Appropriate Assessment Screening Report &

Natura Impact Statement

prepared in response to request for further information

for proposed

Lanesborough Outdoor Theatre

in accordance with the requirements of
Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive

by

CAAS Ltd

for

de Blacam and Meagher Architects

on behalf of

Longford County Council

DE BLACAM AND MEAGHER ARCHITECTS

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Document Control

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

CAAS has been appointed by de Blacam and Meagher Architects on behalf of Longford County Council to prepare this Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (AASR) and Natura Impact Statement in response to the Request for Further Information received from An Coimisiún Pleanála (Case ID: 318314) for the Lanesborough Outdoor Theatre, Co. Longford ('the proposed development').

1.2. Report structure

This report sets out an overview of the methodology utilised for this assessment. It then describes the proposed development and associated works, followed by a description of receiving environment of the lands to which the proposed development relates, and any relationships to European sites. Subsequently the factors that determine which European sites are included in the report are described and the selected European sites are identified.

The proposed development and its potential sources for effect are then examined in the context of the receiving environment, connectivity to the relevant European site and their sensitive ecological features i.e. screening for AA. Subsequently, sites that are identified as having a likelihood for significant effects advanced to the next stage of the assessment process and a Natura Impact Statement is advised where mitigation measures need to be applied to prevent adverse effects to European sites. Assessment of in-combination effects arising from other plans and/or projects is also taken into account.

The assessment is undertaken in view of the Conservation Objectives, known sensitivities and threats and pressures on the Qualifying Interests and Special Conservation Interests for each European site, which are listed in Appendices II, III and IV. Appendices V and VI provide supporting information on the AA process, the legislative background and author competencies respectively.

2. Methodology

2.1. AA Screening overview

Screening for AA identifies any likely significant effects on European sites arising from the proposed development, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans. The proposed development and receiving environment are examined in order to determine:

- Whether the proposed development can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site.
- Whether the proposed development will have a potentially significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, in view of the site's conservation objectives or if residual uncertainty exists regarding potential impacts.

The proposed development is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site and therefore will be considered as to whether it may have a potentially significant effect on any European site in screening for AA.

2.2. Relevant guidance

This AASR has been prepared in line with the relevant legislation (ref s1.3), is based on best scientific knowledge, and has utilised ecological expertise, with consideration of the relevant guidance, including the following:

- *Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management,* Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021;

- *Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC,* European Commission Notice, Journal of the European Union, 2021;
- *Commission Notice: Managing Natura 2000 sites - The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC",* European Commission 2018; and
- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities,* Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009.

2.3. Assessment

2.3.1. Desktop review

The desktop review provides supporting information for conducting the source-pathway-receptor (SPR) model and establishing a ZoI. The identification of the "'Conservation Objectives" (COs), "Qualifying Interests" (QIs) and/or "Special Conservation Interests" (SCIs) of European sites requiring assessment as part of this review, is an integral part of the screening for AA process.

QIs are the habitats and species (flora and fauna) listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive respectively, for which each Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been designated under the Habitats Directive. SCIs are bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive for which each Special Protection Area (SPA) has been designated under the Habitats Directive. Under the requirements of the Habitats Directive, the threats and pressures on the ecological / environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs, with specific regard to the COs of each site, are considered as part of the assessment.

The COs or Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) for each site aim to achieve and maintain the favourable conservation status[1] for a particular habitat or species at that site. COs define the requirements for the favourable conservation condition of the QIs or SCIs at a given European site by setting targets for attributes which define the healthy characteristics of a given habitat or species.

Note: where detailed SSCOs have not been prepared for any European site, the below First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives apply:

European site type	First Order Site-specific Conservation Objective[2]
SAC	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected
SPA	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for the SPA

The following databases are utilised in the preparation of this AASR: the National Biodiversity Data Centre[3]; the NPWS[4]; the EPA[5]; data collected for the most recent Article 12 and 17 conservation status reporting cycle, 2019; and *The Status of Protected EU Habitats and Species in Ireland* report

[1] Favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when:
'*population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.*'
Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when:
'*its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable*'.

[2] NPWS Conservation Management Planning website.

[3] NBDC datasets available here

[4] NPWS European sites information and mapping available here and here respectively

[5] EPA datasets available here

(NPWS, 2019). Based on these resources, the desktop review is also comprised of the following elements:

- Identification of European sites within one or several zones of Influence (as defined in s 2.3.3) established using the source -pathway-receptor model (as defined in s 2.3.2);
- Review of the NPWS site synopses and Conservation Objectives for European sites within the zone(s) of influence for which potential pathways from the proposed development area have been identified; and
- Examination of available data on protected species' and habitats' distribution, trends and abundances – where relevant.

Supporting information on threats to individual sites and vulnerability of habitats and species is also reviewed in the following documents where relevant:

- Ireland's Article 17 Report to the European Commission *"Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland"* (NPWS, 2019);
- Ireland's Article 12 Report to the European Commission *"Bird species' status and trends reporting format for the period 2008-2012-"* (NPWS, 2012)
- Site Synopses[6]; and
- NATURA 2000 Standard Data Forms[13].

2.3.2. Source-pathway-receptor model

The assessment of potential for significant effects on European sites is conducted following a standard SPR model, where, in order for an effect to be established, all three elements of this mechanism must be in place. EC guidance[7] outlines the types of effects that may affect European sites. These include effects from the following activities:

- Land take
- Resource requirements (drinking water abstraction etc.)
- Emissions (disposal to land, water or air)
- Excavation requirements (removal of soil and vegetation)
- Transportation requirements
- Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning

This guidance is taken into consideration when applying the SPR model in this AASR.

Examples of a source, pathway and receptor are:

- Source(s) – e.g., pollutant run-off from proposed development
- Pathway(s) – e.g., groundwater connecting to nearby qualifying wetland habitats; and,
- Receptor(s) – e.g., qualifying habitats and species of European sites

Thus, in the context of this report, a receptor is a QI or SCI, or an ecological feature that is known to be utilised by the QIs or SCIs of a European site. A source is any identifiable element of the proposed development that is known to interact with the QI, SCI, or any ecological processes underpinning a QI or SCI. A pathway is any connection or link between the source and the receptor[8], for example a river.

When all three elements of the SPR model are in place, a pathway for potential effect is identified to that European site. The pathway, receptor and source for effect are then examined further by

[6] NPWS (2019); NPWS Database of protected site data and associated documents for each European site; available here. Accessed March 2025

[7] Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission Environment DG, 2001

[8] Receptor example: a Qualifying Interest or Special Conservation Interest of the European site in question in the context of their known sensitivities and Conservation Objectives

conducting a desktop review, in the context of the receiving environment and the characteristics of the proposed development, in order to establish a Zone of Influence for potential significant effects.

2.3.3. Zone of Influence

The Zone of Influence (ZoI) (as defined in the relevant guidance[9,10]) is informed by the SPR model and is the geographical area over which a proposed development could affect the ecological receiving environment in any way that could result in potential significant effects on the Qualifying Interests or Special Conservation Interests of a given European site, in view of the Conservation Objectives of each site.

2.3.4. Characterising potential significant effects

The characterisation of a given effect as significant or not involves the consideration of several factors. The terms and factors used to characterise potential effects[11] in this report, in accordance with the relevant guidelines, are:

- Positive or Negative:
    - Positive - a change that improves the quality of the environment e.g. by increasing species diversity, extending habitat or improving water quality (may also include halting or slowing an existing decline in the quality of the environment).
    - Negative - a change which reduces the quality of the environment (e.g. destruction of habitat, removal of foraging habitat, habitat fragmentation, pollution).
- Extent: the spatial or geographical area over which the impact/effect may occur under a suitably representative range of conditions (e.g. noise transmission under water).
- Magnitude: the size, amount, intensity and volume of an impact/effect. Magnitude is quantified where possible and expressed in absolute or relative terms (e.g. the amount of habitat lost, percentage change to habitat area, percentage decline in a species population).
- Duration: defined in relation to ecological characteristics (such as the lifecycle of a species) as well as human timeframes (e.g., five years, may be short-term in the human context or other long-lived species, but would span at least five generations of some invertebrate species). In addition, the duration of an activity may differ from the duration of the resulting effect caused by the activity (e.g., if short-term construction activities cause disturbance to birds during their breeding period; longer-term implications could be failure to reproduce that season). The Duration of impacts and effects may be described as the following, defined in months/years:
    - Short
    - Medium
    - Long-Term and Permanent, or
    - Temporary.
- Frequency: The number of times that an activity or impact occurs. This will influence the magnitude and/or duration of the resulting effect (e.g., a single person walking a dog will have very limited impact on nearby waders using wetland habitat, but numerous walkers will subject the waders to frequent disturbance and could affect feeding success, leading to displacement of the birds and knock-on effects on their ability to survive).

[9] *Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021.*

[10] CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine. Version 1.3, updated September 2024. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

[11] Parameters adapted from CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.3 (updated Sept 2024). Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

- Timing: The timing of an activity or change may result in an impact, or have different magnitude of impact if it occurs at different times of a given year versus others (e.g., if it coincides with critical life-stages such as a bird species bird nesting season)
- Reversibility: An irreversible effect is one from which recovery is not possible within a reasonable timescale or there is no reasonable chance of action being taken to reverse it. A reversible effect is one from which spontaneous recovery is possible or which may be counteracted by mitigation. It is possible that certain activities can cause both reversible and irreversible effects.

2.3.5. Assessment of significant effects

The CIEEM (2018)[10] guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment define an ecologically significant effect based on a variety of questions and factors, such as:

- is the project and associated activities likely to undermine the conservation objectives of the site, or positively or negatively affect the conservation status of species or habitats for which the site is designated, or may it have positive or negative effects on the condition of the site or its interest/qualifying features?
- is the project likely to result in a change in ecosystem structure and function?

These guidelines also recommend that consideration should be given to whether:

- any processes or key characteristics will be removed or changed
- there will be an effect on the nature, extent, structure and function of component habitats
- there is an effect on the average population size and viability of component species.

The OPR Guidance[12] on conducting Appropriate Assessment for developments defines likely significant effects as the following:

Likely means a risk or possibility of effects occurring that cannot be ruled out based on objective information.

Significant effects are those that would undermine the conservation objectives of the European sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects. The significance of ecological impacts depends on:

- the ecological characteristics of the species or habitat, including their structure, function, conservation status and sensitivity to change, and/or
- the character, magnitude, duration, consequences and probability of the impacts occurring.

When the SPR models is conducted and the Zone of Influence is established; European sites (and their respective QIs and SCIs) that occur within this zone are examined with supporting surveys conducted, if necessary, to ultimately determine whether or not there is a *likelihood of significant effect* on a given European site. This is carried out by assessing objective information such as: the nature of the source for effect; the nature of the pathway; the distances involved; the QIs/SCIs (or 'receptors') involved, their threats, pressures and sensitivities; and consulting best scientific evidence/literature when required.

As such, the presence of all three elements and the identification of a pathway for potential effect, does not automatically constitute the likelihood of significant effect on a European site, and is dependent on factors such as character, magnitude, duration etc. However, the absence or removal

[12] OPR (2021). Practice Note PN01 on Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management.

of one of the elements of the mechanism is sufficient to conclude that there is no potential effect(s) and thus no further consideration required.

Where a likelihood for significant effects on any European site is established to be present, and/or the lack of significant effect cannot be ruled out based on the precautionary principle[13], mitigation measures are required and the project must proceed to Stage 2 AA, where a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is compiled in order to apply relevant and / or tailored mitigation measures intended to prevent adverse effects on the QIs/SCIs of the European sites involved, in view of their Conservation Objectives.

2.4. Supporting surveys

Surveys were carried out to both support the NIS as required and respond to the Request for Further Information made by An Bord Pleanála regarding the proposed project. Methodology for the surveys carried out that are relevant for this NIS are detailed below.

2.4.1. Habitats

Habitats were surveyed on 14/07/2025. Due to the nature and design of the proposed development the survey focused on the site itself (a disused quarry), but also on the edge habitats that may be impacted during construction and additional visitors pressures in the operational phase, in addition to the areas leading up to the quarry (i.e., the pathway and surround leading from Lanesborough village to the quarry), as these will also be affected by increased traffic, footfall and general disturbance as a result of the construction and operational phases of the proposed development. Habitats were surveyed using best practice guidelines[14,15] during the optimal flowering time.

2.4.2. Birds

Both wintering and breeding birds were surveyed within the quarry and nearby amenity grassland on the following dates:

Date	Focus group	Survey type
14/12/2025	Wintering birds	Walked transect and point count
28/12/2025	Wintering birds	Walked transect and point count
02/09/2025	Wintering birds	Walked transect and point count
09/03/2025	Wintering / Breeding birds	Walked transect and point count
13/04/2025	Breeding birds	Walked transect and point count
21/04/2025	Breeding birds	Walked transect and point count
14/06/2025	Breeding birds	Walked transect and point count

Survey effort and type (i.e., a combination of walked transects, and bird point counts) was determined in response to the nature of the proposed site (i.e., a disused quarry with no suitable habitat within the main area), the nature of the proposed development as an events location and considering visitor access pathways and expected distribution in and around the site, and the ongoing levels of disturbance within the site from local visitors and general tourism. All surveys followed best practice guidelines for wintering bird and breeding bird surveys[16,17,18], and were carried out during optimal periods in both seasons, and in suitable weather conditions.

2.4.3. Survey limitations

[13] With regard to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, and case law C127/02 Waddenzee
[14] Smith, G. F., O'Donoghue, P., O'Hara, K., Delaney, E (2011). *Best Practice and Guidance for Habitat Surveying and Mapping.* Heritage Council
[15] Fossitt, J (2000) *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland.* Heritage Council
[16] Scottish Natural Heritage (2014) *Recommended bird survey methods to inform impact assessment of onshore wind farms*. SNH, Perth
[17] BirdWatch Ireland (2012). Countryside Bird Survey Manual - Guidelines for Countryside Bird Survey participants.
[18] Bibby, C., Burgess, N., Hill, D & Mustoe, S. (2000). Bird Census Techniques: Second Edition. Academic Press: London, United Kingdom

All surveys were carried out within the optimum season and conditions for identification and data gathering. All factors surveyed were afforded the survey effort deemed appropriate for the site, surrounding sensitivities and current site use, and proposed development type. Therefore, it is considered that the survey effort is sufficient to support the Appropriate Assessment process for the proposed development.

3. Description of Proposed Development

3.1. General description

The proposed Lanesborough Outdoor Theatre development site is 0.618 ha (6,180 sqm) in area and consists of the construction of a 500-seat outdoor community amphitheatre in former Council Depot at Commons North Lime Quarry, Lanesborough, Co. Longford (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Location of the proposed development

The proposed development comprises (see Figure 3.2):

1. Permanent tiered seating (500 seats)
2. Stage with canvas canopy and steel support structure.
3. Temporary public 'porta-loos' including 1 no. accessible 'porta-loo'.
4. 1 no. 20 foot container (14 sqm) modified for equipment storage.
5. 1 no. 20 foot container (14 sqm) modified to contain function services (temporary bar, first aid).
6. 1 no. Sound booth (7 sqm).
7. Site lighting.
8. Associated landscaping and ancillary site works.

Ancillary accommodations (temporary toilets, bar, first aid, storage) are provided to service events. Car parking is provided in the existing public car park adjacent to Lanesborough Bridge, from which existing pedestrian footpaths provide access to the venue site.

The venue will operate on Friday and Saturday evenings for the months of June, July and August, for live music performances.

3.2. Drainage (wastewater and surface water)

There will be no permanent installation of water services, surface water drainage or wastewater infrastructure as part of the proposed development. All services will be temporary. Wastewater will be collected via temporary toilets (a.k.a. porta-loos) and transported off site after each event to an EPA licenced wastewater disposal facility. All drinking water will be provided on site via a temporary drinks bar and all surface water will percolate on site through permeable surfaces such as gravel and grass lawn.

3.3. Lighting design

The complete lighting plan will be complied at the detailed design stage but will follow the below structure of practice methods and design for artificial lighting at ecologically sensitive locations[19,20,21]:

1. No lighting installed on site shall have a colour temperature greater than 2700 K (or a G-index of ≥ 2.0)
2. Light sources should feature peak wavelengths higher than 550nm to avoid the component of light most disturbing to bats.
3. All lighting shall be LED warm lighting with no metal halide, compact fluorescent light sources used.
4. All lighting on site will be designed in such a manner as to reduce light spill to the surrounding ecologically sensitive areas [i.e., the surrounding semi-native woodland, and particularly the rock face of the disused quarry (as this is bat roost habitat)] as much as possible by implementing the following measures:
    a) All lighting on site shall be designed to be projected away from the sensitive ecological features of the surrounding landscape
    b) All lighting installed shall be designed to point towards pathways and central floor of the proposed outdoor theatre
    c) Light beams of all installed lighting should not exceed an angle 80 degrees.
    d) Baffles or cowls can be used to assist in directing light away from woodland where necessary.
5. All lighting will only be in use during events and have a “switch-off programme” for when events are not taking place.
6. All lighting during events will be dimmable and censored during events to reduce lighting on site as much as possible when not required. Exceptions for censored lighting areas which may require continual lighting during the events for health and safety / risk management reasons.
7. All lighting will comply with best energy efficiency standards.

[19] EPA 2024. Irish GPP Criteria: Indoor & Outdoor Lighting. Available here.
[20] The Heritage Council. Environmentally Friendly Lighting Guide.
[21] Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals, 2023. Guidance Note GN08/23 Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night

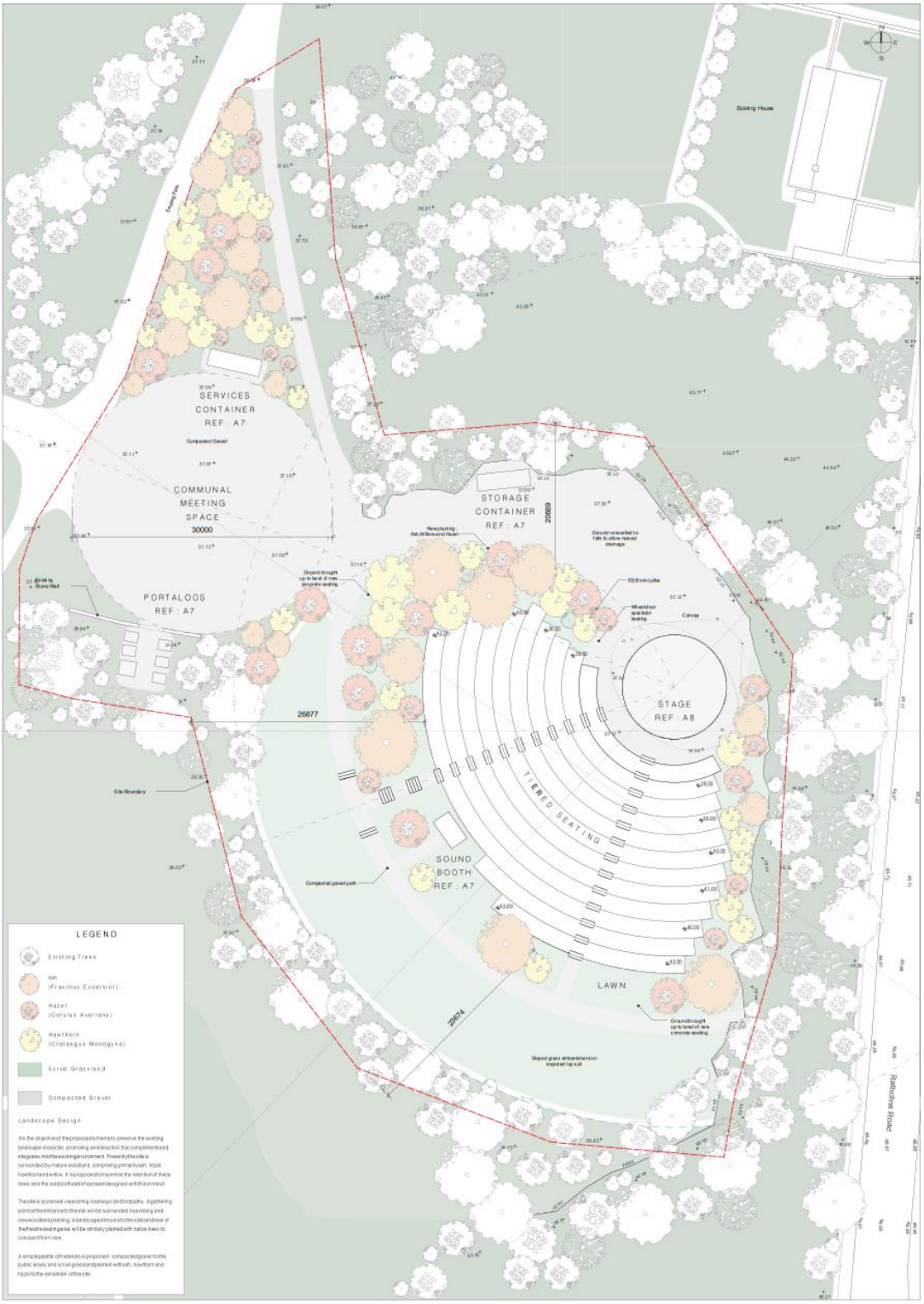

Figure 3.2 Plan of the proposed development

4. Receiving Environment

4.1. General description

The proposed development is located just south of the village of Lanesborough, County Longford, and is bordered by Lough Ree to the west, the Rathcline Road to the east and the Rathcline Woods to the south. This site is contained almost entirely within the disused quarry (Figure 3.1) which is situated along a public access route leading from Lanesborough village, through a large area of amenity grassland along the shore of Lough Ree, and eventually into Rathcline Woods. The area of

amenity grassland preceding the proposed site is heavily used during the spring and summer months by visitors for camping, fishing and boating activities on the small marina.

4.2. Habitats

A full habitat map is provided in Figure 4.1 and accompanies the below discussion. The proposed site is composed almost entirely of exposed gravel (ED1) and scrub (WS1). There is no vegetative growth whatsoever within the centre of the quarry, it being pure gravel deposit. There are areas along the edge of the quarry where spoil in the form of soil and rock mixture and grass clippings have been deposited over time as there is evidence of previously disturbed ground or earthen deposits being recolonised over previously bare ground (ED3), and presently dominated by species such as bramble (*Rubus plicatus*), field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*), false oat grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), marsh horsetail (*Equisetum palustre)* and rosebay willowherb (*Chamaenerion angustifolium)*. There are also occurrences of creeping speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*) and scarlet pimpernel (*Lysimachia arvensis*) in the disturbed ground, however these are much less common.

Where accessible/visible, there are areas of intermittent wetting in the winter months. A small pond occurs in winter in the southeast of the quarry which wet in winter and dry in summer and is likely a remnant basic from quarry activities. This area is similarly surrounded by recolonising bare ground of the same species outlined above. An additional area that is freshwater in winter was identified along the southern boundary of the proposed site but not contained within the bounds of the previous quarry activities. Therefore, this may be a naturally occurring area (possibly of a karst basin) that floods in the winter months. This area also contains high value mature *Salix spp.* (WN6) with a wealth of bryophytes and has remained undisturbed. This area is not accessible due to thick bush but likely provides high value habitat for amphibians and mammals. This illustrates the high ecological value of the habitat which immediately surrounds the boundary of the proposed site and the ecological sensitivity therein.

Some areas of scrub have developed along the hedgerow and woodland which border the quarry, consisting of mostly bramble (*Rubus plicatus*) and field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*). These scrub habitats encroach on the hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) dominated hedgerows which border the northern edge of the pathway which leads from the quarry into the open amenity grassland (GA2) which borders Lough Ree. This grassland area is intensively maintained for recreational and tourism purposes, with a continually closely mown sward of perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), accompanied by white clover (*Trifolium repens*) and occasional ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), and is accompanied by a large hard surfaced car park.

Karst limestone habitat occurs just outside of the proposed site boundary to the southeast, along the shore of Lough Ree. Lough Ree SAC is designated for Limestone pavements [8240]. The Site Synopsis for the SAC states that "*Limestone pavement occurs occasionally around the lake shore. The most substantial area is at Rathcline in the extreme north-east. While this has been planted with commercial forestry since the 1950s, it still displays a diverse representation of pavement types, from the typical clint-gryke system to large blocky pavements and scattered boulders*." This exposed area has been colonised by species such as creeping speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*), scarlet pimpernel (*Lysimachia arvensis*), black medic (*Medicago lupulina*), chickweed (*Stellaria media*), greater bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) – and bordered by scrub of gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), bramble (*Rubus plicatus)*, blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), eventually tending back towards the semi-native Rathcliffe woodland habitat. On the lake side of this karst limestone is a mixture of reed beds and *Salix spp*.

Therefore, the habitats within the exposed gravel area of quarry itself are of low value, however due to the nature of such disused quarries, and its proximity to several habitats of high ecological value

the habitats immediately surrounding the boundary of the proposed development are highly sensitive to disturbance (such as noise, light, footfall and/or damage directly to the habitat).

4.3. Hydrology and hydrogeology

Lough Ree is an expansive freshwater lake which occurs approximately 80m from the proposed site boundary that is also an SAC designated for freshwater habitats and species such: as Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)* [91E0, Otter (*Lutra lutra*) [1355] and Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition* - type vegetation [3150]. Lough Ree is also an SPA designated for species which are sensitive to changes in water quality for foraging and reproduction. There is no direct surface hydrological connectivity between the proposed site and Lough Ree. However, the proposed site also lies partially on / is surrounded by areas of Karst limestone. This habitat is of high value in itself as it is one of the Qualifying Interest for which the SAC is designated [8240], but it also provides a direct connection between the surface of the site and groundwater, and thus Lough Ree SAC (Figure 4.2).

As a result, a Hydrogeological assessment was conducted (by Aqua GeoServices, 2025) for the proposed development site, which also informs this assessment. The resulting report, which accompanies the documentation submitted for the FI request, states that: "*Both point and diffuse recharge occur in this GWB. Swallow holes and collapsed features provide the means for point recharge, diffuse recharge will occur over the entire GWB via rainfall percolating directly through the epikarst (due to the lack of subsoil). As a result, groundwater would show a very rapid response to recharge. The lack of surface water drainage in the vicinity of the quarry confirms that potential recharge readily percolates into the groundwater system*." And that "*The GSI has assigned a groundwater vulnerability rating of "Extreme" (X and E) within the proposed site area and surrounding lands. The shoreline has been assigned a groundwater vulnerability rating of "High", which is not consistent with the presence of outcropping limestone pavement and should be revised as "Extreme" (X – rock near or at surface)."*

Therefore, due to the geology of the site and proximity to two European sites with species and habitats that are highly sensitive to changes in water quality, the proposed site is of high sensitivity with regards to surface water runoff and high risk of pollution.

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Figure 4.1 Habitat map of the proposed site

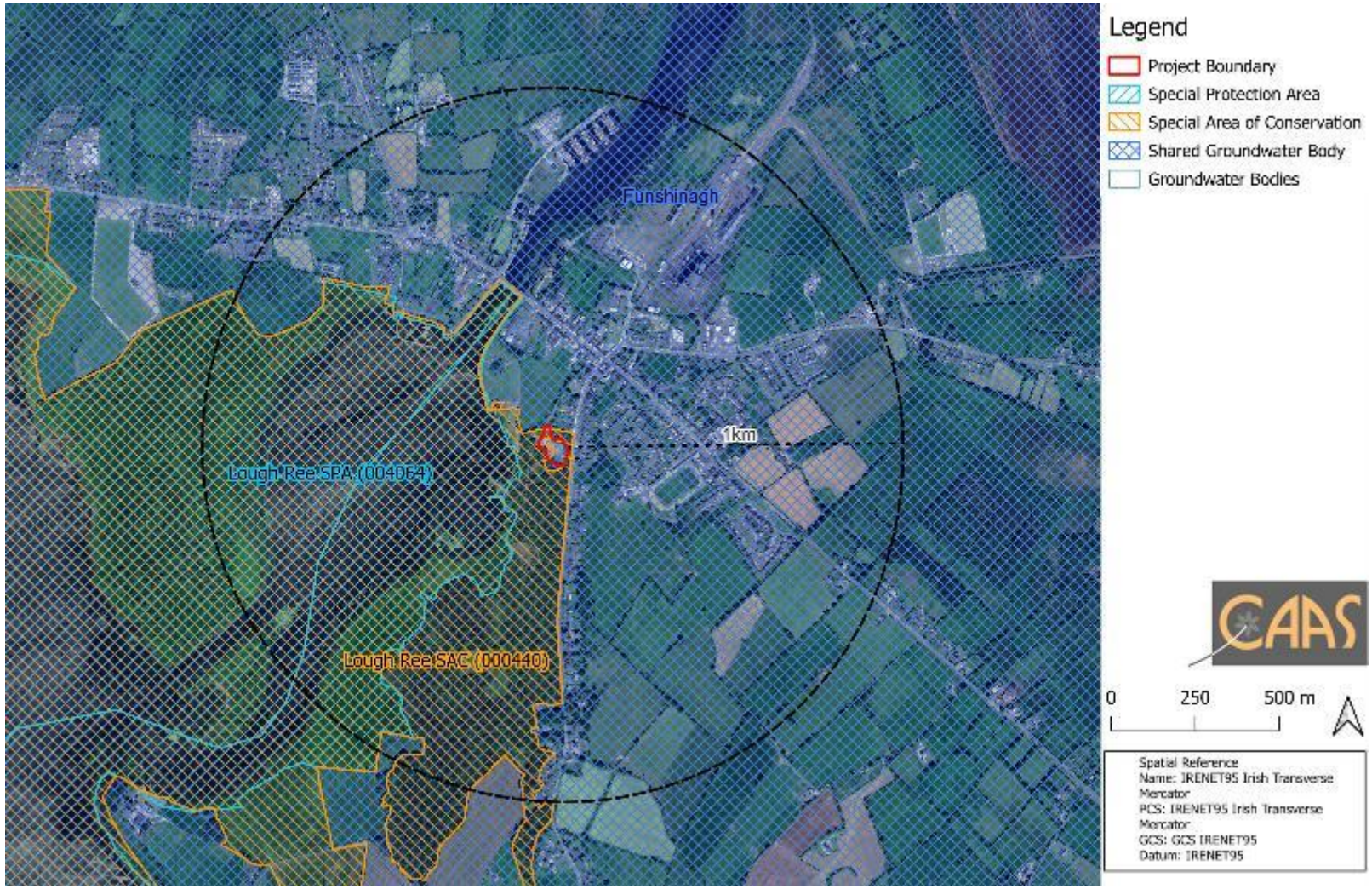


Figure 4.2 Relationship of the proposed development boundary to hydrogeological features and European sites [22]

[22] Source: NPWS Protected Sites and EPA River Scheme areas (datasets accessed July 2025)

4.4. Winter bird surveys

Surveys were carried out during the peak winter foraging season for foraging SCI species with 4 days covering 24 hours of the peak wintering season.

No wintering birds were observed landing or roosting within the boundary of the proposed development. This is likely due to the largely unsuitable habitat for waterfowl within the disused quarry which is surrounded by thick semi-natural woodland. Similarly, there were no records of SCI wintering species utilising the amenity grassland which occurs between the proposed site and Lanesborough, providing access and parking. This could be due to the level of continual disturbance from visitors and vehicles at the site, and the wide availability of alternative grassland habitats in the landscape immediately surrounding Lough Ree.

All records of wintering SCI species are of 4 (no.) species flying over the proposed site, but each species displays a high level of activity above the site (Figure 4.3 & Figure 4.4), indicating there are stable resources supporting these species in Lough Ree and the surrounding landscape.

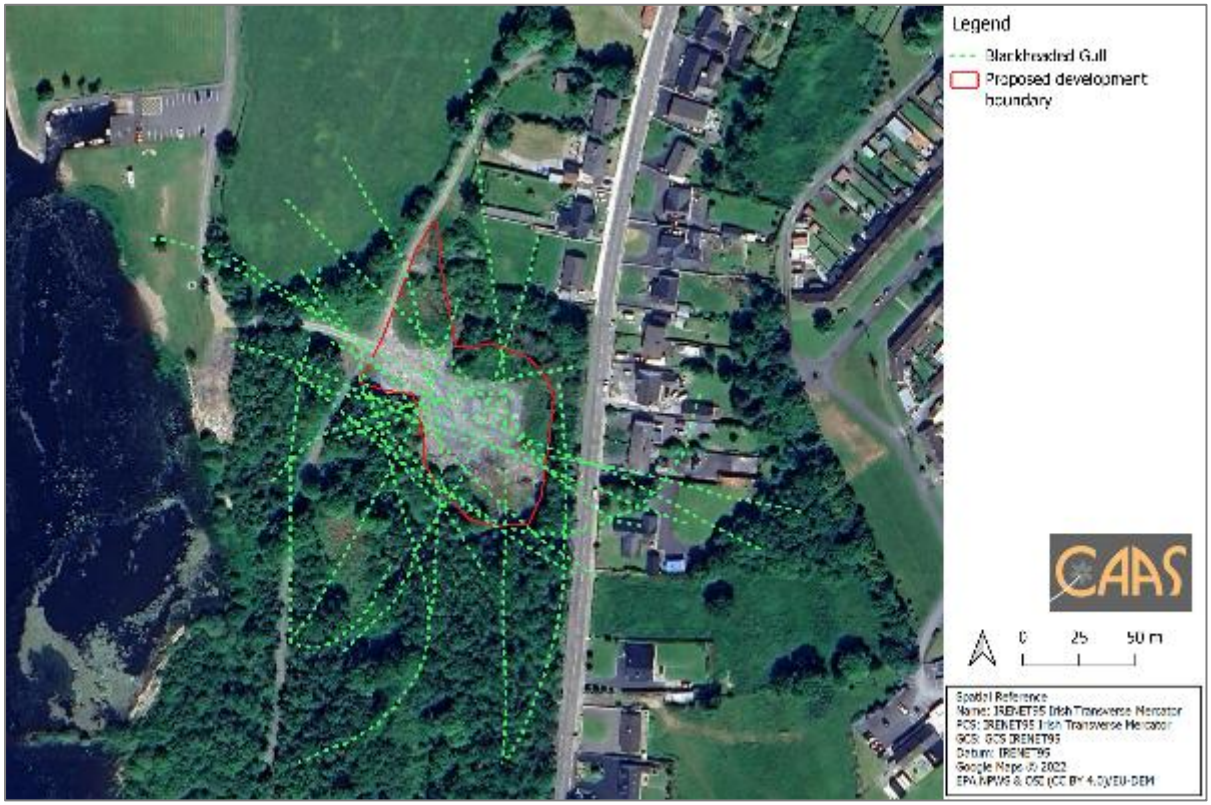


Figure 4.3 Black-headed gull flight paths

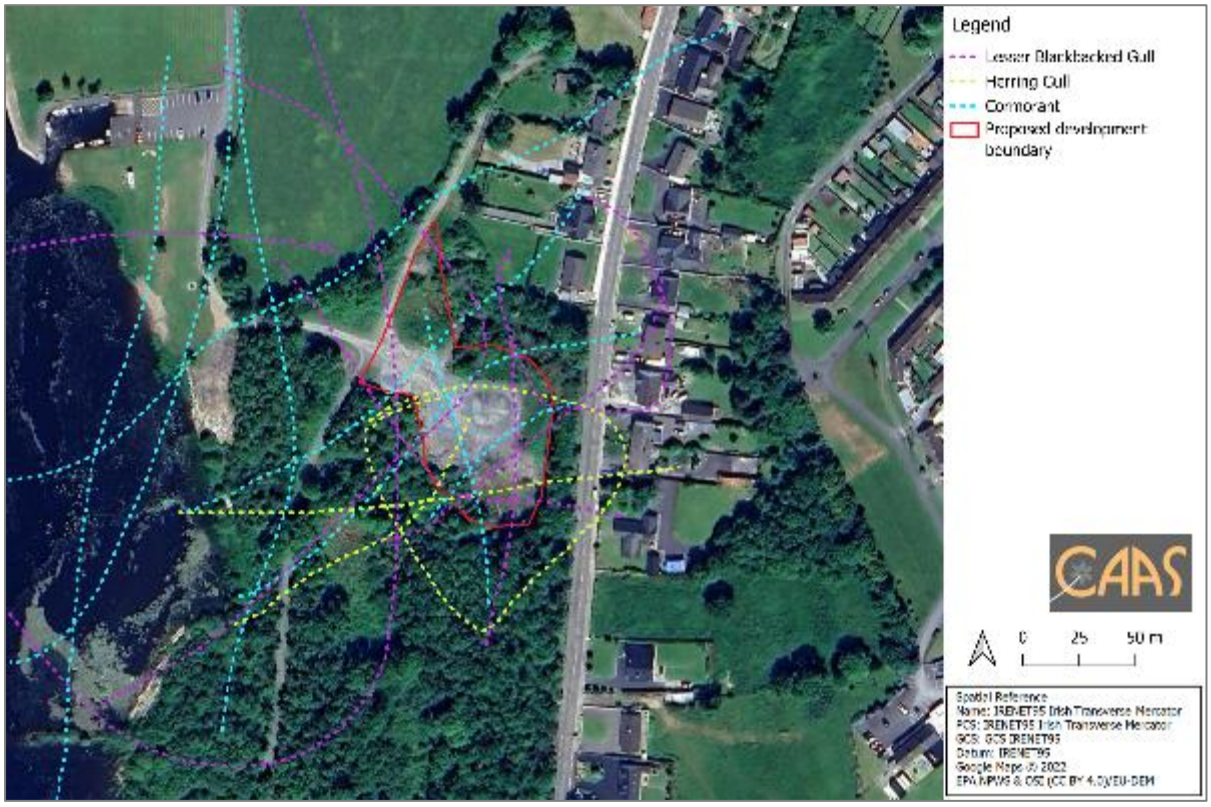


Figure 4.4 Lesser black-backed gull, Herring gull and Cormorant flight paths

4.5. Breeding bird surveys

Considering the sensitivity of this site and nature of the proposed development, breeding bird surveys were also carried out over 4 days covering 24 hours. Results of the total number of species recorded show a large diversity of 41 species recorded from transects and point counts within or flying over the proposed site (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Bird species recorded within the proposed development

Species name	Birds Directive / SCI species	Red list status[23]
Blackbird	-	Green
Blackcap	-	Green
Black-headed Gull	Yes	Amber
BlueTit	-	Green
Bullfinch	-	Green
Chaffinch	-	Green
Chiffchaff	-	Green
Coa Tit	-	Green
Cormorant	Yes	Amber
Collared Dove	-	Green
Dunnock	-	Green
Goldcrest	-	Amber
Goldfinch	-	Green
Great Tit	-	Green
Herring Gull	Yes	Amber
Hooded Crow	-	Green

[23] Gilbert G, Stanbury A and Lewis L (2021), "Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020 –2026". Irish Birds 9: 523—544

House Sparrow	-	Amber
Jay	-	Green
Jackdaw	-	Green
Kingfisher	Yes	Amber
Lesser Blackbacked Gull	Yes	Amber
Linnet	-	Amber
Little Egret	-	Green
Longtailed Tit	-	Green
Magpie	-	Green
Mistle Thrush	-	Green
Peregrine Falcon	Yes	Green
Pied Wagtail	-	Green
Raven	-	Green
Redwing	-	Red
Robin	-	Green
Rook	-	Green
Siskin	-	Green
Song Thrush	-	Green
Starling	-	Amber
Swallow	-	Amber
Swift	-	Red
White-tailed Eagle	-	Red
Willow Warbler	-	Amber
Wood pigeon	-	Green
Wren	-	Green

The vast majority of breeding birds were recorded as either seen and/or heard from within the quarry, in the woodland and scrub habitats immediately surrounding the proposed development boundary – with the exception of the kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis)*.

Such high levels of activity were recorded within the quarry site that it was not practicable to map all of the records as they could not be distinguished. All species were recorded as seen and heard in abundance within this small area – indicating that the habitats around the edge of the quarry are of high ecological value for breeding birds. In addition, two resident/breeding SCI species were also observed. A peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus)* was seen flying over the quarry and a kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis)* at the lake shore, and in addition, a white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) was observed crossing the quarry and circling overhead (Figure 4.5) on two separate surveys; on March 9th and April 24th 2025.

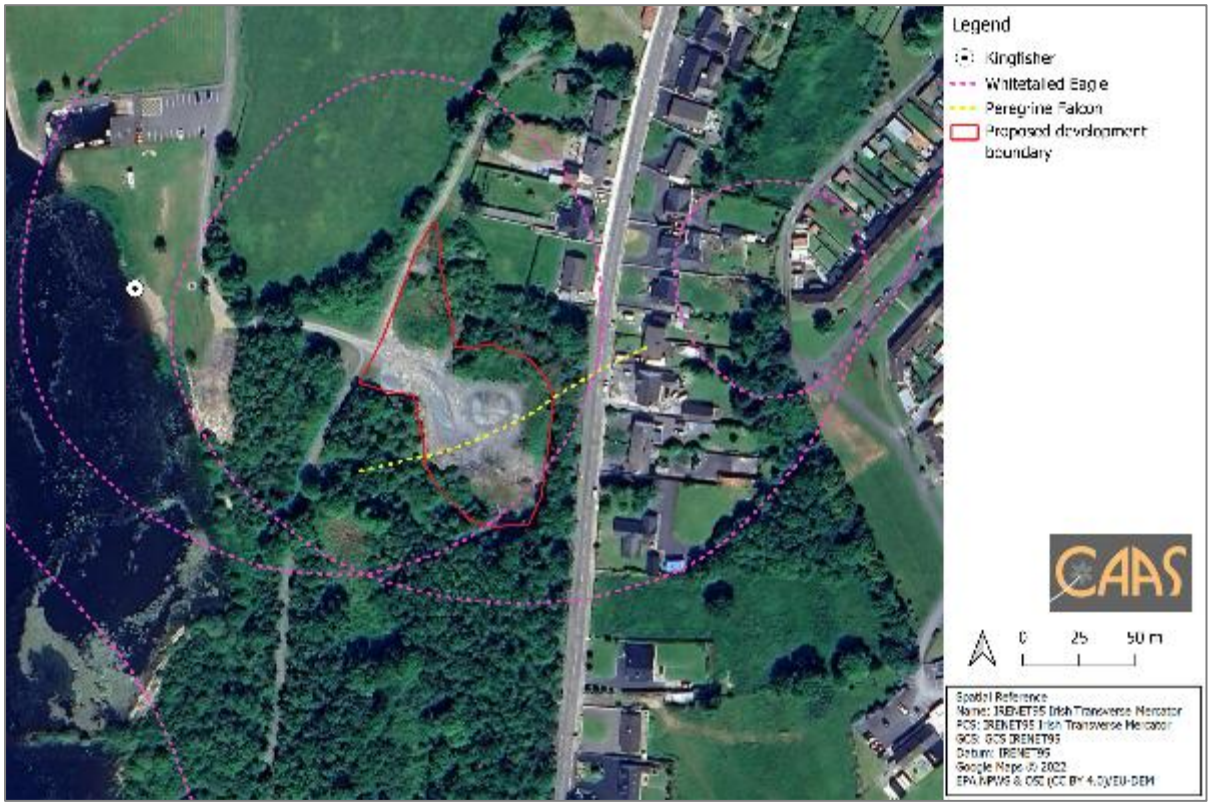


Figure 4.5 White-tailed eagle and peregrine falcon flight paths, and kingfisher

Three of the breeding bird species recorded are red list[23] species, eleven are amber listed, and six are Birds Directive / SCI species designated for SPAs. In summary, surveys have shown that the proposed site is not of value for wintering bird species but of high local and national value for breeding bird species in terms of diversity recorded and habitat availability.

5. Identification of relevant European sites

5.1. Source-pathway-receptor model

Pathways with sources for potential significant effects
The information and supporting surveys provided above inform the source-pathway-receptor model and the assessment of potential for significant effects.

There are hydrological and hydrogeological connections between the proposed site and Lough Ree SAC and SPA via surface water run off sources through the karst limestone bedrock within the area. Lough Ree is designated for several species and habitats that are sensitive to pollution via groundwater. Therefore, there is a direct pathway for potential effects via surface run off from earthworks, siltation, dust, cement, in the construction phase through groundwater connectivity with Lough Ree SAC and SPA. There will be use of permeable gravel in the operational phase allowing rainwater to percolate, and there will be no wastewater or mains water services installed in the operational phase of the proposed development.

No wintering SCI species were recorded utilising any habitat types within the proposed development site. Considering this, and the habitat types recorded there in, it is considered that the proposed site is of negligible value for SCI species and thus there is no pathway for effect for SCI species regarding loss of habitat foraging or roosting habitat within the proposed development site.

Considering the proximity of the proposed development to Lough Ree SPA, the level of flight activity by various SCI species recorded above the proposed development site, and the nature of the

operational phase, there are potential pathways for noise disturbance to SCI species as a result of the proposed development in the operational phase. Bird populations can be sensitive to noise disturbance[24], depending on the species, time of year, type of noise etc. (with research ongoing)[25]. However, a noise assessment conducted by Allegro Acoustics (2025) of the current baseline ambient noise levels during the daytime and evenings at the proposed site, showed the current ambient LAeq levels at the proposed site range from 44 to 63 dB LAeq with most above 58 dB LAeq (Table 5.1). As this is the current baseline at the site, it is expected that faunal species utilising or crossing the site on a regular basis are habituated to ambient noise level of 55dB.

It is proposed, through various management measures of speakers positioning and angles, to keep db levels produced as a result of music performance at that are received at ecologically noise sensitive locations (Figure 5.1) at or below 55 db (Table 5.2), which is below the current baseline levels measured as occurring at the site in 2025 (Figure 5.1). These factors, combined with the intermittent nature of the events for the operational phase, will ensure that there is no source with a pathway for potential of significant effects on SCI species due to noise disturbance as a result of the proposed development.

Table 5.1 Baseline ambient noise at the proposed development site [26]

Measured Noise Levels – 2025 Survey									
Location	Meas No.	Start Time	Period	Duration	L_{Aeq}	L_{A90}	L_{A10}	L_{Amax}	L_{Amin}
					dB	dB	dB	dB	dB
NSL1	3	07/08/2025 17:44	Day	00:30:00	62	40	50	97	32
	8	07/08/2025 21:13	Eve	00:30:00	44	36	46	71	29
NSL2	4	07/08/2025 18:20	Day	00:30:00	59	39	60	82	32
	7	07/08/2025 20:31	Eve	00:30:00	60	34	61	81	31
NSL3	2	07/08/2025 17:08	Day	00:30:00	63	40	63	87	35
	6	07/08/2025 19:55	Eve	00:30:00	58	37	58	82	32
NSL4	1	07/08/2025 16:35	Day	00:30:00	60	39	61	82	34
	5	07/08/2025 19:13	Eve	00:30:00	61	37	61	82	33

[24] Veon, J.T. and McClung, M.R., 2023. Disturbance of wintering waterbirds by simulated road traffic noise in Arkansas wetlands. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, *87*(4), p.e22387.
[25] Engel, M.S., Young, R.J., Davies, W.J., Waddington, D. and Wood, M.D., 2024. A systematic review of anthropogenic noise impact on avian species. *Current Pollution Reports*, *10*(4), pp.684-709.
[26] Extracted from Allegro Acoustics 2025. Lime Quarry Theatre - Planning Stage Noise Assessment.

Figure 5.1 Location of receivers / monitors in ecologically noise sensitive locations[26]

Table 5.2 Modelled noise (dB) levels for amplified music at ecologically noise sensitive locations[26]

Modelled Noise Levels - Scenario 2: Amplified Performance	
Model Receiver	Predicted Noise Levels (dB L_{Aeq})
E01	52
E02	50
E03	52
E04	44
E05	42
E06	39
E07	39
E08	38

Therefore, upon applying the SPR model, considering all possible sources for significant effect from the proposed development, and all possible pathways to the identified QI and SCI receptors; a hydrogeological pathway with a sources for potential effects as a result of the implementation of the proposed development has been identified for Lough Ree SAC and Lough Ree SPA – as summarised in Table 5.3 below.

5.2. European sites identified for screening assessment

Considering the nature and size of the proposed development, and the proximity of the European sites identified, a ZoI (Zone of Influence) which extends from the proposed site to Lough Ree SAC and SPA via the groundwater connection identified, is considered suitable for potential effects resulting from the proposed development. This ZoI encompasses the European sites listed in Table 5.3 and illustrated in Figure 5.2.

Table 5.3 European sites identified for screening assessment

Receptor/ European site	Qualifying interests	Distance (km)	Source(s) for potential effect	Pathway(s) identified for potential effect	SPR link present?	Screening required?
Lough Ree SAC	Otter *(Lutra lutra)* [1355], Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120], Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150], Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates *(Festuco-Brometalia)* * important orchid sites [6210], Active raised bogs [7110], Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior *(Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)* [91E0], Alkaline fens [7230], Limestone pavements [8240], Bog woodland [91D0]	Within / adjacent	Surface runoff of silt, construction materials, cement, fuel, soil storage and dust in the construction phase during heavy rainfall	A Regionally Important Karstified Aquifer occurs beneath the proposed site, with karst limestone pavement around the site. These characteristics create a hydrogeological connection between the groundwater sensitive habitats and species of Lough Ree SAC with the proposed development site.	Yes	Yes
Lough Ree SPA	Little Grebe *(Tachybaptus ruficollis)* [A004], Wetland and Waterbirds [A999], Whooper Swan *(Cygnus cygnus)* [A038], Wigeon *(Anas penelope)* [A050], Teal *(Anas crecca)* [A052], Mallard *(Anas platyrhynchos)* [A053], Shoveler *(Anas clypeata)* [A056], Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* [A061], Common Scoter *(Melanitta nigra)* [A065], Goldeneye *(Bucephala clangula)* [A067], Coot *(Fulica atra)* [A125], Golden Plover *(Pluvialis apricaria)* [A140], Lapwing *(Vanellus vanellus)* [A142], Common tern *(Sterna hirundo)* [A193]	0.80	Surface runoff of silt, construction materials, cement, fuel, soil storage and dust in the construction phase during heavy rainfall	A Regionally Important Karstified Aquifer occurs beneath the proposed site, with karst limestone pavement around the site. These characteristics create a hydrogeological connection between the groundwater sensitive habitats and species of Lough Ree SPA with the proposed development site.	Yes	Yes

The Conservation Objectives for the above European sites that have been considered throughout this report and the SPR model are included in the following NPWS/Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht documents which were utilised in this assessment:

- NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives for Lough Ree SAC [IE0000440] Version 1.
- NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives for Lough Ree SPA [IE0004064] Version 1.

Figure 5.2 European sites considered for screening

6. Screening of European sites

This section of the report concerns the final stage of the screening process. Information has been collected and is presented on the proposed project and its relationship to the relevant European sites. The sensitivities of each relevant European site are identified and the potential significant effects on these sites resulting from the proposed development have been identified, assuming an absence of any controls, conditions, or mitigation measures, as is required in the AA screening process.

The European sites identified by the SPR model as being within a ZoI for significant effects are discussed, in view of their QIs and SCIs and their sensitivities (Appendix III and IV) and assessed for a likelihood of significant effects in Table 6.1 below. Should a likelihood of significant effects be identified for any European site, a Natura Impact Statement (otherwise knowns as Stage 2 AA) is be required.

Table 6.1 Screening assessment of the potential effects arising from the proposed development

European site	Qualifying feature[27]	Analysis for likely significant effects	Likelihood of significant effects
Lough Ree SAC	Otter *(Lutra lutra)* [1355], Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120], Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150], Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates *(Festuco-Brometalia)* * important orchid sites [6210], Active raised bogs [7110], Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior *(Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)* [91E0], Alkaline fens [7230], Limestone pavements [8240], Bog woodland [91D0]	Considering the Qualifying Interests and known sensitivities of this European site (detailed in Appendix III of this AASR), in view of their Conservation Objectives, and the potential effects identified in s5, this SAC is sensitive to hydrological interactions, land use management, and groundwater interactions. This SAC is partially within and adjacent to the proposed development. There are sources for significant effect via hydrogeology during the construction phase due to the presence of limestone bedrock connecting the proposed site directly to this SAC. Considering the nature of the proposed development's construction phase with the hydrogeological characters of the site, and the proximity of this SAC, there is a risk of significant effects the Qualifying Interest of this SAC in the absence of mitigation. As sources and pathways with a likelihood for significant effects on this European site have been identified, mitigation is required and under Article 6(3), a Natura Impact Statement must be prepared.	Yes
Lough Ree SPA	Little Grebe *(Tachybaptus ruficollis)* [A004], Wetland and Waterbirds [A999], Whooper Swan *(Cygnus cygnus)* [A038], Wigeon *(Anas penelope)* [A050], Teal *(Anas crecca)* [A052], Mallard *(Anas platyrhynchos)* [A053], Shoveler *(Anas clypeata)* [A056], Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* [A061], Common Scoter *(Melanitta nigra)* [A065], Goldeneye *(Bucephala clangula)* [A067],	Considering the Special Conservation Interests and known sensitivities of this European site (detailed in Appendix III of this AASR), in view of their Conservation Objectives, and the potential effects identified in s5, this SPA is sensitive to hydrological interactions, disturbance interactions and groundwater interactions. As above, there are sources for significant effect via hydrogeology during the construction phase due to the presence of limestone bedrock connecting the proposed site directly to this SPA. This SPA is designated for species that are sensitive to changes in water quality of their breeding and/or foraging habitat. Considering the nature of the proposed development's construction phase with the hydrogeological characters of the site, and the proximity of	Yes

[27] Term used to encompass both Qualifying Interests of SACs and Special Conservation Interests of SPAs

European site	Qualifying feature[27]	Analysis for likely significant effects	Likelihood of significant effects
	Coot *(Fulica atra)* [A125], Golden Plover *(Pluvialis apricaria)* [A140], Lapwing *(Vanellus vanellus)* [A142], Common tern *(Sterna hirundo)* [A193]	this SPA, there is a risk of significant effects on the Special Conservation Interest species of this SPA in the absence of mitigation. As sources and pathways with a likelihood for significant effects on this European site have been identified, mitigation is required and under Article 6(3), a Natura Impact Statement must be prepared.	

7. Appropriate Assessment Screening Conclusion

This Appropriate Assessment Screening, which has been produced in order to inform the competent authority on the AA process, has examined the likelihood of potential significant effects on European sites arising from the proposed Lanesborough Outdoor Theatre, utilising the best scientific information and data available, and with regard to the precautionary principle, and has found that the proposed development has a likelihood of resulting in potential significant effects on 2 (no.) European sites in the absence of mitigation measures, namely:

- 000440 Lough Ree SAC
- 004064 Lough Ree SPA

Therefore, in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, potential for significant effects on European sites as a result of the implementation of the proposed Lanesborough Outdoor Theatre cannot be ruled out, and Stage 2 AA and the production of a Natura Impact Statement is required.

8. Natura Impact Statement

The objective of the Natura Impact Statement is to analyse the likely significant effects identified and determine whether the proposed development would have any residual adverse effects on the European site(s) identified, alone or in-combination with other plans or projects upon the application of appropriate and tailored mitigation measures. The following documents have been reviewed for the European sites identified to inform the appropriate application of mitigation measures for the effects identified:

- NPWS Site Synopses;
- *NPWS Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms; and*
- *NPWS Conservation Objectives and supporting documents.*

8.1. Mitigation measures

The below specified mitigation measures will be applied throughout the construction and operational phases for the proposed development to address the potential effects identified in this report (see section 5). All mitigation specified is relevant for this NIS. Additional mitigation measures are provided in the Outline Construction Management Plan which accompanies the application.

8.1.1. Construction phase measures – Lough Ree SAC

Qualifying Interests / receptors	Source(s) for potential adverse effect	Mitigation measure(s)	Residual impacts post mitigation?
Otter *(Lutra lutra)* [1355], Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120], Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150], Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates *(Festuco-Brometalia)* * important orchid sites [6210], Active raised bogs [7110], Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior *(Alno-Padion,*	Surface runoff of silt, construction materials, cement, fuel, soil storage and dust in the construction phase during heavy rainfall	A buffer zone of at least 20m separating working machinery from watercourses. Silt fencing and bunding will be installed previous to construction starting and remain in place throughout the construction stage see Figure 8.1 below for plan of construction stage measures. Regarding earthworks: site clearance will not be undertaken during wet conditions, when rainfall of more than 0.5 mm/hour is forecast within the next 24 hours or rainfall of more than 3mm/hour is forecast within the next five days in the works area. Silt fencing will be installed to retain eroded sediments. All preliminary site works and construction stage surface water run-off will be managed as part of the existing approved surface water management system with integrated hydrocarbon and silt removal. The contractor will be obliged to ensure no deleterious discharges are released from the sites to Lough Ree during excavation, de-watering, or erecting activities. There will not be discharge of silty water from the works to any watercourse, will any discharge of construction water be required during the construction phase, discharge will be to foul sewer following agreement with the Council/ Irish Water. There will be no discharge of effluent to groundwater during the construction phase. All wastewater from the construction facilities will be stored for removal off site for disposal and treatment. Refuelling of machinery will be done off-site or at a designated bunded refuelling area. Oil and fuel storage tanks will be stored in designated areas, and these areas will be bunded to a volume of 110% of the capacity of the largest tank/container within the bunded area(s) (plus an allowance of 30 mm for rainwater ingress). Drainage from the bunded area(s) will be diverted for collection and safe disposal. In order to minimise the risk of contamination, any stockpiled material designated for removal will be removed off-site as soon as possible. Surface water drain gratings in areas near or close to where stockpiles are located will be covered by appropriate durable	No

Qualifying Interests / receptors	Source(s) for potential adverse effect	Mitigation measure(s)	Residual impacts post mitigation?
Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0], Alkaline fens [7230], Limestone pavements [8240], Bog woodland [91D0]		polyurethane covers or similar. Active treatment systems such as siltbusters or similar may will be adopted, depending on turbidity levels and discharge limits. Construction works will be scheduled to be predominantly carried out during periods of low water levels on Lough Ree (May to September). Excavation and construction activities during or immediately after severe rainfall events will be avoided, to minimise flood risk and potential water ingress into the quarry floor. A suitable risk assessment for wet concreting will be completed prior to works being carried out. No batching of wet-cement products will occur on site. Ready-mixed concrete will be delivered to the excavation site. Where possible, emplacement of pre-cast elements, will take place. Where possible pre-cast elements will be used; Weather forecasting will be used to plan dry days for pouring concrete; The small volume of water that will be generated from washing of the concrete lorry chutes will be directed into a concrete washout area. Groundwater and sump water levels will be regularly monitored during construction to provide early warning of elevated groundwater conditions. Baseline groundwater quality sampling will be conducted prior to commencement of works, and periodic sampling will be undertaken during construction phase to confirm that no adverse impacts on groundwater or indirectly connected habitats are occurring. Regular auditing of construction / mitigation measures will be undertaken, e.g. concrete pouring, refuelling in designated areas, etc. A log the regular inspections will be maintained, and any significant blockage or spill incidents will be recorded for root cause investigation purposes and updating procedures to ensure that any such incidents are not repeated. The following parameters shall be monitored : • pH • Turbidity • Electrical Conductivity • Dissolved Oxygen • Temperature • Total Suspended Solids • Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons	

Qualifying Interests / receptors	Source(s) for potential adverse effect	Mitigation measure(s)	Residual impacts post mitigation?
		• Chloride • Nitrate (baseline monitoring only). Following completion of works, a monitoring programme will be implemented for a minimum of six months to confirm no adverse impacts have occurred. Sampling will be undertaken monthly and following significant rainfall events, including all parameters listed above. All mitigation measures will be reviewed and updated prior to commencement of works to ensure alignment with final construction methodologies and recognition of the indirect hydraulic connection to Lough Ree. A dedicated groundwater monitoring well will be installed on the site, downgradient to the proposed development and prior to the commencement of construction activities. This is subject to advance consultation and agreement with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), given the location of the site within the Lough Ree SAC. This well will: • Be designed with a sealed upper section to prevent ingress of shallow or ponding water. • Be fitted with a calibrated automatic logger to enable continuous recording of groundwater levels and allow prompt response to changing conditions. • Be sampled prior to works to establish a baseline dataset of groundwater levels and water quality, and periodically during construction and for at least six months post-construction to confirm no adverse impacts. All monitoring results shall be recorded and made available to the relevant authorities upon request. Upon completion of the groundwater monitoring post-construction, the monitoring well should be decommissioned in an approved manner. A High Water Alert Level of 36.5m a.OD will be established, above which excavation and other ground disturbing works will be suspended until water levels recede.	

8.1.2. Construction phase measures – Lough Ree SPA

Special Conservation Interests / receptors	Source(s) for potential adverse effect	Mitigation measure(s)	Residual impacts post mitigation?
Little Grebe *(Tachybaptus ruficollis)* [A004], Wetland and	Surface runoff of silt, construction materials,	A buffer zone of at least 20m will separate working machinery from watercourses. Silt fencing and bunding will be installed prior to construction starting and will remain in place throughout the construction stage - see Figure 8.1 below for plan of construction stage measures.	No

Special Conservation Interests / receptors	Source(s) for potential adverse effect	Mitigation measure(s)	Residual impacts post mitigation?
Waterbirds [A999], Whooper Swan *(Cygnus cygnus)* [A038], Wigeon *(Anas penelope)* [A050], Teal *(Anas crecca)* [A052], Mallard *(Anas platyrhynchos)* [A053], Shoveler *(Anas clypeata)* [A056], Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* [A061], Common Scoter *(Melanitta nigra)* [A065], Goldeneye *(Bucephala clangula)* [A067], Coot *(Fulica atra)* [A125], Golden Plover *(Pluvialis apricaria)* [A140], Lapwing *(Vanellus vanellus)* [A142], Common tern *(Sterna hirundo)* [A193]	cement, fuel, soil storage and dust in the construction phase during heavy rainfall	Regarding earthworks: site clearance is not to be undertaken during wet conditions, when rainfall of more than 0.5 mm/hour is forecast within the next 24 hours or rainfall of more than 3mm/hour is forecast within the next five days in the works area. Silt fencing will be installed to retain eroded sediments. All preliminary site works and construction stage surface water run-off will be managed as part of the existing approved surface water management system with integrated hydrocarbon and silt removal. The contractor will be obliged to ensure no deleterious discharges are released from the site to Lough Ree during excavation, de-watering, or erecting activities. There will not be discharge of silty water from the works to any watercourse. Should any discharge of construction water be required during the construction phase discharge will be to foul sewer following agreement with the Council/ Irish Water. There will be no discharge of effluent to groundwater during the construction phase. All wastewater from the construction facilities will be stored for removal off site for disposal and treatment. Refuelling of machinery shall be carried out off-site or at a designated bunded refuelling area. Oil and fuel storage tanks will be stored in designated areas, and these areas will be bunded to a volume of 110% of the capacity of the largest tank/container within the bunded area(s) (plus an allowance of 30 mm for rainwater ingress). Drainage from the bunded area(s) will be diverted for collection and safe disposal. In order to minimise the risk of contamination, any stockpiled material designated for removal will be removed off-site as soon as possible. Surface water drain gratings in areas near or close to where stockpiles are located will be covered by appropriate durable polyurethane covers or similar. Active treatment systems such as siltbusters or similar will be utilised, depending on turbidity levels and discharge limits. Construction works predominantly will be scheduled to be carried out during periods of low water levels on Lough Ree (May to September). Excavation and construction activities during or immediately after severe rainfall events will be avoided, to minimise flood risk and potential water ingress into the quarry floor. A suitable risk assessment for wet concreting will be completed prior to works being carried out. No batching of wet-cement products will occur on site; Ready-mixed concrete will be delivered to the excavation site. Where possible, emplacement of pre-cast elements, will take place. Where possible pre-cast elements will be used. Weather forecasting will be used to plan dry days for pouring concrete.	

Special Conservation Interests / receptors	Source(s) for potential adverse effect	Mitigation measure(s)	Residual impacts post mitigation?
		The small volume of water that will be generated from washing of the concrete lorry chutes will be directed into a concrete washout area. Groundwater and sump water levels will be regularly monitored during construction to provide early warning of elevated groundwater conditions. Baseline groundwater quality sampling will be conducted prior to commencement of works, and periodic sampling will be undertaken during construction phase to confirm that no adverse impacts on groundwater or indirectly connected habitats are occurring. Regular auditing of construction / mitigation measures will be undertaken, e.g. concrete pouring, refuelling in designated areas, etc. A log the regular inspections will be maintained, and any significant blockage or spill incidents will be recorded for root cause investigation purposes and updating procedures to ensure incidents do not occur. The following parameters shall be monitored : • pH • Turbidity • Electrical Conductivity • Dissolved Oxygen • Temperature • Total Suspended Solids • Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons • Chloride • Nitrate (baseline monitoring only). Following completion of works, monitoring programme shall be implemented a for a minimum of six months to confirm no adverse impacts have occurred. Sampling shall be undertaken monthly and following significant rainfall events, including all parameters listed above. • All mitigation measures will be reviewed and updated prior to commencement of works to ensure alignment with final construction methodologies and recognition of the indirect hydraulic connection to Lough Ree	

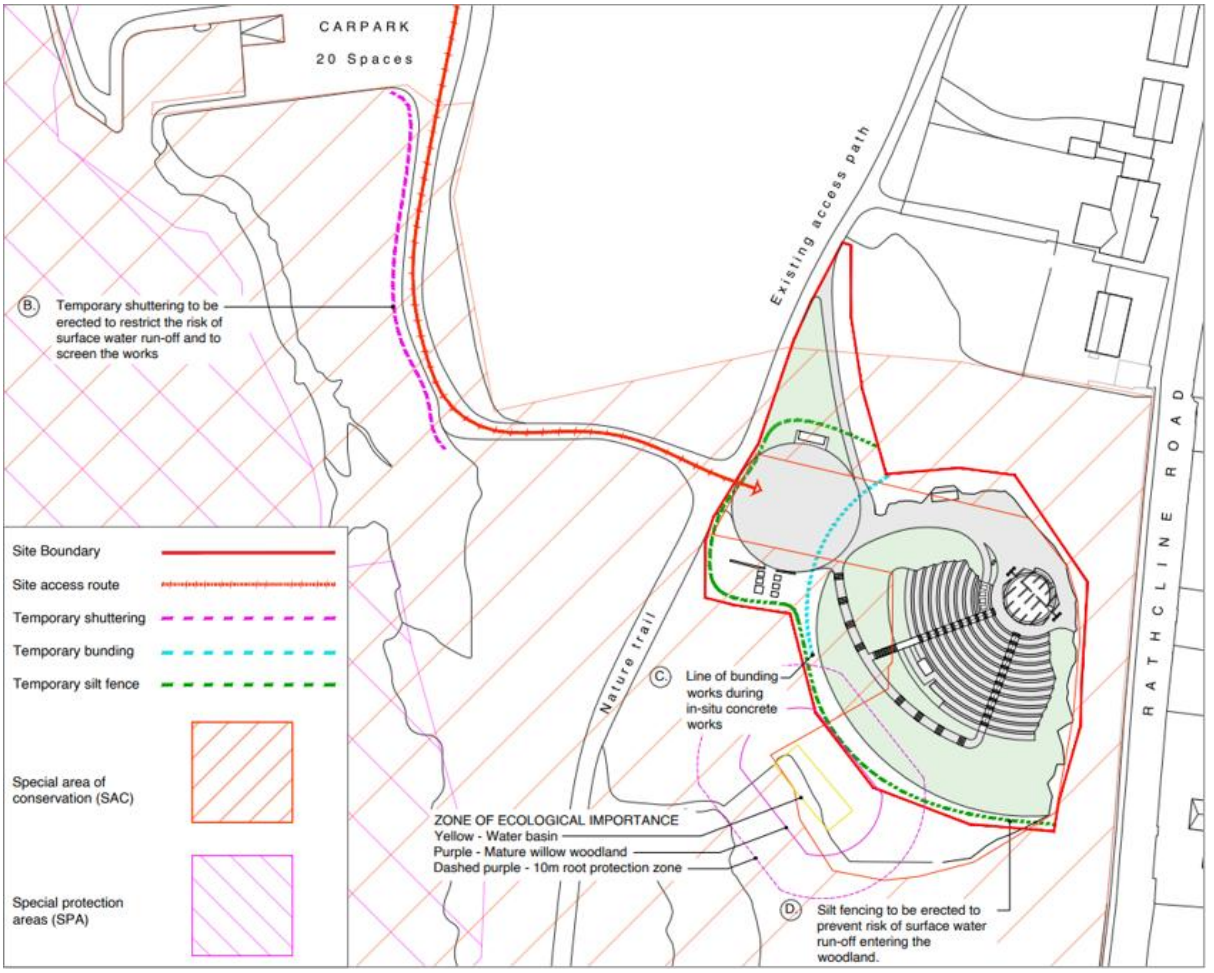


Figure 8.1 Construction phase design measures[28]

9. In-combination effects

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive also requires an assessment of a plan or project to consider other plans or projects that might, in combination with the plan or project, have potential for significant effects European sites.

For considerations of in combination effects with respect to emerging or recent developments a search of the Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage planning database was undertaken to identify relevant plans and programmes which relate to the proposed development. All developments from the receiving area were considered; the area considered has been defined by the authoring ecologist using criteria which depend on the characteristics of the proposed development and the associated sources (identified above). These criteria include:

- Having direct or indirect connectivity to a European site;
- Being in close proximity to a European site;
- Being of a substantial scale relative to the conditions and/or current works taking place in the surrounding landscape;
- Having disperse emissions or far-reaching sources for effects;
- Having sources for effects to ecological connectivity.

[28] Adapted from drawing "A10 Construction Management-@A1", see drawing set accompanying application for full scale version

These factors are considered in the context of characteristics of the proposed development and on this basis a search radius of 200 m, within the last 5 years[29], was selected to be used to search for projects that were subject to applications to the local planning authority (i.e., Longford County Council). Regarding applications made to the national planning body, An Coimisiún Pleanála (ACP), a similar search radius of 200 m was used. The sources for potential significant effects are considered in combination with the potential sources for effects from the receiving environment for potential additive or interactive effects on the receiving environment.

Plans considered for in-combination effects with the proposed development:

- Longford County Development Plan 2021 - 2027
- Longford Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030
- Longford Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

The proposed development has a small-scale, temporary construction phase and the operational phase is consistent with the progressive development of small towns and villages. Lanesborough is identified as a "*Self-sustaining Growth Town*" in the Longford County Development Plan (CDP), with the policy objective of "*CPO 4.10 It is the County Policy Objective to: Promote the commensurate population and employment growth in the designated Self Sustaining town, in accordance with the Core Strategy, and to deliver targeted regeneration and 'catch-up' investment in services, infrastructure, amenities and local employment in order to become more self-sustaining*." The proposed development is in accordance with this objective of the Longford County Development Plan 2023 – 2029 (which has also undergone Appropriate Assessment). The proposed development is also in compliance with the relevant biodiversity measures of the CDP and Biodiversity Action Plan for protection of European sites and biodiversity. As a result of these factors, the proposed development does not have any significant in-combination effects with the above plans.

Projects considered for in-combination effects with the proposed development:
To identify projects for consideration for the in-combination effects section, the Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage planning database and ACP were consulted used[30]. A review of all planning applications and cases within the identified zone was conducted focusing on all application within the past 5 years[31].

There are a number of other proposed developments in the vicinity of the proposed development including works which are at planning stage or underway on various sites. The database search found that the vast majority of projects within the area are relating to the construction and alteration of residential structures, all of which undergo Appropriate Assessment where required. No projects were found to have in-combination effects with the proposed development (a full list of the projects examined as part of the in-combination effects assessment is provided in Appendix I).

10. Conclusion

A Natura Impact Statement to inform the competent authority on Stage 2 AA has been carried out and ffinds that the implementation of the proposed Lanesborough Outdoor Theatre would have the potential to result in effects on the integrity of 2 (no.) European sites, if unmitigated.

[29] Planning applications have a standard lifespan of 5 years as per Section 40 (3)(b) of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended; therefore, these are viewed to be the 'live' applications, all other projects are considered as part of the site other than refused and withdrawn applications, as these would not have any in-combination effects
[30] Accessed August 2025
[31] Planning applications have a standard lifespan of 5 years as per Section 40 (3)(b) of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended; therefore, these are viewed to be the 'live' applications, all other projects are considered as part of the site other than refused and withdrawn applications, as these would not have any in-combination effects

The risks to the safeguarding and integrity of the Qualifying Interests, Special Conservation Interests and Conservation Objectives of the European sites have been addressed by the inclusion of mitigation measures that will avoid adverse effects to any of the European sites considered.

In-combination effects from interactions with other plans and projects have been considered in the assessment. The mitigation measures incorporated into the design of the proposed development allow a conclusion to be arrived at that there will be no adverse effects as a result of the proposed development either alone or in-combination with other plans/projects.

Having incorporated mitigation measures, it is concluded that the proposed development will not give rise to any effects on the ecological integrity of any European sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects[32]. This evaluation is made in view of the conservation objectives of the habitats or species for which these sites have been designated.

Following an examination, analysis and evaluation in view of best scientific knowledge, in view of objective information of the proposed development, in respect of the Qualifying Interests and Special Conservation Interests of the relevant European Sites, and in view of each sites' Conservation Objectives; it is concluded, that upon the application of the appropriate mitigation measures stated herein, which address the potential adverse effects identified, the proposed Lanesborough Outdoor Theatre does not pose a risk of any adverse effects (either direct or indirect), alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, to the integrity of the European Sites assessed.

[32] Except as provided for in Section 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be: a) no alternative solution available, b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the plan to proceed; and c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

Appendix I Review of planning history[33] in the vicinity of the proposed development[34]

The below tables contain the findings of a planning search of Local Authority for developments within a radius of 200 m of the site of the proposed development in the last 5 years. There were no results from those parameters of the An Coimisiún Pleanála database.
Note: projects considered as having no potential of contributing to significant cumulative effects, when considered in combination with effects arising from the subject proposal, have been excluded.

Local Authority planning applications

Project Code	Decision	Description	Grant Date	Project Area (sq. m)	Distance from Proposed development (m)	Characteristics of the potential interactions between the projects; sources and pathways	Likelihood of significant in-combination effects
2460123	Conditional	the following: (a) demolish existing outbuildings, and two storey extension to the (rear) North-west of an existing two-storey dwelling, (b) construct a two storey extension to the rear (north-west) of same dwelling, (c) form a new vehicular site entrance and driveway, (d) along with connections to all site services, and all other associated site works	2024-09-06	1,722.1	114.88	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No
2419	Conditional	and planning permission for the following: (i) retention of a single storey extension to the west elevation of the dwelling (ii) and proposed demolition of single storey temporary timber framed structure to the north elevation of the dwelling and all associated proposed site works	2024-07-02	220.6	113.42	This is a small-scale project with a temporary construction phase and the operational phase will have localised effects that will be in keeping with the context and character of the surrounding environment. The consent process for this project was subject to applicable EIA and AA requirements. Considering the above, in combination with the lack of any potential for effects to European sites arising from the proposed development, it is not considered that there is any potential for significant in-combination effects to any European sites.	No

[33] The majority of surrounding planning permissions are for developments which are minor projects with no risk of in-combination effects. Therefore, a summary list is provided here of the largest / most relevant proposed project(s) within the below stated parameters (i.e., excluding minor additions or edits to residential homes / existing planning permissions)
[34] Parameters used: planning application from within the last 10 years, within a radius of 200m around the proposed project boundary

Appendix II Background information on European sites[35]

Site code	Site name	Qualifying feature	Pressure codes	Known threats and pressures
000440	Lough Ree SAC	Otter *(Lutra lutra)* [1355], Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120], Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150], Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates *(Festuco-Brometalia)* * important orchid sites [6210], Active raised bogs [7110], Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior *(Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)* [91E0], Alkaline fens [7230], Limestone pavements [8240], Bog woodland [91D0]	A03.03, A04, F02.03, B02, D03.01.02, A08, H01.08, G01.02, G01.01, E01.03, L08, H02.06, H06.03, F03.01, J02.04, J02.11.02, G02.09, I01, K03.05	Abandonment or lack of mowing, grazing, leisure fishing, forest and plantation management & use, piers or tourist harbours or recreational piers, fertilisation, diffuse pollution to surface waters due to household sewage and waste waters, walking, horse-riding and non-motorised vehicles, nautical sports, dispersed habitation, inundation (natural processes), diffuse groundwater pollution due to agricultural and forestry activities, thermal heating of water bodies, hunting, flooding modifications, other siltation rate changes, wildlife watching, invasive non-native species, antagonism arising from introduction of species
004064	Lough Ree SPA	Little Grebe *(Tachybaptus ruficollis)* [A004], Wetland and Waterbirds [A999], Whooper Swan *(Cygnus cygnus)* [A038], Wigeon *(Anas penelope)* [A050], Teal *(Anas crecca)* [A052], Mallard *(Anas platyrhynchos)* [A053], Shoveler *(Anas clypeata)* [A056], Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* [A061], Common Scoter *(Melanitta nigra)* [A065], Goldeneye *(Bucephala clangula)* [A067], Coot *(Fulica atra)* [A125], Golden Plover *(Pluvialis apricaria)* [A140], Lapwing *(Vanellus vanellus)* [A142], Common tern *(Sterna hirundo)* [A193]	A04, B, A08, F03.01, F02.03, G01.02, G01.01, I01	Grazing, sylviculture, forestry, fertilisation, hunting, leisure fishing, walking, horse-riding and non-motorised vehicles, nautical sports, invasive non-native species

Appendix III Qualifying Interests of SACs that have undergone assessment[36]

EU code	Qualifying interests	Article 17 report summary - threats and pressures	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures	Sensitivity of qualifying interests
[1355]	Otter *(Lutra lutra)*	There are no pressures facing this species	Xxp, Xxt	No pressures, no threats	Surface and marine water dependent. Moderately sensitive to hydrological change. Sensitivity to pollution.

[35] That have functional connectivity (ecological pathways) to the proposed development area including their Qualifying Interests, known threats and pressures
[36] Including known treats and pressures and sensitivities of qualifying interests

EU code	Qualifying interests	Article 17 report summary - threats and pressures	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures	Sensitivity of qualifying interests
[3150]	Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation	Most of the pressures on this habitat are as a result of pollution from agriculture, forestry activities and wastewater.	A25, A26, B23, C05, F11, F12, F13, K04, K05	Agricultural activities generating point source pollution to surface or ground waters, agricultural activities generating diffuse pollution to surface or ground waters, forestry activities generating pollution to surface or ground waters, peat extraction, pollution to surface or ground water due to urban runoffs, discharge of urban waste water (excluding storm overflows and/or urban run-offs) generating pollution to surface or ground water, plants, contaminated or abandoned industrial sites generating pollution to surface or ground water, modification of hydrological flow, physical alteration of water bodies	Surface and groundwater dependant. Highly sensitive to hydrological changes. Highly sensitive to pollution.
[6210]	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates *(Festuco-Brometalia)* * important orchid sites)	The significant pressures related to this habitat are mainly associated with agricultural intensification causing loss of species-rich communities, or abandonment of farmland resulting in succession to scrub.	A02, A09, A10, C01, I02, I04	Conversion from one type of agricultural land use to another (excluding drainage and burning), intensive grazing or overgrazing by livestock, extensive grazing or under grazing by livestock, extraction of minerals (e.g., rock, metal ores, gravel, sand, shell), other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), problematic native species	Changes in management such as grazing regime. Changes in nutrient or base status. Changes to vegetation composition. Introduction of alien species.
[7110]	Active raised bogs	The main pressures on active raised bog are peat extraction, drainage, afforestation and burning.	A11, B01, C05, K02, N01	Burning for agriculture, conversion to forest from other land uses, or afforestation (excluding drainage), peat extraction, drainage, temperature changes (e.g., rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change	Surface water interactions. Groundwater isolated system with sensitivities related to the bog basin. Drainage and land use management are the key things.
[7120]	Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	The main pressure on degraded bogs come from peat extraction, drainage, afforestation and burning.	A11, B01, C05, K02, N01	Burning for agriculture, conversion to forest from other land uses, or afforestation (excluding drainage), peat extraction, drainage, temperature changes (e.g., rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change	Surface water interactions. Groundwater isolated system with sensitivities related to the bog basin. Drainage and land use management are the key things.

EU code	Qualifying interests	Article 17 report summary - threats and pressures	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures	Sensitivity of qualifying interests
[7230]	Alkaline fens	The main pressures facing this habitat are land abandonment (and associated succession), overgrazing, drainage and pollution.	A06, A09, A26, J01, K01, K02, K04, L02, N02, N03	Abandonment of grassland management (e.g., cessation of grazing or of mowing), intensive grazing or overgrazing by livestock, agricultural activities generating diffuse pollution to surface or ground waters, mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and terrestrial), abstraction from groundwater, surface water or mixed water, drainage, modification of hydrological flow, natural succession resulting in species composition change (other than by direct changes of agricultural or forestry practices), temperature changes (e.g., rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, increases or changes in precipitation due to climate change	Surface and groundwater dependent. Highly sensitive to hydrological changes. Inappropriate management.
[8240]	Limestone pavements	The main pressures facing this habitat are associated with conversion to agricultural land and housing construction, as well as scrub encroachment caused by under-grazing.	A01, A10, C01, F01, I02	Conversion into agricultural land (excluding drainage and burning), extensive grazing or under grazing by livestock, extraction of minerals (e.g., rock, metal ores, gravel, sand, shell), conversion from other land uses to housing, settlement or recreational areas (excluding drainage and modification of coastline, estuary and coastal conditions), other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern)	Erosion, overgrazing and recreation.
[91D0]	Bog woodland	Pressures facing this habitat are related to drainage, invasive species and burning.	A11, B09, C05, I02, K01	Burning for agriculture, clear-cutting, removal of all trees, peat extraction, other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), abstraction from groundwater, surface water or mixed water	Changes in management. Changes in nutrient or base status. Introduction of alien species.
[91E0]	Alluvial forests with Alder and Ash *(Alnus glutinosa, Fraxinus excelsior, Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)*	Many of the pressures facing this habitat include invasive species, particularly sycamore *(Acer pseudoplatanus)*, beech *(Fagus sylvatica)*, Indian balsam *(Impatiens glandulifera)* and currant species *(Ribes nigrum and R. rubrum)* as well as some native species such as brambles *(Rubus fruticoses agg.)* and common nettle, along with over felling.	B09, I02, I04, I05	Clear-cutting, removal of all trees, other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), problematic native species, plant and animal diseases, pathogens and pests	Surface and groundwater dependent. Highly sensitive to hydrological changes. Changes in management.

Appendix IV Special Conservation Interests of SPAs that have undergone assessment[37]

Species code	Common name	Scientific name	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures
A004	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	x	No threats and pressures
A038	Whooper Swan	*Cygnus cygnus*	D01, D06, F07, F28	Wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, transmission of electricity and communications (cables), sports, tourism and leisure activities, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A050	Wigeon	*Mareca penelope*	F07, G07, N01, D01, F08, F28	Sports, tourism and leisure activities, hunting, temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, modification of coastline, estuary and coastal conditions for development, use and protection of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational infrastructure and areas (including sea defences or coastal protection works and infrastructures), modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A052	Teal	*Anas crecca*	G07, F07, D01, F28	Hunting, sports, tourism and leisure activities, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A053	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	F07, G07, D01, F28	Sports, tourism and leisure activities, hunting, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A056	Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	I02, I05, F07, G07, N01, D01, F28	Other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), plant and animal diseases, pathogens and pests, sports, tourism and leisure activities, hunting, temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A061	Tufted Duck	*Aythya fuligula*	F28, F07, G07, J01, N01, D01	Modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development, sports, tourism and leisure activities, hunting, mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and terrestrial), temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure
A065	Common Scoter	*Melanitta nigra*	L06, A06, I02, I04, A26, F07, G12, G01, D01, E02	Interspecific relations (competition, predation, parasitism, pathogens), abandonment of grassland management (e.g. cessation of grazing or mowing), other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), problematic native species, agricultural activities generating diffuse pollution to surface or ground waters, sports, tourism and leisure activities, bycatch and incidental killing (due to fishing and hunting activities), marine fish and shellfish harvesting (professional,

[37] Including known treats and pressures of SCIs

Species code	Common name	Scientific name	Threats and pressures codes	Known threats and pressures
				recreational) causing reduction of species/prey populations and disturbance of species, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, shipping lanes and ferry lanes transport operations
A067	Goldeneye	*Bucephala clangula*	F07, G07, J01, N01, N04, D01, F28	Sports, tourism and leisure activities, hunting, mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and terrestrial), temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, sea-level and wave exposure changes due to climate change, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A125	Coot	*Fulica atra*	J01, N01	Mixed source pollution to surface and ground waters (limnic and terrestrial), temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change
A140	Golden Plover	*Pluvialis apricaria*	B01, I04, I02, A02, A11, A09, D01, H04, A31, G07, N01, F07, F28	Conversion to forest from other land uses, or afforestation (excluding drainage), problematic native species, other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), conversion from one type of agricultural land use to another (excluding drainage and burning), burning for agriculture, intensive grazing or overgrazing by livestock, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, vandalism or arson, drainage for use as agricultural land, hunting, temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, sports, tourism and leisure activities, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A142	Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*	A08, A21, B01, I04, I02, A02, C05, D01, A06, A31, N01, F07, F28	Mowing or cutting of grasslands, use of plant protection chemicals in agriculture, conversion to forest from other land uses, or afforestation (excluding drainage), problematic native species, other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), conversion from one type of agricultural land use to another (excluding drainage and burning), peat extraction, wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, abandonment of grassland management (e.g. cessation of grazing or mowing), drainage for use as agricultural land, temperature changes (e.g. rise of temperature & extremes) due to climate change, sports, tourism and leisure activities, modification of flooding regimes, flood protection for residential or recreational development
A193	Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*	A09, G12, I02, I04, J02, L06, M08, D01, F07, G01, N06, N07	Intensive grazing or overgrazing by livestock, bycatch and incidental killing (due to fishing and hunting activities), other invasive alien species (other than species of union concern), problematic native species, mixed source marine water pollution (marine and coastal), interspecific relations (competition, predation, parasitism, pathogens), flooding (natural processes), wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure, sports, tourism and leisure activities, marine fish and shellfish harvesting (professional, recreational) causing reduction of species/prey populations and disturbance of species, desynchronisation of biological / ecological processes due to climate change, decline or extinction of related species (e.g. food source / prey, predator / parasite, symbiote, etc.) due to climate change

Appendix V Legislative context and Habitats Directive overview

The Habitats Directive provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the "favourable conservation status" of habitats and species of European Community Interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives (Habitats Directive as above and Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds) with Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated to afford their protection. Qualifying Interests (QIs) are the habitats and species for which SACs are designated and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) are the species for which SPAs are designated. SACs and SPAs are known and referred to as European sites.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect such sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for AA. These requirements are implemented in the Republic of Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive States:

> *'Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public'.*

For the purposes of this assessment, the above definition relates to a project. The AA process relates to the protection of species listed in Annex I and Annex II of the Habitats Directive which form the Natura 2000 network (Article 3(1)). Species breeding and resting places of species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive are nationally protected in Ireland as per Articles 15 and 16 of the Habitats Directive. The actual species listed in Annex IV do not form part of the Natura 2000 network as they are not mentioned in Article 3(1) of the Directive which defines the Natura 2000 network.

Article 3(1) of the Habitats Directive States:

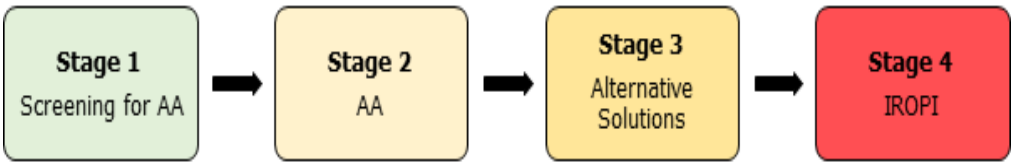
> *'A coherent European ecological network of special areas of conservation shall be set up under the title Natura 2000. This network, composed of sites hosting the natural habitat types listed in Annex I and habitats of the species listed in Annex II, shall enable the natural habitat types and the species' habitats concerned to be maintained or, where appropriate, restored at a favourable conservation status in their natural range'.*

AA is an assessment of the likelihood of significant effects arising from a project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, to assess if the project will have potential for significant effect on any European site concerned, and implications in view of the European site's Conservation Objectives (COs). These sites consist of SACs and SPAs and provide for the protection and long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. Where a formal consent process applies, the AA process is concluded by the relevant competent authority making a determination in accordance with article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Overview of the Habitats Directive and Appropriate Assessment process

The Habitats Directive itself promotes a hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensatory measures. This approach aims to avoid any effects on European sites by identifying possible effects early in the project making process and avoiding such effects. Second, the approach involves the application of mitigation measures, if necessary, during the AA process to the point where no adverse impacts on the site(s) remain. If potential significant effects on European sites remain, and no further practicable mitigation is possible, the approach requires the consideration of alternative solutions. If no alternative solutions are identified and the project is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, then compensation measures are required for any remaining adverse effects.

There are four main stages in the AA process:



Stage one: Appropriate Assessment Screening
The process that identifies the likely impacts upon a European site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant. An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (AASR) can be compiled to inform the competent authority on conducting a Screening for AA.

Stage two: Appropriate Assessment (AA)
The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the European site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse effects mitigation measures are required to avoid or minimise potential effects. The details of these mitigation measures are then assessed in the context of the ecological integrity of the plan/project characteristics to ensure no significant adverse effects on European sites. If this assessment process shows there are no residual significant effects, then the process may end at this stage, stage two, of the AA process which are formalised in Natura Impact Statements (NIS) reports which support the overall AA process. However, if the likelihood of significant impacts remains, then the process must proceed to Stage Three.

Stage three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions
The process that examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoids adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site.

Stage four: Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI)
An assessment of compensatory measures, where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain, but in the light of an assessment of IROPI, it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Appendix VI Contributor competencies

Lead author - Karen Dylan Shevlin is a senior ecologist with over 12 years' experience working in multiple capacities in ecology in Irish and international research institutions and organisations and holds a MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation from Trinity College Dublin (Dist. 2013). Karen has significant skills and experience in leading research and ecological surveys of bats, birds, insects, habitats and mammals, data analysis and managing resulting reports. Karen is also a specialist in ecological theory and the impacts/effects that altering natural dynamics may have on the surrounding environment. Karen has been the lead author and reviewed on many Appropriate Assessment Screenings, NISs, and EIARs for a range of public and private projects and plans ranging from residential and industrial projects to County Development Plans, to major wind turbine sites.

Reviewer - Paul Fingleton has an MSc in Rural and Regional Resources Planning (with specialisation in EIA) from the University of Aberdeen. Paul is a member of the International Association for Impact Assessment as well as the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. He has over twenty-five years' experience working in the area of Environmental Assessment. Over this period, he has been involved in a diverse range of projects including contributions to, and co-ordination of, numerous complex EIARs and EIA screening reports. He has also contributed to and supervised the preparation of numerous AAs and AA screenings.

Paul is the lead author of the current EPA Guidelines and accompanying Advice Notes on EIARs. He has been involved in all previous editions of these statutory guidelines. He also provides a range of other EIA related consultancy services to the EPA. Paul is regularly engaged by various planning authorities and other consent authorities to provide specialised EIA advice.

Ornithologist - Laurence Manning has over 14 years' experience as a consultant ornithologist and researcher in Ireland and internationally in South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. In Ireland, Larry has immense experience in conducting vantage point surveys, point counts and transects of on shore wintering birds, breeding birds and sea birds, and has contributed ornithological data to multiple AA Screening, Natura Impact Statements and Ecological Impact Assessments for projects ranging from housing developments to pharmaceutical plants to informing land use planning.

Technical assistant - Callum O'Regan holds a B.Sc. degree in Zoology from University College Cork and obtained a Master's degree in Conservation Behaviour from Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in 2021. Callum has skills in data management and analysis, report writing and mapping. Callum has also worked on the preparation of a number of Appropriate Assessment Screening Reports for private and public projects of various sizes and complexities.