Orsted Onshore Ireland Midco Limited

4: MEMORANDUM RESPONSE TO SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

ORNITHOLOGY

Proposed Oatfield Wind Farm Project, Co. Clare: ABP Case No. ABP-318782-24

June 2024

CONTENTS

1 ORNITHOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

The following memorandum has been prepared to address submissions received during the observations and submissions period associated with the Oatfield Wind Farm Planning Application. The planning application for the aforementioned Proposed Development was submitted to An Bord Pleanála on 22nd December 2023 (ABP Case Number: ABP-318782-24). The period for submissions and observations was 22nd December 2023 to 19th February 2024.

This is memorandum number 4 in the Oatfield Wind Farm submission response documentation, which addresses common themes identified within the discipline of Ornithology (corresponding to **EIAR Chapter 8 Ornithology** (hereafter referred to as **EIAR Chapter 8**), submitted as part of the planning application made to An Bord Pleanála).

Responses to submissions received from regulatory & prescribed bodies are presented in Section 2 and responses to common themes in submissions received from the general public are presented in Section 3.

1.2 Statement of authority

Andrew Whitfield MA BA CEnv CEcol (Associate Consultant, RSK Biocensus): Andrew has over 30 years of experience in undertaking and co-ordinating ecological and environmental impact assessments across a wide variety of infrastructure projects. These include projects of varying type and scale, ranging from new nuclear power generation facilities and housing developments to major road and rail construction schemes. Andrew has undertaken Habitat Regulations Assessments (HRA) of various plans and projects including transport improvement options for the Scottish Government, water supply options for Greater London, and the Heads of the Valleys road improvements in South Wales, where Marsh Fritillary and Lesser Horseshoe Bat were a key concern. Andrew has extensive experience of undertaking Phase 1 habitat surveys, surveys for Otter, Water Vole, Badger and Red Squirrel, amphibian surveys, and butterfly and dragonfly surveys. He has given evidence at approximately 20 planning inquiries/hearings in the UK, Ireland and Africa. Andrew led the technical review of the EIAR chapter.

Howard Williams BSc CEnv CBiol MRSB MIFM (Principal Ecologist and CEO, INIS): Chartered Environmentalist and Chartered Biologist who has authored and managed Ecological Impact Assessments (EcIA), Construction Environmental Management Plans and Article 6 Appropriate Assessments (AA) for over 50 wind farm projects. Howard is an expert in the field of avian ecology and has extensive knowledge and experience of prescribing management for a range of terrestrial and aquatic protected species. Howard provided technical support during the production of the EIAR chapter.

Dr Alex Copland BSc PhD MIEnvSc MCIEEM (Technical Director, INIS): Has over 25 years of professional experience working in both statutory and private companies, in third-level research institutions and with environmental NGOs. He is a full member of the

Institute of Environmental Sciences (IES) and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). He is proficient in experimental design and data analysis and has managed several large-scale, multi-disciplinary ecological projects. These have included research and targeted management work for species of conservation concern, the design and delivery of practical conservation actions with a range of stakeholders and end-users, education and interpretation on the interface between people and the environment and the development of coordinated, strategic plans for birds and biodiversity. He has written numerous scientific papers, developed and contributed to evidence-based position papers, visions and strategies on birds and habitats in Ireland. He also sits on the Editorial Panel of the scientific journal, *Irish Birds*, which publishes original ornithological research relevant to Ireland's avifauna. Alex provided technical support during the production of the EIAR chapter.

Peter O Connor BA MSc (Lead GIS Specialist, INIS): Lead GIS Specialist experienced in overseeing the completion of mapping for multiple windfarm projects. Peter has experience in conducting Viewshed Analysis in support of selected Vantage Points for ornithological surveys, involving the use of Digital Terrain Models and Digital Elevation Models in addition to bespoke Viewshed Analysis plugins for QGIS. Peter also has experience with field data capture and integration into project mapping (e.g., for habitats and species), including for figures supporting EIAR chapters and associated reports. Peter led the production of figures, calculations and all other GIS inputs to the EIAR chapter.

Esther McMorrow Donnellan MSc BA (Ecologist, INIS): Ecological consultant with extensive ecological survey experience, notably for habitats and bats. Esther has authored numerous ecological reports including survey reports, EcIA, Natura Impact Statements (NIS) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Reports. Esther co-authored the EIAR chapter.

Megan Doyle MSc BSc (Ecologist, INIS): Ecologist awarded a distinction MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation from Trinity College Dublin and an honours BSc in Zoology from University College Dublin. Megan has extensive report writing experience, including Screening for Appropriate Assessment Reports, NIS, Environmental Impact Assessment Reports and survey reports for a range of protected species. Megan has also undertaken surveys of habitats, bats and terrestrial mammals. Megan co-authored the EIAR chapter.

Cillian Burke BSc (Assistant Ecologist, INIS): Ecologist with a BSc (Hons) in Environmental Science from the University of Galway. Cillian has experience in undertaking multi-disciplinary surveys including habitat and bat surveys, as well as supporting as an Ecological Clerk of Works. Cillian has authored ecological reports including AA Screening Reports, NIS, EcIA and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Reports. Cillian co-authored the EIAR chapter.

Conor Daly MSc BSc (Hons) (Assistant Ecologist, INIS): Ecologist that contributed to the writing of this EIAR. Conor was awarded an MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation and an Honours BSc in Zoology. Conor has been conducting ornithological surveys for projects since 2021 for a variety of projects including industrial estates and Windfarms (Small-Large). Conor has conducted habitat surveys to inform this EIAR. Conor has experience in Raptor conservation with ample experience with birds of prey and pressures and threats to protected species. Conor has provided reports for EIAR and NIS

reports while working with Inis Environmental Ltd. Conor has been a Qualifying member of CIEEM since 2022.

Katie Sullivan BA (Mod.) MSc is an Assistant Ecologist at INIS with a BA (Hons) in Natural Sciences (Zoology) from Trinity College Dublin and an MSc (Hons) in Wildlife Conservation and Management from University College Dublin, where her research focused on modelling the impacts of result-based agri-environmental schemes on pollinator communities in semi-natural grasslands. Katie has experience in bat, mammal, herpetological, ornithological and entomological surveying. As part of her role with INIS, Katie has conducted small mammal trapping and several bird and bat surveys in line with Best Practice Standards. Katie has undertaken bat surveys to inform this project. Katie is also a Qualifying member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

Molly O'Hare BSc MSc carried out bat surveys on this project. She is a Bat Ecologist with Inis Environmental Consultants Ltd. She has a BSc in Ecology and Environmental Biology and an MSc in Marine Biology from University College Cork. Molly has extensive Bat Surveying and Handling experience ranging from Radio Tracking, Mist Netting, Harp Trapping and Hand Netting. She also has experience with carrying out Roost Assessments, Emergence/Re-entry Surveys and various exclusion practices. She was the lead surveyor for bat surveys for this project. Molly also has experience in the preparation and writing of reports, including Ecology Reports and screening for Appropriate Assessment.

James O'Connell BSc (Hons) (Ecologist, INIS): James was awarded a BSc (Hons) in Wildlife Biology from IT Tralee. James regularly conducts ornithological surveys for various projects across Ireland. He has a broad range of ecological survey experience including Vantage Point surveys, transect surveys, habitat classification and bat surveys. James led a wide a range of ornithological field surveys to inform the EIAR Report.

Chris McKiernan BSc (Hons) (Ecologist, INIS): Chris has over three years of experience of carrying out professional ornithology surveys in Ireland on a variety of projects. They received a BSc in Ecology and Environmental Biology from UCC in 2020 and is a Qualifying member of CIEEM. Chris was heavily involved in carrying out and coordinating ornithological field surveys to inform this EIAR Report, including Vantage Point surveys, transect surveys, breeding and wintering raptor surveys, and surveys for wintering waterbirds.

Emily Marsh BSc (Hons) PGDip MSc (Ecologist, INIS): Emily has an MSc in Sustainable Resource Management awarded jointly from the University of Galway and University of Limerick, a Postgraduate Diploma in Climate Change Science & Policy from University of Bristol, and a BSc (Hons) in Environmental & Earth System Science from University College Cork. Emily's expertise is primarily in ornithological surveys, terrestrial mammal surveys and habitat assessment. She is experienced in delivering ecological fieldwork and reporting for renewable energy projects in accordance with industry best practice standards. Emily completed ornithological survey work informing the EIAR including Vantage Point surveys and surveys for breeding and wintering raptors.

Darren McCartney BSc (Ecologist and GIS Specialist, INIS): Darren has worked in both the field ecology and GIS teams at INIS and is a Qualifying member of CIEEM. He has experience of undertaking ornithological field surveys in relevant habitats and completed various surveys to inform the EIAR including Vantage Point surveys, transect

surveys, surveys for breeding waders, surveys for breeding and wintering raptors, and surveys for wintering waterbirds. As a member of the INIS GIS team, Darren also contributed to figure production and habitat calculations for the EIAR.

Michael Whelan (Consultant Ornithologist): Micheal is a field ecologist based in Co. Offaly and has been working for INIS since 2018. Michael has substantial experience with many relevant ornithological survey types and has led varied surveys to inform this EIAR Report including Vantage Point surveys, transect surveys, surveys for breeding waders, surveys for breeding and wintering raptors, and surveys for wintering waterbirds.

Peig Healy MSc BSc (Assistant Ecologist, INIS): Ecologist awarded a distinction MSc in Environmental Leadership and an Honours BSc in International Development and Food Policy. Graduate Member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), Peig has authored reports on sustainability and environmental research, involving policy analysis, case study review, and reporting in relation to Fisheries Policy and EIA. Peig has also produced ecological reports including AA Screening Reports, NIS and EIA Screening. Peig co-authored the EIAR chapter and was involved in bat surveys to inform the EIAR biodiversity chapter.

Nick Henson MSc CEnv (Associate Director, RSK Biocensus): Nick has a wealth of experience from over 18 years as an ecological consultant. His expertise includes ecological impact assessment for a range of projects including wind farms, for which he has extensive experience of providing technical advice and leadership in the UK and Ireland. Nick provided technical support during the production of the EIAR chapter.

George Wilkinson BSc MSc (Senior Ornithologist, RSK Biocensus): George has over six years of consultancy experience and over 15 years of experience of studying and watching wildlife in the UK and overseas. George works primarily in the UK where he frequently leads ecological assessments and surveys for a variety of species and development types including wind farms and solar developments. This has included work on wind farms and other development types in Ireland. George co-authored the EIAR chapter.

1.3 Correction in species and habitat management plan (SHMP)

The version of the SHMP submitted in December 2023 (see **Appendix 7.1** of the **EIAR Chapter 7 Biodiversity**, hereafter referred to as **EIAR Chapter 7**) indicated an area of land not within the landowner agreement schedule (i.e. Figure 1.20, Figure 1.21, Figure 1.22 and Figure 1.24). This was purely a presentation matter and calculations regarding adequacy of compensatory habitats etc. were correct in the original submitted document. The figures referred to above have since been amended in an updated SHMP which can be found in **Appendix 2 of the Biodiversity response i.e. memorandum no. 3** of the submission response documentation).

2 REGULATORY & PRESCRIBED BODIES

2.1 Clare County Council

2.1.1 Potential impacts on Hen Harrier and Red Grouse

Section 8.6 of **EIAR Chapter 8** included detailed consideration of the potential impacts on Hen Harrier and Red Grouse, including potential impacts associated with habitat loss and fragmentation, habitat degradation, disturbance and displacement, during all stages of the Proposed Development. In addition, cumulative effects were assessed based on potential impacts from the Proposed Development in the context of other nearby projects, in as much detail as was afforded by the level of ornithological information available for these nearby projects. These impacts have been minimised where possible within the Proposed Development design and embedded mitigation and are addressed through detailed mitigation including the Species and Habitat Management Plan (SHMP). Detailed Collision Risk Modelling using data collected between 2021 and 2023 identified that anticipated Hen Harrier collision fatalities during the operation of the Proposed Development will be 0.01 Hen Harriers per year. This rate of Hen Harrier collision fatalities would not be significant in a population context. Considering the location and level of Red Grouse activity recorded during the detailed ornithological surveys of the site and adjacent land (with the nearest Red Grouse activity recorded c.469m north of the nearest turbine), the potential for significant effects on Red Grouse is relatively limited, with potentially significant effects identified on a precautionary basis given the suitability of other habitat (including habitat to be removed) for this species and its relevance to Gortacullin Bog NHA. As such, the mitigation specified (including mitigation detailed in the SHMP) is considered sufficient to avoid significant effects on Red Grouse.

It is not possible, however, to undertake comprehensive assessment of cumulative impacts with Knockshanvo Windfarm as there is no publicly available data for Hen Harrier or Red Grouse using the Knockshanvo Windfarm area; as the project has not been submitted to the planning authorities at the time of writing of the original EIAR for the Oatfield Proposed Development. The cumulative assessment of impacts to Hen Harrier (and Red Grouse), therefore, needs to be made as part of the Knockshanvo project application, as the data for the Oatfield windfarm has been made available as part of its planning submission.

The SHMP, as indicated above, will provide managed habitats for foraging Hen Harrier over and above the existing availability of these habitats, providing a net gain for this species, directly supporting action CDP15.12(f) of the Clare County Development Plan "*To promote biodiversity net gain in any new plans/projects/policies to promote development that leave biodiversity in a better state than before*". Furthermore, due to the implementation of the measures for Hen Harrier detailed in the Species and Habitats Management Plan (SHMP) that follow those designed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for their Farm Plan Scheme, tried and tested measures are proposed for the lifetime of the proposed wind farm. This approach aligns with the overall objective of the County Development Plan, including Objective CDP15.12(a) "*To protect and promote the sustainable management of the natural heritage, flora and fauna of the County both within protected areas and in the general landscape through the promotion of biodiversity, the conservation of natural habitats, the enhancement of new and existing*

habitats, and through the integration of Green Infrastructure (GI), Blue Infrastructure and ecosystem services including landscape, heritage, biodiversity and management of invasive and alien species into the Development Plan" and CDP15.12(b) "To promote the conservation of biodiversity through the protection of sites of biodiversity importance and wildlife corridors, both within and between the designated sites and the wider Plan area"

Furthermore, it is noted that the Proposed Development area sits within the Broadford Hills, an area specifically identified within the Clare County Development Plan Clare Wind Energy Strategy as a "*Strategic*" area for wind farm development[1].

The NIS report objectively concluded that, following an examination, analysis and evaluation of relevant information, including in particular the nature of the predicted impacts from the Proposed Development and the implementation of mitigation measures, the Proposed Development will not adversely affect (either directly or indirectly) the integrity of any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Further to DHLGH comment (see below) regarding the SHMP requiring Screening for Appropriate Assessment, this has now been undertaken and the results appended as part of this memorandum.

2.2 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

2.2.1 Screening for Appropriate Assessment of Species and Habitat Management Plan

Screening for Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken in regard of the SHMP and is available as **Appendix 1 to this document**.

Having considered the activities proposed within the SHMP, it is concluded that this element of the application does not require an AA because there is no potential for significant effects on any European Sites, either from the implementation of the SHMP alone or in-combination with other projects. Indeed, the implementation of the SHMP is expected to benefit Qualifying Interests (QI) and Special Conservation Interests (SCI) of the European Sites within the Zone of Influence (ZoI) of the SHMP, including Hen Harrier and Lesser Horseshoe Bat.

Therefore, it is deemed, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the SHMP, individually or in combination with other projects, will not have a significant adverse effect on any European Sites. It is noted that the competent authority (An Bord Pleanála) will make its determination on whether an Appropriate Assessment is required for any of the European Sites described herein.

2.2.2 Efficacy of SHMP

The management prescriptions applied under the SHMP are based upon those used by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme. These measures will benefit Hen Harrier in both the short and long term and will ensure the supply of a substantial area of suitable foraging habitat for the local Hen Harrier population, over and above that potentially lost as a result of the Proposed Development.

[1] https://clarecdp2023-2029.clarecoco.ie/stage3-amendments/adoption/volume-6-clare-wind-energy-strategy-clare-county-development-plan-2023-2029-51390.pdf

The proven ability of management prescriptions to enhance biodiversity has now become imperative, especially outside SPAs where successful pairs of Hen Harriers need the same stable environments afforded to pairs within SPAs, to remain successful. The breeding success of a single pair of breeding Hen Harriers is now essential for recruitment to both the local and national populations and everything must be done to ensure that the Lifetime Reproductive Success (LRS) of Hen Harriers within these areas is maximised. The provision of habitats which will, without question, be beneficial to Hen Harriers, within the range already used by the species, is something that must be integral to every Hen Harrier management plan. In addition, the provision of habitats proximal to Hen Harrier nests is extremely important as parent birds staying close to the nest increases their opportunities for vigilance at the nest, leading to decreased predation risk; nest predation is now a recognised significant risk to eggs and pulli[2].

The overall aim of the SHMP is to provide a net gain of foraging habitat for Hen Harrier for the lifetime of the Proposed Development as close to nesting and foraging areas as possible. The management prescriptions proposed will enhance the existing biodiversity of the site for prey items and wildlife in general, which is an extremely important component of the SHMP if it is to be successful. The Plan also promotes a mosaic of vegetation types, which are optimal foraging habitat, and will improve foraging success rates and, consequently, breeding success rates for the local Hen Harrier population, which is the ultimate target of the SHMP.

It is concluded that the proposed SHMP will provide full and effective additional foraging habitat for Hen Harrier, as part of the Proposed Development for the lifetime of the wind farm.

2.2.3 Consideration of disturbance distance on Hen Harrier

Disturbance distance for foraging Hen Harriers is not quantified in the literature, but Goodship & Furness (2022) note "*Hen Harrier will nest at 200 to 300m from an operational wind turbine (Madders & Whitfield, 2006) or closer (Ruddock & Whitfield, 2007)*". Unpublished data obtained during surveys of Hen Harriers foraging at operational wind farms in Ireland has shown that birds will forage much closer than 250m to wind turbines.

However, no reliance is placed upon Hen Harriers nesting or foraging within 250m of a Proposed Development turbine. The Species and Habitat Management Plan (SHMP) explicitly states that all suitable habitats within 250m of a turbine are considered to be no longer available for foraging Hen Harrier and this exclusion area forms the basis for the determination of the area required for positively managed habitat for Hen Harrier within the SHMP for the lifetime of the windfarm.

[2] Young birds / nestlings that are not yet able to fly.

3 GENERAL PUBLIC

3.1 Theme 1: Loss of wildlife/biodiversity

Generic concerns were raised regarding loss of wildlife/biodiversity as a result of the Proposed Development.

Potential impacts associated with construction, operation and decommissioning of the wind farm have been thoroughly described and assessed in **EIAR Chapter 8** following best practice and appropriate guidance by appropriately qualified and experienced experts.

Section 8.8 of **EIAR Chapter 8** described residual effects on Key Ecological Features (i.e., habitats and species) which, with the adoption of the mitigation measures described, including those detailed in the Species and Habitat Management Plan, are anticipated to be not significant.

3.2 Theme 2: Contradictions between EIAR and non-technical summary statements

The submissions raised a query that there is a contradiction between substantive EIAR and Non-Technical Summary.

The EIAR has been undertaken following relevant guidance, best practice and by appropriately qualified and experienced professional ecologists. The results are in accordance with the full assessments with the NTS providing an overall summary evaluation.

3.3 Theme 3: Redacted content of SHMP

The submissions raised the question of elements of SHMP being redacted partway through the consultation period.

It must be noted that the full SHMP was submitted to ABP on the planning application submission date (22nd December 2024). Following this, on 10th January 2024, the NPWS requested that the SHMP be redacted to protect the precise location of the Hen Harrier nest locations. RSK Biocensus and INIS (project ornithologists) concurred with this request and therefore redacted information detailing the precise location of the Hen Harrier nests.

This demonstrates both the compliance with a prescribed body request and, in the interest of protecting the Hen Harrier species, demonstrates the awareness of the sensitivity of this species, adherence to ecological best practice, and will therefore avoid any adverse effects on local Hen Harrier populations due to unlawful disturbance. The now redacted information is still available to ABP both in hard and soft copies, and the EIAR and SHMP fully evaluate potential impacts based on this information.

3.4 Theme 4: Hen Harrier collision risk modelling

The submissions received show a misinterpretation of the Collision Risk Modelling and Impact Assessments for Hen Harrier. The outcome of this study is summarised below for clarity.

Section 8.6.3.2.1 of **EIAR Chapter 8** states that "*Modelled Hen Harrier collision fatalities are estimated as 0.01 birds per year, equating to one Hen Harrier collision every 76.15 to 87.42 years. As such, when assessed in the context of the Hen Harrier population recorded within the Proposed Development and adjacent land, collision impacts on Hen Harrier during the operational phase are considered not significant.*"

3.5 Theme 5: Lack of consideration of cumulative effects

It has been noted that the submissions suggest that the EIAR failed to consider cumulative effects of other wind farms. This is incorrect and is clarified below.

The area has been subjected to thorough survey and assessment and the results of these surveys are presented within **EIAR Chapter 8**. Where possible, cumulative assessments have been undertaken but the scope of these surveys is limited given the availability of relevant information dependent upon the status of the other applications.

3.6 Theme 6: Potential effects on Kestrel

Concerns were raised regarding all elements of the Proposed Development on Kestrels. The results of the impact assessment are summarised below for clarity.

Potential effects from all elements of the Proposed Development are fully evaluated in the **EIAR Chapter 8** (Section 8.6.3.1.2 and Table 8.11).

The potentially significant effects identified as above are addressed in the mitigation described in **EIAR Chapter 8** Section 8.7.1, including:

- Retainment of areas of more important habitat within the landscape design (e.g., bog, heathland, higher quality grassland/woodland/scrub);
- Minimisation of the extent of habitat loss during construction wherever possible;
- Selection of delivery routes which use existing built infrastructure wherever possible, with laying of cables underground;
- Sensitive timing of construction works with the potential to affect sensitive ornithological features; and
- Presence of an ECoW to oversee any ornithological issues during construction, with appropriate exclusion zones established in relation to any active nests or important winter roosts.

In addition, habitat re-instatement and creation described in the SHMP will have benefit for Kestrel.

The proposed SHMP area is outside of the location of the Knockshanvo area, and any other windfarm, and landowners have entered into legally binding commitments to ensure that the mitigation measures are in place.

The **EIAR Chapter 8** (Section 8.6.3.4.3 Assessment of Cumulative Effects on Bird Populations) states that *"….there is not considered to be potential for significant cumulative effects through habitat loss or disturbance during any stages of the Proposed Development with any other (i.e., non-wind farm) projects. As detailed in Section 8.5, the Proposed Development includes embedded mitigation to minimise the potential for effects, and mitigation and enhancement measures (see Section 8.7) will further reduce the potential for adverse effects."*

The **EIAR Chapter 8** identifies the potential presence of nesting Kestrel near works areas (e.g., the IPP connection route) during the construction of the Proposed Development. As presented in Section 8.5 and Section 8.6.3.1.2 of **EIAR Chapter 8**, detailed consideration has been given to the avoidance of significant effects on nesting birds including Kestrel during construction. Activities with the potential to cause significant disturbance will be minimised wherever possible and undertaken outside of the breeding season. Where such activities must be undertaken during the breeding season, these will be undertaken in accordance with best practice construction methods (Section 8.5.1 of **EIAR Chapter 8**) and under ecological supervision using the procedure specified in Section 8.5.4 of **EIAR Chapter 8**. If an active Kestrel nest is identified, the procedure identified in Section 8.5.3 of **EIAR Chapter 8** will be followed to avoid significant disturbance of breeding Kestrels. With regard to the turbine delivery route specifically, it is not anticipated that any significant road widening will be required in the vicinity of this receptor (i.e., the Kestrel nest). Section 5.2.8.4 Turbine blade delivery route land take and temporary works of **EIAR Chapter 5 Project Description** states that "*Along the route, tree and hedgerow trimming will also be required and these will only be carried out at the appropriate time of the year and in accordance with any licencing requirements.*" Any such activities would be subject to pre-construction surveys and the mitigation measures described above.

EIAR Chapter 5 Project Description, Section 5.5.1 Use of the site following decommissioning states that "*Following decommissioning, the hardstands and crane pads will be covered with soil and reseeded or left to revegetate…*" such treatment would provide ideal habitat for kestrels to forage for small mammals and reptiles.

3.7 Theme 7: Requirement for Natura Impact Statement to contain complete, precise and definitive conclusions

The submissions received identified the need to provide complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions as to the effects of the Proposed Development on protected sites concerned.

A Screening Report for Appropriate Assessment was presented as part of the Application and provides a review of relevant European Union (EU) designated sites of nature conservation value (termed 'European Sites' or 'Natura 2000 sites') and identifies any potential Likely Significant Effects (LSE) from the Proposed Development on these EU designated sites.

Where potential Likely Significant Effects on a European Site were identified, an Appropriate Assessment was undertaken to identify any adverse effects on the integrity of the European Site; a report to inform this (the Natura Impact Statement report) was subsequently prepared and submitted by RSK Biocensus and Inis Environmental

Consultants as part of the Application. These reports accompany **EIAR Chapter 7 Biodiversity** and **EIAR Chapter 8** for the Proposed Development.

The Natura Impact Statement (NIS) report assesses whether the Proposed Development is anticipated to result in any adverse effects on the integrity of any European sites. Where likely adverse effects on the integrity of a European site are identified, the NIS report prescribes mitigation measures for the avoidance of such effects.

The NIS report objectively concluded that, following an examination, analysis and evaluation of relevant information, including in particular the nature of the predicted impacts from the Proposed Development and the implementation of mitigation measures, the Proposed Development will not adversely affect (either directly or indirectly) the integrity of any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.