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STATEMENT OF SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT OF A PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT ST FRANCIS PARK, NAVAN, CO MEATH

IN LINE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF ARTICLE 6(3) OF THE
EU HABITATS DIRECTIVE



Meath County Council
c/o Cooney Architects
The Old Brewers Club
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Article 6 of the EU Habitat's Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) requires that all plans and projects be screened for potential impacts upon Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The aim of this screening process is to establish whether or not a full Appropriate Assessment of the proposed plan or project is necessary

A comprehensive assessment of the potential impacts of a proposed development at St Francis' Park, Navan, Co. Meath on certain designated sites was carried out in March 2021 by Noreen McLoughlin, MSc, MCIEEM of Whitehill Environmental. This assessment will allow the Competent Authority, i.e., Meath County Council, to undertake an Appropriate Assessment, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

The location of the proposed development is within 15km of sites designated under European Law. As such and in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitat's Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) regarding Appropriate Assessment, this screening exercise for Appropriate Assessment was carried out in order to identify whether any significant impacts on designated sites are likely. This exercise will also determine the appropriateness of the proposed project, in the context of the conservation status of the designated sites.

1.2 REGULATORY CONTEXT

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The Birds Directive (Council Directive 2009/147/EC) recognises that certain species of birds should be subject to special conservation measures concerning their habitats. The Directive requires that Member States take measures to classify the most suitable areas as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the conservation of bird species listed in Annex 1 of the Directive. SPAs are selected for bird species (listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive), that are regularly occurring populations of migratory bird species and the SPA areas are of international importance for these migratory birds.

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) requires that Member States designate and ensure that particular protection is given to sites (Special Areas of Conservation) which are made up of or support particular habitats and species listed in annexes to this Directive.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of this Directive also call for the undertaking of an Appropriate Assessment for plans and projects not directly connected with or necessary to the management of, but which are likely to have a significant effect on any European designated

sites (i.e. SACs and SPAs). This is explained in greater detail in the following section (Section 1.2.2 and Section 1.2.3).

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000/60/EC), which came into force in December 2000, establishes a framework for community action in the field of water policy. The WFD was transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. 722 of 2003). The WFD rationalises and updates existing legislation and provides for water management on the basis of River Basin Districts (RBDs). RBDs are essentially administrative areas for coordinated water management and are comprised of multiple river basins (or catchments), with cross-border basins (i.e. those covering the territory of more than one Member State) assigned to an international RBD. The aim of the WFD is to ensure that waters achieve at least good status by 2021 and that status does not deteriorate in any waters.

Appropriate Assessment and the Habitats Directive

Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora – the ‘Habitats Directive’ – provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Article 2 of the Directive requires the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species of European Community interest, at a favourable conservation status. Articles 3 - 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as *Natura 2000*. Natura 2000 sites are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC).

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive sets out the decision-making tests for plans or projects affecting Natura 2000 sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment:

“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.”

Article 6(4) deals with the steps that should be taken when it is determined, as a result of appropriate assessment, that a plan/project will adversely affect a European site. Issues dealing with alternative solutions, imperative reasons of overriding public interest and compensatory measures need to be addressed in this case.

Article 6(4) states:

"If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, the Member States shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.

Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species, the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest."

The Appropriate Assessment Process

The aim of Appropriate Assessment is to assess the implications of a proposal in respect of a designated site's conservation objectives.

The 'Appropriate Assessment' itself is an assessment which must be carried out by the competent authority which confirms whether the plan or project in combination with other plans and projects will have an adverse impact on the integrity of a European site.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment shall be carried out by the competent authority as set out in Section 177U(1) and (2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) as follows:

'(1) A screening for appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or application for consent for proposed development shall be carried out by the competent authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if that Land use plan or proposed development, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the European site.

(2) A competent authority shall carry out a screening for appropriate assessment under subsection (1) before—

- (a) a Land use plan is made including, where appropriate, before a decision on appeal in relation to a draft strategic development zone is made, or
- (b) consent for a proposed development is given.'

The competent authority shall determine that an Appropriate Assessment is not required if it can be excluded, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or project will have a significant effect on a European site.

Where the competent authority cannot exclude the potential for a significant effect on a European site, an Appropriate Assessment shall be deemed required.

Where an Appropriate Assessment is required, the conclusions of the Appropriate Assessment Report (Natura Impact Statement (NIS)) should enable the competent authority to ascertain whether the plan or proposed development would adversely affect the integrity of the European site. If adverse impacts on the integrity of a European site cannot be avoided, then mitigation measures should be applied during the appropriate assessment process to the point where no adverse impacts on the site remain. Under the terms of the Habitats Directive consent can only be granted for a project if, as a result of the appropriate assessment either (a) it is concluded that the integrity of any European sites will not be adversely affected, or (b) after mitigation, where adverse impacts cannot be excluded, there is shown to be an absence of alternative solutions, and there exists imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the project should go ahead.

Section 177(V) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) outlines that the competent authority shall carry out the Appropriate Assessment, taking into account the Natura Impact Statement (amongst any other additional or supplemental information). A determination shall then be made by the competent authority in line with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive as to whether the plan or proposed development would adversely affect the integrity of a European site, prior to consent being given.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

This Statement of Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1) has been prepared with reference to the following:

- European Commission (2018). Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC.
- European Commission (2002). 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 (2006). Nature and Biodiversity Cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice.
- European Commission (2007). Clarification of the Concepts of: Alternative Solution, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence, Opinion of the Commission.
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009). Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities.

The EC Guidance sets out a number of principles as to how to approach decision making during the process. The primary one is 'the precautionary principle' which requires that the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 should prevail where there is uncertainty.

When considering the precautionary principle, the emphasis for assessment should be on objectively demonstrating with supporting evidence that:

- There will be no significant effects on a Natura 2000 site;
- There will be no adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site;
- There is an absence of alternatives to the project or plan that is likely to have an adverse effect to the integrity of a Natura 2000 site; and
- There are compensation measures that maintain or enhance the overall coherence of Natura 2000.

This translates into a four stage process to assess the impacts, on a designated site or species, of a policy or proposal.

The EC Guidance states that "each stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required". Consequently, the Council may not need to proceed through all four stages in undertaking the Appropriate Assessment.

The four-stage process is:

Stage 1: Screening – The process which identifies the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether or not these impacts are likely to be significant;

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment – The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 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 impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts;

Stage 3: Assessment of Alternative Solutions – The process which examines alternative ways of achieving objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site;

Stage 4: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain – An assessment of the compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

In complying with the obligations set out in Articles 6(3) and following the guidelines described above, this screening statement has been structured as a stage by stage approach as follows:

- Description of the proposed project;
- Identification of the Natura 2000 sites close to the proposed development;
- Identification and description of any individual and cumulative impacts on the Natura 2000 sites likely to result from the project;
- Assessment of the significance of the impacts identified above on site integrity. Exclusion of sites where it can be objectively concluded that there will be no significant effects;

2.1 STATEMENT OF COMPETENCY

This AA Screening report was carried out by Noreen McLoughlin, BA, MSc, MCIEEM. Noreen has an honours degree in Zoology and an MSc in Freshwater Ecology from Trinity College, Dublin and she has been a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management for over thirteen years. Noreen has over 15 years' experience as a professional ecologist in Ireland.

2.2 DESK STUDIES & CONSULTATION

Information on the site and the area of the proposed development was studied prior to the completion of this statement. The following data sources were accessed in order to complete a thorough examination of potential impacts:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service - Aerial photographs and maps of designated sites, information on habitats and species within these sites and information on protected plant or animal species, conservation objectives, site synopses and standard data forms for relevant designated sites.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)- Information pertaining to water quality, geology and licensed facilities within the area;
- Myplan.ie – Mapped based information;
- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) – Information pertaining to protected plant and animal species within the study area;
- Bing maps & Google Street View – High quality aerials and street images;
- Cooney Architects – Plans and Information Pertaining to the Development
- Meath County Council – Information on planning history in the area for the assessment of cumulative impacts.

2.3 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The proposed development was assessed to identify its potential ecological impacts and from this, the Zone of Influence (Zoi) of the proposed development was defined. Based on the potential impacts and their Zoi, the Natura 2000 sites potentially at risk from direct, indirect or in-combination impacts were identified. The assessment considered all potential impact sources and pathways connecting the proposed development to Natura 2000 sites, in view of the conservation objectives supporting the favourable conservation condition of the site's Qualifying Interests (QIs) or Special Conservation Interests (SCIs).

The conservation objectives relating to each Natura 2000 site and its QIs/SCIs are cited generally for SACs as "to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the

Annex I habitat(s) and/or Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected”, and for SPAs “to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA”.

As defined in the Habitat’s Directive, the favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- Its natural range and area it covers within that range is stable or increasing;
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future;

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- The population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats;
- The natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future;
- There is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Where site-specific conservation objectives (SSCOs) have been prepared for a European site, these include a series of specific attributes and targets against which effects on conservation condition, or integrity, can be measured. Where potential significant effects are identified, then these SSCO should be considered in detail.

3 SCREENING

3.1 DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

Meath County Council have indicated their intention to develop a housing estate at St Francis Park, Navan, Co. Meath. Planning will be sought under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Act. The proposed development at St. Francis Park traveller accommodation site will consist of the following:

- a) Demolition of 14no. existing bay units
- b) Construction of 10no. dwellings with permanent caravan parking bays
- c) Closure of the existing St. Francis Park entrance and access road on Ratholdren Road and provision of a new entrance and access road from Tailteann Drive
- d) Redesign of landscaping within the site boundary
- e) All associated site development and associated ancillary works.

The proposed housing units will comprise of 1 no. 2 bed single storey dwelling, 1 no. 3 bed single storey dwelling, 2 no. 4 bed single storey dwellings and 6 no. 4 bed two storey dormer dwellings. An extract from the planning maps as submitted with the development is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 – Extract from Planning Drawings (as prepared by Cooney Architects Ltd)

Wastewater and Surface Water Disposal

Wastewater and surface water from the proposed site will continue to be directed into the public foul sewer and surface water network.

3.2 SITE LOCATION AND SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT

The site in question is located on the outskirts of Navan town, approximately 1.6km north-west of the town centre and just off the Rathholdren Road. The site will be accessed via an existing entrance that is just off Tailteann Drive.

The land-use surrounding the site is mixed. The sub-urban areas of Navan lie to the east of the site and the main habitats associated with these areas include buildings and artificial surface and improved grasslands. To the west, north and south of the site, agriculture is the predominant land-use and improved agricultural grassland is main habitat. Other habitats represented locally include small areas of woodland and scrub, treelines and hedgerows. The River Blackwater and its riparian habitats is 1.1km south of the site.

Site location maps are shown in Figures 2 and 3, whilst an aerial photograph of the site and its surrounding habitats is shown in Figure 4.

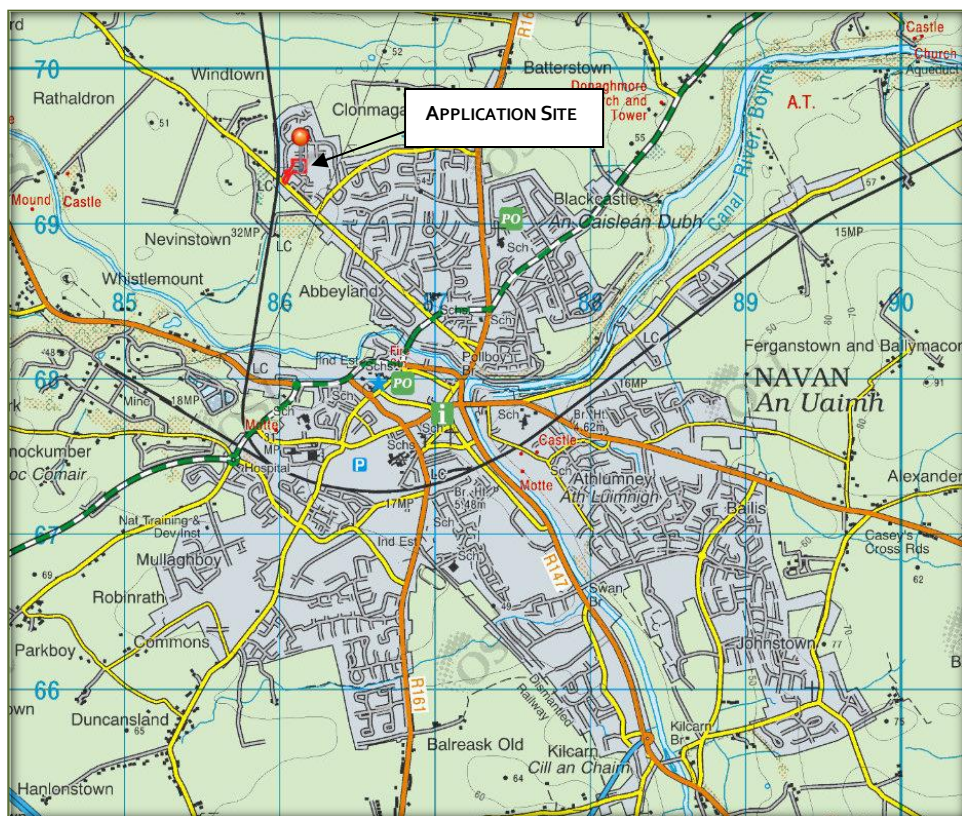


Figure 2 – Site Location Map (Site Pinned)



Figure 2 – Site Location Map (Site Outlined in Red)

Habitats within the Site

The application site does not lie within or adjacent to any area that has been designated for nature conservation purposes. The site itself consists of buildings and artificial surfaces and a small area of amenity grassland. There are no habitats of conservation interest on the site. There are no mapped drains or streams within or adjacent to the site.

An examination of the website of the National Biodiversity Data Centre, revealed that there are no records for the presence of any protected plant or animal species from the relevant 1km square (N8669) of this proposed development

Water Features and Quality

The application site is located within the Boyne Hydrometric Area and Catchment, the Boyne Sub-Catchment and the Blackwater Sub-Basin. There are no streams / drains within or adjacent to the application site. There are watercourses approximately 190m south of the sites and these lead to the River Blackwater, which is 1.1km south of the application site.

The EPA have defined the ecological status of the River Blackwater at points upstream of Navan as poor – under the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, this is unsatisfactory.



Figure 3 – Aerial Photograph of the Site (Outlined in Red) and its Surrounding Habitats.

3.3 NATURA 2000 SITES IDENTIFIED

In accordance with the guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, a list of Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the proposed development has been identified. The zone of impact may be determined by an assessment of the connectivity between the application site and the designated areas by virtue of hydrological connectivity, atmospheric emissions, flight paths, ecological corridors etc.

For significant effects to arise, there must be a potential impact facilitated by having a *source*, i.e., the proposed development and activities arising out of its construction or operation, a *receptor*, i.e., the European site and its qualifying interests and a subsequent *pathway* or *connectivity* between the source and receptor, e.g., a water course. The likelihood for significant effects on the European site will largely depend on the characteristics of the source (e.g., nature and scale of the construction works), the characteristics of the existing pathway and the characteristics of the receptor, e.g., the sensitivities of the Qualifying Interests (habitats or species) to changes in water quality.

There are two Natura 2000 designated sites within 15km of the application site. These designated areas and their closest points to the proposed development site are summarised in Table 1 and a map showing their locations relative to the application site is shown in Figure 4. A full description of these sites can be read on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (npws.ie).

| Site Name & Code | Distance | Qualifying Interests | Significant Effects |
|--|-------------|---|---|
| The River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC 002299 | 1.1km south | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>) • Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>) • Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) • Alkaline fens • Alluvial forests with alder <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> | <i>There is no hydrological connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore significant effects can be ruled out.</i> |
| The River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA 004232 | 1.1km south | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | <i>There is no hydrological connectivity between the application site and this SPA, therefore significant effects can be ruled out.</i> |

Table 1 – Natura 2000 Sites Within 15km of the Proposed Site

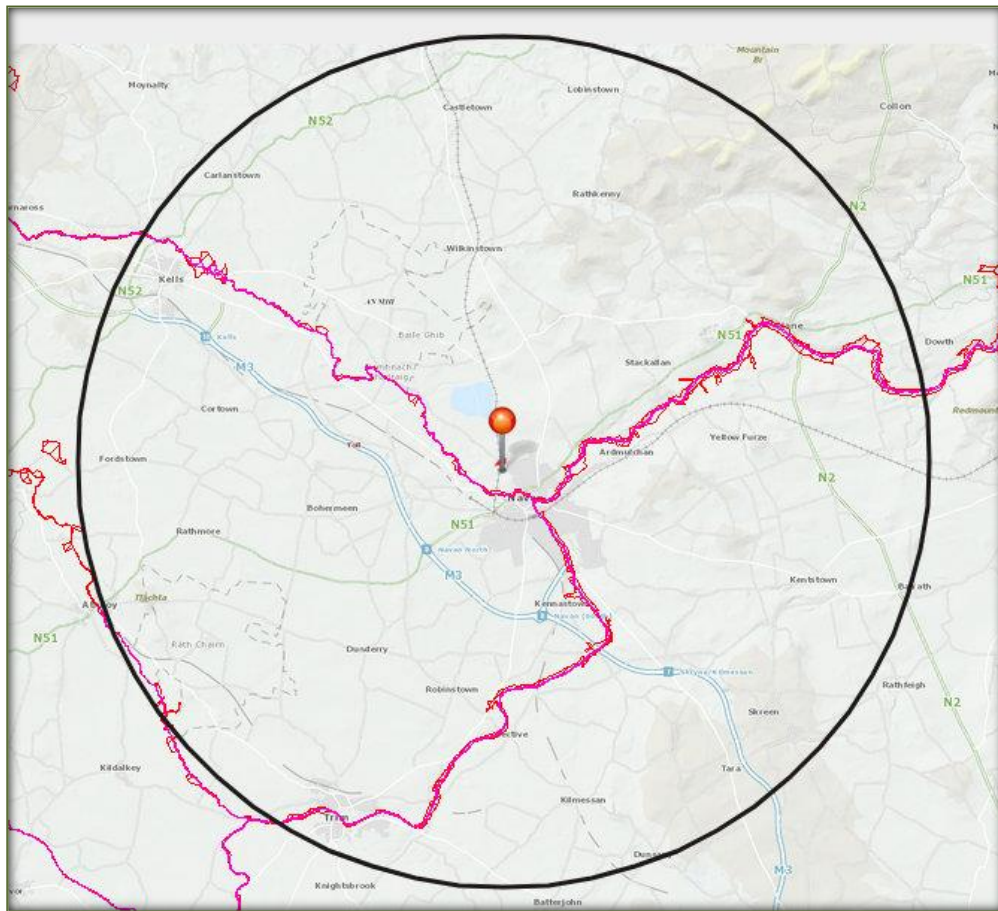


Figure 4 – The Application Site in relation to the Natura 2000 Sites within 15km (SACs and SPAs - Red Hatched Areas)

THE RIVER BOYNE AND RIVER BLACKWATER SAC 002299

This site comprises most of the freshwater element of the River Boyne from upriver of the Boyne Aqueduct at Drogheda, the Blackwater River as far as Lough Ramor and the principal Boyne tributaries, notably the Deel, Stoneyford and Tremblestown Rivers. This system drains a considerable area of Counties Meath and Westmeath and smaller areas of Cavan and Louth. The rivers flow through a landscape dominated by intensive agriculture, mostly of improved grassland but also cereals. Much of the river channels were subject to arterial drainage schemes in the past. Natural flood-plains now exist along only limited stretches of river, though often there is a fringe of reed swamp, freshwater marsh, wet grassland or deciduous wet woodland. Along some parts, notably between Drogheda and Slane, are stands of tall, mature mixed woodland. Substantial areas of improved grassland and arable land are included in site for water quality reasons. There are many medium to large sized towns adjacent to but not within the site.

The main channel of the Boyne contains a good example of alluvial woodland of the *Salicetum albo-fragilis* type which has developed on three alluvium islands. Alkaline fen vegetation is well represented at Lough Shesk, where there is a very fine example of habitat succession

from open water to raised bog. The Boyne and its tributaries is one of Ireland's premier game fisheries and offers a wide range of angling, from fishing for spring salmon and grilse to sea trout fishing and extensive brown trout fishing. The site is one of the most important in eastern Ireland for *Salmo salar* and it has very extensive spawning grounds. The site also has an important population of *Lampetra fluviatilis*, though the distribution or abundance of this species is not well known. *Lutra lutra* is widespread throughout the site. Some of the grassland areas along the Boyne and Blackwater are used by a nationally important winter flock of *Cygnus cygnus*. Several Red Data Book plants occur within the site, with *Pyrola rotundifolia*, *Poa palustris* and *Juncus compressus*. Also occurring are a number of Red Data Book animals, notably *Meles meles*, *Martes martes* and *Rana temporaria*. The River Boyne is a designated Salmonid Water under the EU Freshwater Fish Directive.

THE RIVER BOYNE AND BLACKWATER SPA 004232

The River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA is a long linear site that comprises stretches of the River Boyne and several of its tributaries. Most of the site is in Co Meath but it extends also into Counties Cavan, Louth and Westmeath. It includes the following river sections: The River Boyne from the M1 motorway bridge, west of Drogheda, to the junction with the Royal Canal, west of Longwood, Co Meath; the River Blackwater from its junction with the River Boyne in Navan to the junction with Lough Ramor in Co Cavan; the Tremblestown River (and Athboy River) from the junction with the River Boyne at Kilnagross Bridge to the bridge in Athboy, Co Meath; the Stoneyford River from its junction with the River Boyne to Stonestone Bridge in Co. Westmeath; the River Deel from its junction with the River Boyne to Cummer Bridge, Co. Westmeath. The site includes the river channel and marginal vegetation.

The River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA supports nationally important numbers of *Alcedo atthis*. Other species which occur within the site include *Cygnus olor*, *Anas crecca*, *Anas platyrhynchos*, *Phalacrocorax carbo*, *Ardea cinerea*, *Gallinula chloropus*, *Gallinago gallinago* and *Riparia riparia*.

3.4 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The potential impacts of the proposed development on the Natura 2000 sites identified above are described below.

Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give rise to impacts on nearby Natura 2000 site:

The construction and operation of the proposed development will have no significant effects on the designated sites identified, i.e., the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC/SPA. There are no individual elements of the proposed project that are likely to give rise to negative impacts on these sites. There is an adequate distance between the proposed development site and designated areas to ensure that no direct impacts will occur. There are no source – pathway – receptor linkages between the application site and designated areas. This minimises any potential risk.

Describe any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the nearby Natura 2000 sites by virtue of:

Size and scale: Given the size and scale of the development in relation to the overall size of the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC/SPA, the likelihood of any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on these designated sites are low.

Land-take: There will be no land-take from any designated site. There will be no interference with the boundaries of any designated site.

Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site: At its closest point, the proposed development is situated 1.1km north of the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC/SPA. The distance from these Natura 2000 sites is adequate to predict that there will be no impacts upon these designated areas.

Resource requirements (water abstraction etc.): No resources will be taken from any Natura 2000 site and there are no resource requirements that will impact upon the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC/SPA.

Emissions: Neither the construction nor the operation of the proposed development will result in any emissions to the identified SAC or SPA. Only clean surface water run-off will be directed to local watercourses via appropriate silt and oil traps.

Excavation requirements: There will be no excavation works that will impact upon any designated area.

Transportation requirements: There will be no additional transportation requirements resulting from the proposed development and associated works that will have any impact upon the Natura 2000 sites identified.

Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning etc: Once construction begins, it should be complete within one year.

Describe any likely changes to the nearby Natura 2000 sites arising as a result of:

Reduction of habitat area: The proposed development lies outside the boundaries of the Natura 2000 sites identified in Section 3.3. There will be no reduction of designated habitat area within any SAC or SPA. There will be no interference with the boundaries of any SAC or SPC.

Disturbance to key species: There will be no direct disturbance to any species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive or Annex II of the Habitats Directive. There will be no reduction in water quality in the the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC/SPA arising from the construction or operation of this development, therefore any indirect impacts upon listed species will be avoided.

Habitat or species fragmentation: There will be no habitat or species fragmentation within any SAC or SPA. No ecological corridors between the proposed site and the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC/SPA will be damaged or destroyed.

Reduction in species density: There will be no reduction in species density within the SAC and SPA.

Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.): There will be no negative impacts upon surface or ground water quality within the SAC or SPA. There will be no negative impacts upon the water quality in any designated site, specifically in the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC/SPA.

Describe any likely impacts on the nearby Natura 2000 sites as a whole in terms of:

Interference with the key relationships that define the structure or function of the site: It is not considered likely that there will be any impacts on the key relationships that define the structure or function of the Natura 2000 sites identified.

Provide indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of:

Loss - Estimated percentage of lost area of habitat: None

Fragmentation: None

Disruption & disturbance: None

Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality etc.): None

3.5 FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

| Finding of No Significant Effects Report Matrix | |
|--|---|
| Name of project | Construction of a Housing Development at St Francis Park, Navan, Co. Meath. |
| Name and location of Natura 2000 site | The River Boyne and Blackwater SAC / SPA is situated 1.1km south of the application site. |
| Description of project | A Residential Development |
| Is the project directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site? | No |
| Are there other projects or plans that together with project being assessed could affect the site? | No |
| The Assessment of Significance of Effects | |
| Describe how the project is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site | Having regard to the location, nature and scale of the proposed development, it is considered that there is no potential for significant effects either from the proposed development on its own or in combination with other plans and projects. |
| Explain why these effects are not considered significant | Not applicable as there is no potential for negative impacts |
| Describe how the project is likely to affect species designated under Annex II of the Habitats Directive. | No impacts likely |
| Data Collected to Carry out the Assessment | |
| Who carried out the assessment | Noreen McLoughlin, MSC, MCIEEM. Consultant Ecologist |
| Sources of data | NPWS, EPA, National Biodiversity Data Centre, Meath County Council |
| Level of assessment completed | Stage1 Appropriate Assessment Screening |
| Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed | Full results included |

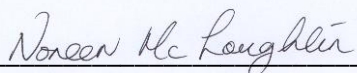
4 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION

In accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the relevant case law, established best practice and the precautionary principle, this AA Screening Report has examined the details of the project in relation to the relevant Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the application site.

At this stage of the AA process, it is for the competent authority, i.e., Meath County Council, to carry out the screening for AA and to reach one of the following determinations:

- a) AA of the proposed development is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European sites;
- b) AA of the proposed development is *not* required if it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European sites.

In conclusion, no impacts are likely as a result of the proposed development on the overall integrity of any Natura 2000 Site. Therefore, Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (NIS) is **not required**.



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