term, lasting impacts this development may have on their habitats. Extensive mitigation has also been recommended for the duration of the construction phase with input from consultations with the NIEA and Loughs Agency, in order to ensure proposed plans are within legislation and to the agreeance of these governing bodies.

The ecological investigation surveys have considered all historical records and evidence of current priority species present on site while factoring in the proposed design for the community park and its potential risks and impacts to the local habitats and wildlife. Appropriate mitigation and compensations have been recommended which, when employed, will ensure key sensitive species remain within the area keeping disturbances to a minimum and in some cases negated altogether.

6.3 Lands, Soils and Waters

This diverse chapter provides a baseline assessment of soils (geology, land contamination) and waters (groundwaters and surface waters including flood risk and drainage) environments. The assessment considers likely impacts from the development compared to the pre-development conditions and provides suitable mitigation to minimise those impacts for the construction and operational phase. The development includes a programme of ground re-profiling which is necessary to facilitate the development.

Lifford

Historical deskstudy review indicates limited previous development on the site, with some localised areas affected by railway land, and hare coursing structures. Detailed intrusive and site-based investigations identified the presence of some areas of modest thicknesses of made ground (historical land raise) but no evidence of significant ground contamination. Pollution-free shallow groundwater was encountered sporadically within the upper alluvium, with deeper groundwaters also identified in the underlying sand & gravel which fill the deep river valley gouged out by glaciers. Low permeability ancient schistose bedrock is anticipated at >20m depth across the site and surrounding area. The non-saline groundwater system shows tidal fluctuations and is hydraulically linked to the River Foyle SAC, which is also non-saline in nature and shows tidal fluctuations.

A small surface water flows through the site from lands the west, discharging to the River Dee to the north of the site, and some areas in the north of the site are poorly draining with surface ponding apparent.

The site is predicted to be affected by high probability flooding from rivers. The main hub building is to be constructed on raised ground to protect it from flooding. The proposed development has no significant negative effect on the extent of the flood plain either on the Lifford or Strabane sides.

Mitigation for the development includes measures to protect quality and flow in local surface waters, through the use of 'SuDS', and protect shallow groundwaters hydraulically connected to the River Foyle, with particular emphasis on environmental protection of the soils and waters environments during the construction phase, but also for the operational period of the proposed development. Residual impacts from the development are considered to be insignificant.

Strabane

Historical deskstudy identified significant previous land uses, including multiple railway infrastructure including sidings, embankments (former tracks), engine house, goods shed and ponds with later phases of development including a bus station and travellers rest. The previous land uses has resulted in significant changes to the original landform, with intrusive Investigations identified the presence of large areas affected by made ground / land raise / infill and historical reprofiling. Some localised areas of soil contamination, requiring small-scale remedial works (by dig and dump) to protect end users of the site were identified an area of former railways lands. Some localised shallow groundwater in the upper made ground – alluvium was identified on site but is not significant in terms of posing a risk to human health or to the River Foyle SAC.

Deeper groundwaters also identified in the underlying sand & gravel which fill the deep river valley gouged out by glaciers. Low permeability ancient schistose bedrock is anticipated at >20m depth across the site and surrounding area. The non-saline groundwater system shows tidal fluctuations and is hydraulically linked to the River Foyle SAC, which is also non-saline in nature and shows tidal fluctuations.

A number of small watercourses flow drain through the site from the urban lands of Strabane to the east. These waters show some impacts typical of an urban catchment, but the water quality improves before waters discharge to the River Foyle along the western site boundary. Areas of ponding are present on the site, which have become overgrown with small trees. The ponds are primarily fed by runoff / rainfall and some areas will dry completely in summer months, otherwise draining to the River Foyle via the surface water network.

The site is predicted to be affected by medium probability flooding from rivers. The proposed development has no significant negative effect on the extent of the flood plain either on the Lifford or Strabane sides.

Mitigation for the development includes measures to protect quality and flow in local surface waters, through the use of 'SuDS', and protect shallow groundwaters hydraulically connected to the River Foyle, with particular emphasis on environmental protection of the soils and waters environments during the construction phase, but also for the operational period of the proposed development. Some localised soil remediation will be required to make the site suitable for redevelopment. Residual impacts from the development are considered to be insignificant.

6.4 Air and Climate

AONA Environmental Consulting Ltd. was commissioned to assess the likely significant environmental effects arising from the proposed Riverine Community Park in relation to air quality and climate.

The air quality impact assessment has been prepared to assess the air quality at sensitive receiver locations in proximity the site of the proposed Riverine Community Park site due to the main existing air pollutant sources, i.e. traffic flows on the A5 (The Great Northern Link) and N14 roads in Strabane and Lifford respectively, and to assess the potential air quality impact of the proposed Riverine Community Park.

The air quality impact assessment was undertaken with reference to The Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and the Air Quality Standards Regulations (S.I. 180 of 2011). The rationale for describing the impact of the Proposed Development is derived from the Environmental Protection UK (EPUK) and Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) guidance (EPUK & IAQM) Land-Use Planning & Development Control: Planning for Air Quality (January 2017). As prescribed within Environmental Protection UK and the Institute of Air Quality Management, Land-use Planning & Development Control: Planning For Air Quality (January 2017) the proposed development has been assessed in accordance to Guidance on the Assessment of Dust from Demolition and Construction (IAQM) 2014.

There are no Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in proximity to the proposed Riverine Community Park. The existing baseline air quality is impacted primarily by traffic and heating emissions in the area. Existing air pollutant concentrations were referenced from various sources to quantify the existing air

quality in proximity to the proposed development site, including EPA data for Lifford, the Derry City and Strabane District Council 2019 Air Quality Progress Report for Strabane and to Defra background maps. Pollutant concentrations in the area of the proposed Riverine Community Park are below the relevant air quality standards limit values.

Using the IAQM methodology for the assessment of air quality and dust impacts from construction activities has indicated the a 'Low' level of risk, including the recommended construction phase dust mitigation measures, in terms of dust soiling impacts, impacts on human health and Ecological impacts.

An assessment of the potential air quality impact on the existing residential receivers in proximity to the proposed development site due to additional traffic emissions has been undertaken. The proposed development will have a negligible impact on local air quality using the Environmental Protection UK (EPUK) and Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) guidance "Land-Use Planning & Development Control: Planning for Air Quality (January 2017), based on the future proposed traffic flow information provided by the traffic consultants for the Project.

There will be no building on the Strabane side of the development. A community resource building is to be provided on the Lifford site incorporating meeting/events space, toilets, offices and café. The orientation of the community resource building will be designed to maximise solar gain for space heating and use of a green sedum roof or similar for energy efficiency and positive impacts for pollinating insects. The heating systems for the proposed community resource building are undecided as yet but are likely to be based on a modern air/water heat pump type system. Therefore, emissions from space heating requirements will result in an insignificant impact on local air quality. At this stage of the design process accurate data cannot provided in relation to the exact manufacturer and supplier, etc. However, it can be stated that the emissions from the heating requirements of a modern system in a relatively small community resource building will not result in a significant impact on local air quality.

6.5 Noise and Vibration

AONA Environmental Consulting Ltd. was commissioned to assess the likely significant environmental effects arising from the proposed Riverine Community Park in relation to noise and vibration.

The noise impact assessment has been prepared to assess the noise levels at sensitive receiver locations in proximity the site of the proposed Riverine Community Park site due to the main existing noise sources and to assess the potential noise impact of the proposed Riverine Community Park.

The noise impact assessment and evaluation of the noise impact arising from the proposed Riverine Community Park involved the completion of a baseline noise survey at sensitive receiver locations in proximity the site of the proposed Riverine Community Park in accordance with suitable guideline methodology. This established the current baseline conditions. The existing daytime and night-time noise levels were dominated by road traffic noise. The results of the baseline noise monitoring data indicate that the noise levels at the sensitive receivers in the area of the proposed works are broadly in accordance with the World Health Organisation (WHO) Guidelines for Community Noise, recommended daytime levels of 50 – 55 dB(A) for outdoor living areas and the external night-time levels of 45 dB(A).

The proposed Riverine Community Park will not have a significant operational noise impact, so the noise impact assessment deals primarily with the potential for daytime noise impacts during the construction phase. The worst-case construction noise levels at specific locations in proximity to the expected main areas of construction activity have been predicted using the methods of predicting construction noise levels set out in BS 5228-1:2009+A1:2014.

The recommended daytime construction noise limit of 65 dB LAeq,12 Hour will be achieved at the nearest residential properties. The construction noise impacts will be short-term and will not be significant. Also, while the overall construction activities for the proposed Riverine Community Park will occur over 9 - 12 months, the nature of the proposed works and its duration will mean that noise sensitive receivers will not be exposed to continuous construction noise impact during the construction period. Appropriate construction mitigation measures have been outlined and once implemented, the residual impacts from the construction period will not be significant.

A Construction Vibration Impact Assessment has considered all works with the potential to cause vibration impacts. Appropriate methods of piling and concrete removal as well as further mitigation

measures have been recommended, which when employed will ensure that vibration levels do not exceed unacceptable levels at any of the sensitive receptors.

6.6 Materials Assets

6.6.1 Roads and Traffic

Hoy Dorman were commissioned to prepare a Traffic Statement (TS) for the proposed development. This TS is included as Appendix 12-1 of Volume 3 of the EIAR. As this proposed development spans both Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI) the Traffic Statement considered the scheme as a single project.

Proposed Use of the Riverine Community Park

It is proposed there will be circa 150,000 users of the park per year of which 28,985 users will be related to the community pavilion incorporating the refreshment area and community centre with programmed activities. Several major events are planned in the open space during a typical year, traffic and people management will be considered under an Event Management Plan specific to the events.

Summary of Assessment Methodology

The Traffic Statement provides a comprehensive review of the potential transport impacts of the proposed development, with an agreed plan to mitigate any adverse consequences. The Traffic Statement:

- Assesses the development proposals against National and Local Transport Policy for both NI and ROI;
- Provides details on the existing baseline traffic within the area of influence;
- Assesses sustainable travel modes to the proposed development;
- Assesses the traffic generation associated with the development and the effect on the baseline network;
- Sets out any mitigation measures to facilitate the proposals.

Existing Conditions, Lifford (RoI)

Lifford is a town in Donegal which according to the 2016 Republic of Ireland Census has a population on circa 1,626 people. There are excellent footway links from the residential areas to the various town amenities, these footway links benefit from both street lighting and dropped kerbs with tactile paving.

The proposed site on the Lifford side of the River Foyle is currently greenfield, access to the proposed development will be from Station Road which currently serves as an access to a large carpark that serves a Cinema, The Donegal Council Offices and The Three Rivers Centre.

Existing Conditions, Strabane (NI)

Strabane is a large town in Northern Ireland which according to the Northern Ireland 2011 Census has a population of circa 13,172 people. The A5 protected route runs along the frontage of the proposed development which straddles the River Foyle. Strabane has excellent footway links from the residential areas to the various town amenities, footways are to a good standard which benefit from both street lighting and dropped kerbs with tactile paving.

The Strabane to Lifford Greenway has already been constructed to the south of the proposed development with a ghost pedestrian island to facilitate crossing of the A38 Lifford Road. The Strabane to Cloughcor Greenway is currently being designed with proposals to link into the north of the proposed development.

Roads and Traffic Conclusion

The creation of the Riverine Community Park will encourage the use of the greenways that have been built or are under construction within the area of Strabane and Lifford thus helping to increase the number of cycling tourists and locals to utilise the off-road routes to access the cross-community park. The creation of two controlled Toucan crossings will enable the safe crossing of pedestrians across the A38 Lifford Road and the A5 Barnhill Road on the Strabane side of the proposed development.

The modelling demonstrates that the local road network can accommodate the proposed development without significant detriment to existing conditions. When considering the above on a Sunday which is the peak hour for the proposed development there is little to no impact on the junction's capacity.

All significant events to be held at the proposed development will be subject to an Event Management Plan which will contain mitigation measures to reduce the traffic impact on the local road network within the area or Lifford and Strabane.

It is expected that construction will have a minimal impact on the local road network and will be ongoing for only 9 months, any oversized loads will be subject to risk assessments that the contractor

will carry out and communication with the relevant authorities in each jurisdiction to minimize any delay within the local area. Any impact associated with construction on the surrounding road network will be 'temporary' to 'short-term' in duration, and 'moderate' in significance.

In conclusion the Transport study confirms there are no residual impacts relating to the proposed development.

6.6.2 Built Services

A qualitative description of the resultant specific direct, indirect, secondary, cumulative, short, medium and long-term permanent, temporary, positive and negative effects as well as impact interactions which the proposed development may have, assuming all mitigation measures are fully and successfully applied were assessed. In addition to mitigation measures outlined in this Chapter, mitigation measures have also been considered throughout the EIAR.

Construction Phase

If unregulated, predicted impacts associated with the construction phase of the proposed development on Built Services would be expected to include potential disruption to local natural and human material assets resulting in both short-term and long-term impacts. The implementation of the mitigation measures set out in this Chapter and the subsequent Chapter of the EIA Report would ensure that there is unlikely to be any significant residual impact during the construction phase. Therefore, impacts are likely to be temporary and neutral.

Operational Phase

The proposed development is unlikely to have any significant impact on the local water, electricity or ICT networks and the overall impact with respect to these utilities can be described as long-term and neutral.

The predicted wastewater generation of the proposed development on the Lifford side will be adequately accommodated in the local foul sewer network. Residual predicted impacts on this infrastructure are likely to be long-term and neutral.

The proposed development will be designed to comply with the provision of SuDS and is therefore unlikely to have any residual impacts in terms of the impact on surface water drainage. Refer to Chapter 9, "Lands, Soils and Water" of Volume 2 for details.

6.7 Cultural Heritage

A desktop survey of all archaeological and cultural heritage sites within a study area that encompassed the proposed development site and a 1km buffer around it was undertaken in order to ascertain the heritage constraints and potential impacts on these. This revealed that there are no recorded archaeological sites, Listed Buildings, Protected Structures, National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) records, Defence Heritage sites or recorded battlesites located with the proposed development area. There are however five Industrial Heritage Record (IHR) sites within the proposed development area, two of which have been confirmed to be extant during field survey. Within the study area there are 19 recorded archaeological sites (12 in RoI and seven in NI), 22 NIAH sites (RoI), seven Protected Structures (RoI), 43 IHR sites (including the five within the proposed development area)(NI), 55 Listed Buildings (NI), four Battlesites (NI), one Scheduled Zone (NI) and one Defence Heritage site (NI).

The desktop survey was followed by site inspections of the proposed development site by a team of qualified and experienced archaeologists/heritage consultants. This revealed that no upstanding previously unrecorded archaeological features are extant within the proposed development area. It was also noted that much of the proposed development area had been subject to landscaping, in filing and ground reduction in the past.

Potential impacts (both direct and indirect) on cultural heritage during Construction, Operational and Decommissioning phases was assessed. The proposed development will not result in any likely predicted significant impacts on the recorded cultural heritage resource. However, the proposed development has the potential to have a direct impact on hitherto unknown sub-surface archaeological features during the Construction Phase.

Overall, any potential direct impacts on hitherto unknown sub-surface archaeological features are deemed to be adequately mitigated by a licenced programme of archaeological works with appropriate evaluation, recording and reporting therein.

No likely predicted significant impact is expected on the cultural heritage resource as a result of this proposed development.

6.8 Landscape and Visual

6.8.1 Introduction

The LVIA focuses on key effects and issues as follows:

- The effect of the Project upon the landscape resource;
- The effect of the Project on the perception of the landscape; and
- The effects arising from the Project on visual amenity
- The LVIA methodology can be summarised as undertaking the following key tasks:-
- Site Visit on 5th July 2021;
- Assessing the baseline Landscape Setting and Conditions;
- Evaluation of key components of the Project based on site layouts, plans and elevations;
- Consideration of Mitigation and Enhancement Measures;
- Assessment of Landscape Effects;
- Assessment of Visual Effects; and
- Summary of Significance of Landscape and Visual Amenity Effects.

A 5km range from the Site is deemed an appropriate study area, following site surveys and review of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV).

6.8.2 Receiving Environment

Lifford

The landscape quality and value of the Site at a local and regional level on the Lifford side of the Project is assessed as Medium and the County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024 designates the area as an Area of Moderate Scenic Amenity. The Site is partly situated within the River Finn SAC and River Foyle and Tributaries SAC. There are no sites, monuments, architectural assets or other landscape designations and it is considered that the Site is able to accommodate the Project without significant effects.

Strabane

The landscape quality, value and sensitivity of the Site at a local and regional level on the Strabane side of the Project is assessed as Medium/High. The site is adjacent to the River Foyle and partially sited on a Natura 2000 site (SAC, SPA and pNHA). Despite being close to the built up areas of Strabane and Lifford there is a sense of tranquillity and wilderness and a sense of enclosure with prospects out to the higher ground beyond.

Landscape receptors including the Regional Landscape Character Foyle Valley LCA 6, Landscape character Foyle Valley LCA 27, River Finn SAC and River Foyle and Tributaries SAC.

6.8.3 Construction and operational phase impacts and assessment

The majority of the potential negative impacts are likely to be experienced during the construction phase, the majority of which will be on the Lifford side and which are predicted to last approximately 9-12 months. The operational phase of the project is long term ie greater than 25 years.

Lifford

The construction works will have a **Slight/Moderate** adverse impact on the landscape character in proximity to the Site and **Negligible** in the wider landscape. The Site is directly connected to the River Finn SAC and Foyle and Tributaries SAC and the effects are assessed as **Medium** adverse. However, if mitigation measures during construction are not followed then the effects will be significant. There is some degree of separation between residents and the site and the construction effects will be **Low** Adverse. Whilst there will be some disturbance to pedestrians during the construction phase ultimately the proposals will open up areas of the river and walks which were previously inaccessible to the public and be **Beneficial**.

East Donegal Hare Course Club (EDHC) is to be reconfigured adjacent to the park, which will be **Medium** adverse in the short term but ultimately **Beneficial** as it will provide them with a purpose built site. The dimensions of the proposed viewing stand are similar to the existing building at 17.94m x 9.7m with a height of 6.7m (9.36mAOD).

The size and scale of the Project is small and not uncharacteristic when set within the context of the Three Rivers Complex. Residents in close proximity to the Project have some degree of separation through distance, orientation and screening, however there may be increased traffic and disturbance from visitors.

Strabane

The majority of the landscape is to be retained. The works will involve construction of paths and boardwalk, car park and bridge, which will have a **Slight** adverse effect on the landscape character locally, but **Negligible** in the wider context. The Site is directly connected to the River Finn SAC and Foyle and Tributaries SAC and the effects are assessed as **Medium** adverse. However, if mitigation measures during construction are not followed then the effects will be significant.

The construction phase of the Project will have some adverse effects on the following receptors, the local landscape character, residents in relative close proximity and pedestrians. However, the impact will be short term and adherence to standard construction management guidance will minimise the effects. Mitigation measures to minimise the impact on the sensitive receptors, particularly the River Finn SAC and River Foyle and Tributaries SAC must be followed to avoid significant adverse effects during construction.

The landscape, particularly on the Strabane side of the site will benefit once the park is operational, as it will conserve the wetland areas, increase biodiversity and habitats and encourage the enhancement and protection of the site.

There is a cluster of residences off Park Road, one of which, 16 Park Road, is adjacent to the proposed permanent car park. Residents in this house will have visibility of the car park but the majority of the park on the Strabane side and Lifford side will be screened by vegetation and mitigation includes proposed hedgerow and tree planting to the north of the car park along the existing hedge line. There is no visibility from other residences on the Strabane side. Nor is there any visibility from recreation sites including Strabane Cricket Club, or commercial and retail outlets lying to the north west and south/south east of the site.

6.8.4 Summary of Visual Assessment – Lifford and Strabane

Viewpoint number	Receptors	Location	Side of Site	Sensitivity	Significance Summary
1	Car users, pedestrians	Lifford Road	Strabane	Medium	Negligible
2	Car users, pedestrians, small businesses and residential	Off bridge Street	Lifford	Medium	Negligible
3	Pedestrians	Lifford side of Site	Lifford	Medium/High	Slight positive
6	Car users, pedestrians	Park Road	Strabane	Medium	No effect
8	Car users, pedestrians, residences	Curlyhill Road	Strabane	Medium	Negligible
9	Car users, pedestrians, residences	Cavanlee Road	Strabane	Medium	No effect
10	Car users, pedestrians, residences	Fountain Street	Strabane	Low	No effect
11	Car users, pedestrians	Great Northern Link	Strabane	Medium	No effect
12	Car users, pedestrians	Bradley Way	Strabane	Medium	No effect
13	Car users, pedestrians, residences	Edenmore Lodge	Lifford	Medium	No effect
14	Car users, pedestrians	The Commons	Lifford	Medium	No effect
15	Car users, pedestrians, residences	Gallows Lane	Lifford	Low/ Medium	No effect

In viewpoints 1 and 2 the park on the Lifford side is screened by the built form and vegetation. The flat nature of the landscape will give little visibility of the park on the Strabane side. The footbridge may be partially glimpsed on the bend in the River Foyle. Viewpoint 3 is taken on the Lifford side of the park looking across to the Strabane side. The River Foyle dominates the view. The permanent car park may be partially glimpsed but woodland will screen much of this and the footbridge on the Strabane side will be perceptible but will not be a dominant feature in the view.

The park lies in a tight visual envelope, screened to the north (viewpoint 4, Park Road) by the landform. Heading south down Park Road is a small cluster of residences, one of which lies adjacent to the proposed permanent car park on the Strabane side of the park. The residents in this property will have

visibility of the car park before the proposed native hedgerow on the north boundary matures. There is no visibility from Barnhill Road as the park will be screened by the mature trees lining the road. From the east (viewpoint 5) the narrow horizontal views of the Strabane side of the Project are unlikely to be perceptible, screened by distance and the existing built form. Viewpoints 6, 7, 8 and 9 to the south have no visibility of the Project as they are screened by built form and vegetation. Landform precludes visibility from the west of Lifford (viewpoints 11 and 12) of either side of the Project. From the north west (viewpoint 10) the landform and intervening vegetation will screen any view of the Project.

6.8.5 Summary

The Riverine Community Park is proposed as a cross border park within Lifford and Strabane. The landscape proposals focus on connecting the two currently separated lands either side of the border with a new pedestrian bridge and creating a shared community parkland, linking into the wider landscape and adjacent towns through new routes and a physical connection with the proposed Strabane North Greenway. The proposals for each side complement each other and capitalise on the existing assets of the landscape, offering a diverse range of recreational and educational opportunities for the community and visitors.

The Project will have limited landscape and visual impact. The scale of the proposal, the receiving environment including the landform and surrounding built environment, renders the site able to absorb the Project without unacceptable changes to the landscape character and visual amenity. From the wider landscape the Project on the Lifford side will appear as an extension to the urban edge and existing recreational facilities and on the Strabane side the park will appear as a more managed unique biodiverse and ecologically sensitive landscape.

7.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS, INTERACTIONS & MAJOR ACCIDENTS AND DISASTERS

An assessment of the likely significant cumulative effects of the Project with other developments has been undertaken in ES Chapters 7 – 14. During the assessment process, coordination took place between assessment specialists to ensure that interacting impacts arising from the Project were identified, assessed and, where appropriate, mitigated. None of the assessments have identified any significant cumulative effect when considered against the developments considered in Chapter 15 of the ES.

In addition, while there is potential for the impacts described to interact, it is unlikely, as a result of the mitigation measures proposed, that any of these interactions will result in significant additional impacts that are not already anticipated by each environmental topic.

The Project is designed, and will be built and operated, in accordance with best practice. It has been ensured that the Project is capable of being constructed safely and without risk to health, can be maintained safely, and complies with all relevant health and safety legislation.