

256398-06/11/2025-EIAR Appendix 6.2 Botanical Assessment



# APPENDIX 6-2

## BOTANICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

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## Botanical Assessment

Curraglass Wind Farm, Co.  
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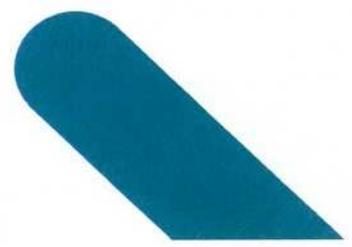
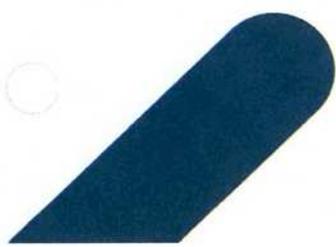
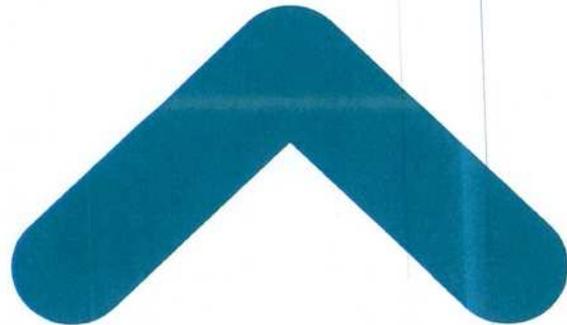
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

MKO were commissioned to undertake detailed botanical surveys to provide an evaluation and assessments of the habitats occurring within the Site. The detailed assessments focused on the habitats occurring under or immediately adjacent to the Proposed Development footprint as these areas will be directly affected by the Proposed Development and therefore, understanding the significance of their loss is necessary for the purpose of impact assessment. Botanical surveys were undertaken on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2024, with additional information collected on in June and July 2025.

## 1.2 Statement of Authority

Field surveys were undertaken by Stephanie Corkery (BSc., MSc.), Pádraig Desmond (BSc.), and Sara Fissolo (BSc.). This report has been prepared by Pádraig Desmond and reviewed by Caroline Kelly.

### Caroline Kelly

Caroline is a Senior Ecologist with MKO with over nine years' experience in ecological consultancy and is a Full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). Caroline holds a BSc in Environmental Biology from University College Dublin (UCD) and an MSc in Applied Ecological Assessment from University College Cork (UCC). In addition, Caroline has completed an Advanced Diploma in Planning and Environmental Law from Kings Inns Dublin. Prior to taking up her position with MKO in June 2025, Caroline worked as a Principal Ecologist with Scott Cawley Ltd. Caroline has strong generalist field ecology skills and has undertaken a range of ecological surveys including habitat, bird (both breeding and wintering), invasive species and protected fauna surveys. She has strong technical reporting skills and has extensive experience in a range of ecological assessments including Appropriate Assessment and Ecological Impact Assessment. She has undertaken ecological assessments and surveys on a variety of project types (e.g. linear infrastructure projects, industrial, commercial, residential recreational, tourism and renewable energy developments).

### Pádraig Desmond

Pádraig is a Project Ecologist with MKO with five years post graduate ecological experience, four years of which have been in ecological consultancy. Pádraig holds a BSc (Hons) in Ecology and Environmental Biology from University College Cork. Pádraig took up his position with MKO in December 2021, prior to which he worked as a Junior Ecologist with Envirico. Through these consultancy roles Pádraig has gained excellent experience in producing ecological reports such as Natura Impact Statements, Ecological Impact Assessments, Biodiversity chapters, Invasive Species Management Plans, and Constraints Reports for a wide range of projects including small private developments to housing developments and renewable energy projects such as solar and wind farms. Prior to the above roles, Pádraig worked as a field ecologist for the Department of Conservation in New Zealand, where he developed a strong field-based skill set. Pádraig's key strengths and areas of expertise are in terrestrial ecology, including vegetation surveys, habitat identification, invasive species surveys, mammal surveys, Appropriate Assessment and Ecological Impact Assessment. Pádraig is also skilled in GIS.

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## 2. SURVEY METHODS

A total of five detailed relevés were undertaken within the Proposed Development footprint. The location of each is provided on Figure 1-1.

Habitats were assessed and described using both Fossitt (Fossitt, 2000) and the Irish Vegetation Classification (IVC) (Perrin et al., 2018) system. Where habitats had a potential to correspond to Annex I habitat type, further detailed assessment of these habitats was undertaken in line with the condition assessment methods outlined in Martin *et al.* (2018), while reference was also made to the *European Commission (2013), Interpretation manual of European Union Habitats. EUR 28.*

Those relevés that were undertaken in peatland habitats followed guidelines set out in the following document:

- Perrin, P.M, Martin, J.R., Barron, J.R., Roche & O' Hanrahan, B. (2014) *Guidelines for a national survey and conservation assessment of upland vegetation and habitats in Ireland. Version 2.0. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 79.* National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Those relevés that were undertaken in woodland habitats followed guidelines set out in the following document:

O'Neill, F.H. & Barron, S.J. (2013) Results of monitoring survey of old sessile oak woods and alluvial forests. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 71. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.

Plant nomenclature for vascular plants follows '*New Flora of the British Isles*' (Stace, 2010), while mosses and liverworts nomenclature follow '*Mosses and Liverworts of Britain and Ireland - a field guide*' (British Bryological Society, 2010).

A fundamental requirement of the IVC is to "*aid in definition and identification of EU Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC) Annex I habitats*" and to "*inform the planning process, for example through environmental impact assessments*".

The Engine for Relevés to Irish Communities Assignment (ERICA) is a web application for assigning vegetation data to communities defined by the Irish Vegetation Classification (IVC). Data can be uploaded, checked for errors and analysed and the results can then be downloaded. ERICA works with both quantitative vegetation cover data (such as are recorded in relevés and other types of botanical recording plots) and presence/absence data, such as species lists. ERICA covers grasslands, woodland, duneland, heaths, bogs, fens, mires, freshwater, saline waters, rocky habitats, scrub, strandline, saltmarsh and weed communities (Perrin, 2019<sup>1</sup>).

The data collected from the botanical assessments was uploaded to ERICA, analysed and the results data downloaded.

<sup>1</sup> Perrin, 2019, Engine for Relevés to Irish Communities Assignment (ERICA), Online, Available at: <https://biodiversityireland.shinyapps.io/vegetation-classification/#ab62059c/manual.pdf>, Accessed, 09.09.2025

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The analysis procedure uses a clustering process to assign classification affinity to vegetation plots based on a degree of membership to each of the communities defined by the IVC. Table 2-1 details the categorizing types of plots utilizing the clustering analysis. This categorizing procedure was utilized to determine if the grassland plots within the study area had affinity to Annex I grassland and whether further assessment was required.

Table 2-1 Categorising types of plots using clustering analysis (after Wisser & de Cáceres, 2013<sup>2</sup>).

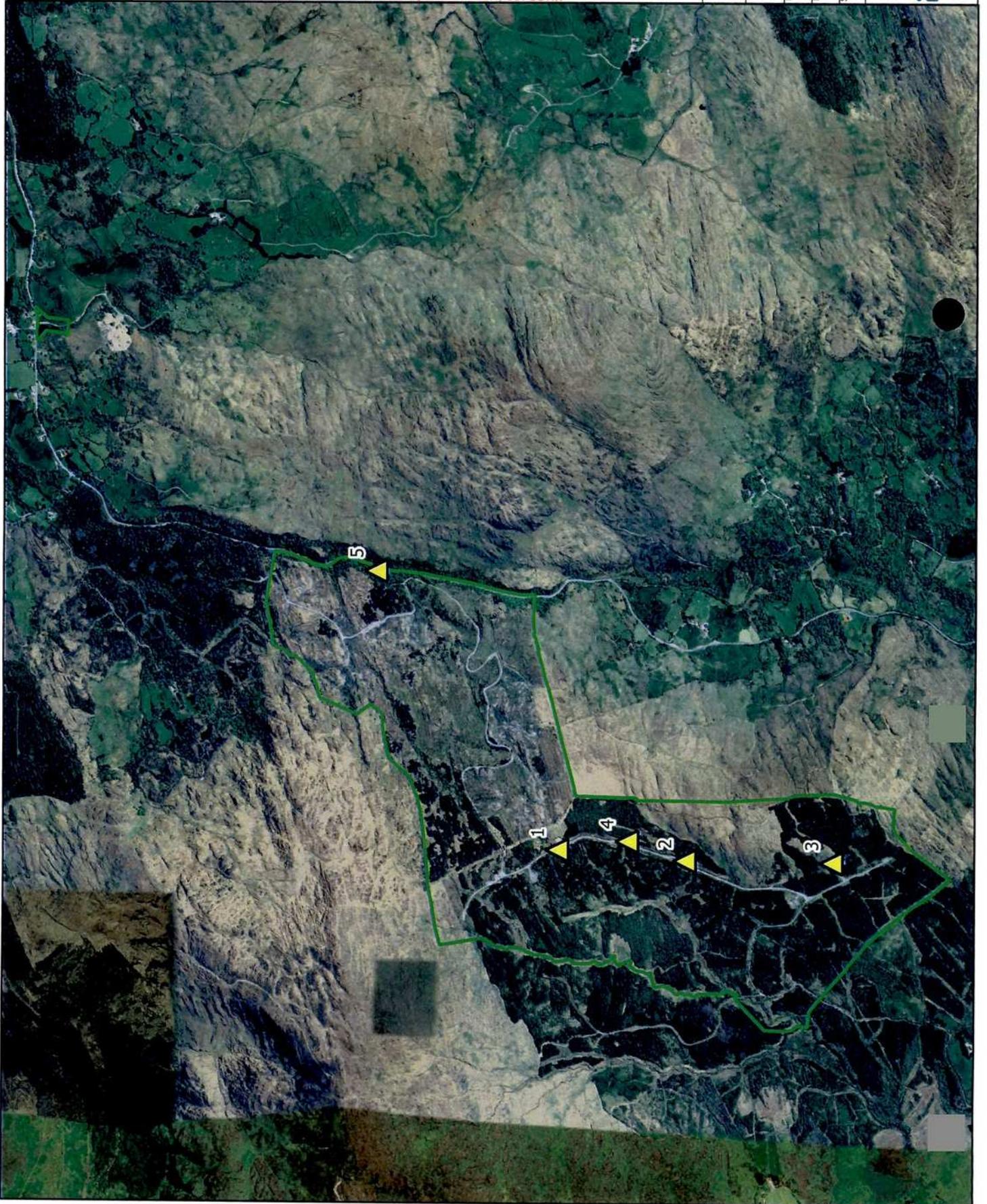
Plot Type	Definition
Assigned	The plot has membership $\geq 0.5$ for one of the vegetation communities and therefore relates to the core definition of that vegetation community.
Unassigned	The plot has membership $\geq 0.5$ for the noise class and is poorly represented by the current classification scheme
Transitional	The plot has membership $< 0.5$ for all vegetation communities and for the noise class. It falls within the scope of the current classification scheme but does not relate to the core definition of any of the vegetation communities.

Detailed relevés were undertaken within habitat which presented higher ecological value and had potential to conform to Annex I habitats. Detailed relevés were not undertaken in habitats which would not be impacted by the Proposed Development footprint, and within habitats which presented low ecological value and low species diversity.

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<sup>2</sup> Wisser, S.K., De Cáceres, M. (2013) Updating vegetation classifications: an example with New Zealand's woody vegetation, *Journal of Vegetation Science*, 24, 80-93.

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**Map Legend**

-  EIAR Site Boundary
-  Relevé locations

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Drawing Title

**Botanical assessments**

Project Title

**Curraglass Wind Farm**

Drawn By	Checked By
PD	CC
Project No.	Drawing No.
240614	Figure 1-1
Scale	Date
1:22,000	2025-08-27

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### 3. RESULTS

The Proposed Development has been designed to maximise usage of existing road and hardstand infrastructure at the Site. As such, several areas of the Proposed Development footprint are located within areas of Spoil and bare ground (ED2) and Recolonising bare ground (ED3), as well as Conifer Plantation (WD4) and Recently felled woodland (WS5). Due to the low ecological value of these habitats, relevés were not undertaken here and instead focused on areas of higher ecological value and species richness which would be directly affected, e.g. where a turbine base was proposed in an area of Conifer Plantation (WD4) and the surrounding hard stand encroached into Wet Grassland (GS4), the relevé was performed in the Wet Grassland (GS4) habitat as, by its nature, it has the potential to be more ecologically sensitive in comparison to Conifer Plantation (WD4).

#### 3.1 Turbine 1

Turbine 1 is proposed to be located in an area of Spoil and bare ground (ED2) and Recolonising bare ground (ED3) habitats, but the associated hardstands encroach into Conifer plantation (WD4) and Wet grassland (GS4) habitats. Given the low ecological value of Conifer plantation (WD4), Relevé 1 was undertaken in Wet Grassland (GS4) habitat.

Table 3-1 Botanical Survey Results – Turbine 1

Relevé 1	ITM: 509065, 563220	Date 6 <sup>th</sup> September 2024
Species	Common Name	% Cover
<b>Vascular Plants</b>		
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft Rush	90
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor Grass	5
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire-fog	15
Fossitt (2000) Habitat Classification	Wet grassland (GS4)	
IVC (Irish Vegetation Community classification)	GL1A - <i>Juncus effusus</i> - <i>Rumex acetosa</i>	
Affinity to Annex I habitat	No (given the absence of positive indicator species, the dominance of rushes, and low species diversity, this habitat does not conform to any Annex I habitat.	

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Plate 3-1 Example of the receiving habitat at Turbine 1

### 3.2 Turbine 2

Most of Turbine 2 hardstand will be located within existing road infrastructure (Spoil and bare ground (ED2)) which is delineated on either side by degraded Wet heath (HH3) and Wet grassland (GS4) habitats. As there will be encroachment into these adjacent habitat, Relevé 2 was undertaken in the degraded Wet heath (HH3) and Wet grassland (GS4) habitat.

Table 3-2 Botanical Survey Results - Turbine 2

Relevé 2	ITM: 509013, 562650	Date 6 <sup>th</sup> September 2024
Species	Common Name	% Cover
<b>Vascular Plants</b>		
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor Grass	40
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	Bell Heather	5
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil	1
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath	5
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	Sweet Vernal Grass	1
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Ling Heather	60

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Fossitt (2000) Habitat Classification	Wet Heath (HH3)
IVC (Irish Vegetation Community classification)	HE2D - <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> - <i>Molinia caerulea</i> - <i>Erica cinerea</i> heath
Affinity to Annex I habitat	4010 Wet heath
4010 Wet heath condition assessment	Within the relevé, no <i>Sphagnum</i> or pleurocarpous mosses, nor any <i>Cladonia</i> species were recorded, which is likely due to the drainage from existing forestry and previous development. Whilst five indicator species of 4010 Wet heath Annex I habitat was present, this Annex I habitat is degraded given it has been drained and had relatively low species diversity.



Plate 3-2 Example of the receiving habitat at Turbine 2

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### 3.3 Turbine 3

Turbine 3 will be located in area of Spoil and bare ground (ED2) and Recolonising bare ground (ED3) habitats. The associated hardstands encroach into habitats such as Conifer plantation (WD4) and Wet heath (HH3). Given the monoculture of Conifer plantation, no relevé was taken in this habitat, as it is a habitat of low ecological value and low species diversity.

Table 3-3 Botanical Survey Results – Turbine 3

Relevé 3	ITM: 509002, 562012	Date 6 <sup>th</sup> of September 2024
Species	Common Name	% Cover
<b>Vascular Plants</b>		
<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Gorse	30
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor Grass	50
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	Bell Heather	10
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil	2
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath	1
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	Sweet Vernal Grass	1
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft Rush	5
Fossitt (2000) Habitat Classification	GS4 Wet grassland / HH3 Wet heath	
IVC community classification	HE4D – <i>Molinia caerulea</i> – <i>Potentilla erecta</i> – <i>Erica tetralix</i> heath	
Affinity to Annex I habitat	4010 Wet heath / 7120 Degraded raised bogs / 7130 Blanket bog (active)*	
4010 Wet heath condition assessment (given the slope of the relevé location, affinity to raised and blanket bog can be ruled out).	Within the relevé, no <i>Sphagnum</i> or pleurocarpous mosses, nor any <i>Cladonia</i> species were recorded, which is likely due to the drainage from existing forestry and previous development. Heavily dominated by purple moor grass with encroaching gorse. Whilst several indicator species of 4010 Wet heath Annex I habitat was present, this Annex I habitat is degraded given the dominance of purple moor grass with encroaching gorse.	

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Plate 3-3 Example of the receiving habitat at Turbine 3

3.4

## New access roads

New access roads within the Site are within areas of Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) Conifer plantation (WD4) and Recently felled woodland (WS5). The forestry is mature and the forest floor is heavily shaded with occasional patches of *Thuidium tamariscinum* moss but was dominated by needle beds and was species poor. In areas of Recently felled woodland (WS5), stumps of forestry remained, with colonising *Juncus* dominated Wet grassland (GS4) and willow/bramble scrub establishing. Additionally, a small section of new access road north of T2 overlaps with an area of highly degraded wet heath, dominated by purple moor grass and rushes. No relevé data was taken from this habitat, as it presented low ecological value and low species diversity .

3.5

## Meteorological Mast

The location of the proposed meteorological mast comprises degraded wet heath that had been drained as a result of the road and forestry plantation. The species within this habitat are recorded in Table 2-4 below.

Table 3-4 Botanical Survey – Meteorological Mast

Relevé 4	ITM: 509105 562921	Date 6 <sup>th</sup> of September 2024
Species	Common Name	REG. No. % Cover

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Vascular Plants		
<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Gorse	5
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor Grass	60
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	Bell Heather	20
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil	5
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	Cross-leaved Heath	5
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	Bell Heather	1
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft Rush	5
Fossitt (2000) Habitat Classification	HH3 Wet heath	
IVC community classification	HE2D – <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> – <i>Molinia caerulea</i> – <i>Erica cinerea</i> heath	
Affinity to Annex I habitat	4010 Wet heath	
4010 Wet heath condition assessment	Within the relevé, no <i>Sphagnum</i> or pleurocarpous mosses, nor any <i>Cladonia</i> species were recorded, which is likely due to the drainage from existing forestry and previous development. Heavily dominated by purple moor grass with encroaching gorse. Whilst five indicator species of 4010 Wet heath Annex I habitat was present, this Annex I habitat is degraded given it has been drained and had relatively low species diversity.	

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Plate 3-4 Example of the receiving habitat at met mast

### 3.6 Temporary Construction Compound

The proposed temporary construction compound is predominantly located at a hardstanding area associated with the Kealkill Wind Farm and was categorised as Recolonising Bare Ground (ED3). The western portion of the compound grades into existing road verge of degraded wet heath, dominated by *Molinia*, and *Juncus* dominated Wet grassland (GS4). Given that the majority of the compound location comprises ED3 which is of low ecological sensitivity (given its disturbed nature), no relevé data was taken in this area.

### 3.7 Proposed Road Widening at Site Entrance

It is proposed to widen the existing access road at the entrance to the Site. The access track is bordered by Oak-Birch-Holly Woodland (WN1) with an infrequent occurrence of beech. A 20m x 20m relevé was conducted in this woodland habitat (O'Neill, F.H. & Barron, S.J., 2013), as shown in Plate 2-5.

Relevé 5	ITM: 510320, 564057	Date 6 <sup>th</sup> of September 2024
Species	Common Name	% Cover
Canopy		
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	30

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<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech	35
<i>Betula pubescens</i>	Downy birch	5
<b>Understory</b>		
<i>Coryllus avellana</i>	Hazel	40
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly	5
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder	10
<i>Salix spp.</i>	Willow	30
<b>Ground Flora</b>		
<i>Blechnum spicant</i>	Hard Fern	2
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove	5
<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	Bramble	10
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken	8
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb Robert	1
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft rush	1
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent-grass	8
Bare ground		30
Fossitt (2000) Habitat Classification	Oak-Birch-Holly Woodland (WN1)	
IVC community classification	WL1C - <i>Quercus petraea</i> - <i>Corylus avellana</i> woodland	
Affinity to Annex I habitat	91A0 Old oak woodland	
91A0 Old oak woodland condition assessment	Within the relevé, negative indicator beech was prevalent in the canopy. Whilst the understory presented several indicators, the ground layer was sparse with encroaching bramble scrub. Additionally, as oak species were absent from the releve data, this habitat does not conform to 91A0 Old oak woodland	

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Plate 3-6 Example of the receiving habitat adjacent to the site access

3.8

## Proposed Turbine Component Turning Area for TDR

A dedicated turbine component turning area is proposed to the northeast of the site, approximately 2.2km from the Site entrance and along the R584, to allow turbine delivery vehicles to access the Site. The proposed turbine component turning area will require removal of fencing and vegetation and the temporary placement of hardcore, so the area can be used during the delivery of large turbine components. The proposed turbine component turning area is comprised of an existing track of Spoil and bare ground (ED2), with narrow verges of Dry Meadows and grassy verges (GS2). This track is delineated by gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), willow (*Salix* sp.), and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) Hedgerows (WL1) and Scrub (WS5). Beyond the boundary of the track, an agricultural field of Improved agricultural grassland (GA1) was recorded to the east, with a soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) dominated Wet grassland (GS4) to the west. The northern section of the turbine component turning area, which comprises the existing R584, comprised Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3). No relevé data was taken for these habitats as they were unlikely to conform to any Annex I habitat, were highly modified, and presented as low ecological value and low species diversity.

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