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Newtown Road Active Travel

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

September 2023

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Galway Office Fairgreen House, Fairgreen Road, Galway, H91 AXK8, Ireland. Tel: +353 (0)91 565 211	Dublin Office Block 10-4, Blanchardstown Corporate Park, Dublin 15, D15 X98N, Ireland. Tel: +353 (0)1 803 0406	Castlebar Office Market Square, Castlebar, Mayo, F23 Y427, Ireland. Tel: +353 (0)94 902 1401	Limerick Office Ducart Suite, Castletroy Commercial Campus, Limerick V94 Y6FD Ireland Tel: +353 (0)61 574 413	Sligo Office The Gateway Building Floor 3, Northwest Business Park Collooney, Sligo Ireland

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Meath County Council is proposing to upgrade the pedestrian facilities along the Newtown Road (L8017) and Old Lackanash Road (L8016) in Trim, Co. Meath, connecting the R161 regional road to the R154 regional road on the south and eastern side of a large housing development on the outskirts of Trim town.

TOBIN Consulting Engineers (hereafter referred to as TOBIN) has prepared this Screening Report for Appropriate Assessment (AA) on behalf of Meath County Council.

The purpose of this report is to inform the AA process, which is carried out by the competent authority (in this case Meath County Council). Appropriate Assessment is an assessment of whether a plan or project, alone and/or in-combination with other plans or projects, may have significant effects on a European site, collectively known as the Natura 2000 network, in view of the site's conservation objectives.

The proposed development design has sought to, in as far as possible, avoid impacts on European sites. This report considers the final design. It determines if direct, indirect, or in-combination effects could arise, or if there is uncertainty regarding potential effects.

This report provides information to assist the competent authority in undertaking a Screening Assessment of the proposed development and was informed by a desktop study undertaken by TOBIN Senior Ecologist, Sinead O' Reilly (B.Sc. M.Res), and reviewed by TOBIN Lead Ecologist, Laura Kennedy (M.Sc.).

2.0 THE APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The AA process is an assessment of significant effects of a plan or project, alone and/or in-combination with other plans or projects, on the conservation objectives of a European site(s). The Natura 2000 network is made up of European sites including Special Protection Areas (SPAs), established under the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) (more generally referred to as the 'Birds Directive') and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), established under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) (more generally referred to as the 'Habitats Directive'). The Natura 2000 network helps provide for the protection and long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

The Screening Stage of the AA process identifies any likely significant effects upon European sites from the proposed development alone or in-combination with other projects or plans. A series of questions are asked during the Screening Stage of the AA process to determine:

- whether a plan or project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site; and
- whether a project or plan 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.

2.1 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, better known as the 'Habitats Directive', provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Articles 3 to 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 network.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect European sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for AA:

'Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In 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) states:

'If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the [Natura 2000] 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, 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.'

The provision for an AA is transposed into Irish law by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2010 (as amended). Section 177U (4) of the said Acts provides for screening for Appropriate Assessment as follows:

'The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of [...] a 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 have a significant effect on a European site.'

Section 177U (5) provides as follows:

'The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of a [...] 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 have a significant effect on a European site.'

An AA should be based on best scientific knowledge and the competent authority should ensure that expertise such as ecological, geological, and hydrological are utilised, where relevant.

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has made several rulings in relation to AA, regarding when it is required, its purpose, and the standards it should meet. Consideration has been given to the evolution in interpretation and application of directives and national legislation arising from jurisprudence of the European and Irish courts, in respect of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

2.2 STAGES INVOLVED IN THE APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

There are four potential stages in the AA process; the result of each stage determines the requirement for assessment under the next.

Stage 1: Screening / Test of Significance

This process identifies the likely significant effects upon a European site from a proposed project or plan. Its purpose is to determine, on the basis of a preliminary assessment and objective criteria, whether a plan or project which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European site, individually or in-combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect upon the European site, in view of its conservation objectives. A project may be 'screened-in' if there is a possibility or uncertainty of possible effects upon the European site, requiring a Stage Two AA. If there is no evidence to suggest significant effects due to the proposed plan or development the project is 'screened-out' from further assessment.

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment

Consideration is given if potential impact(s) of a project or plan could cause likely significantly effects to the integrity of surrounding European sites, 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 likely significant effects have been identified, an assessment of the potential mitigation to avoid/reduce such impacts is required. A NIS is often produced at this stage to inform the AA which is undertaken by the competent authority. This stage is required where uncertainty of effect arises, or a potential effect has been defined which requires further procedures/mitigation to remove uncertainty of a defined impact.

Stage 3: Assessment of Alternatives

This stage of the potential process arises where adverse effects on the integrity of a European site cannot be excluded and examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site. However, in circumstances where there will not be any adverse effects on any European site, the developer places no reliance upon this third stage of the process in the context of this application for planning permission for the proposed development.

Stage 4: Assessment Where Adverse Effects Remain

This is the derogation process of Article 6(4), which examines whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for allowing a project to proceed where adverse effects on the integrity of a European site have been predicted. Compensatory measures must be proposed and assessed as part of this stage and the EU Commission must be informed of the compensatory measures. Again, the developer places no reliance upon this stage of the process in the context of the application for planning permission for the proposed development.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This report has been prepared having regard to the following guidance:

- Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg (European Commission [EC] 2000)[1].

[1] Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/21676661-a79f-4153-b984-aeb28f07c80a/language-en

- Nature and Biodiversity Cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg (EC, 2006)[2].
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites – The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission (EC, 2018)[3].
- Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats. Version EUR 28. European Commission (EC, 2013)[4].
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland, Guidance for Planning Authorities. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG, 2010)[5].
- Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC – Clarification of the concepts of: alternative solutions, imperative reasons of overriding public interest, compensatory measures, overall coherence, opinion of the commission. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg (EC, 2007)[6].
- Assessment of Plans and Projects in Relation to Natura 2000 Sites – Methodological Guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2021a)[7];
- Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management. Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) Practice Note PN01 (OPR, 2021)[8].
- Guidance Document on the Strict Protection of Animal Species of Community Interest Under the Habitats Directive (EC, 2021)[9].

This report has similarly been prepared with regard to relevant rulings by the CJEU, the High Court, and the Supreme Court. A review of *Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, Rulings of the European Court Justice* (Sundseth & Roth, 2014) and other relevant rulings was undertaken[10].

Definitions of conservation status, integrity and significance used in this assessment are defined in accordance with *'Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC'* (EC, 2018):

- Favourable conservation status (FCS) can only be defined and achieved at the level of the natural range of a species or a habitat type. A broad conservation objective aiming at achieving FCS can therefore only be considered at an appropriate level, such as for example the national, biogeographical or European level. The conservation measures have to correspond to the ecological requirements of the natural habitat types in Annex I and of the species in Annex II present on the site. The ecological requirements of those natural habitat types and species involve all the ecological needs which are deemed necessary to ensure the conservation of the habitat types and species. They can only be defined on a case-by-case basis and using scientific knowledge.

[2] Nature and Biodiversity Cases: https://friendsoftheirishenvironment.org/images/EULaw/ecj_rulings_en.pdf
[3]European Commission (2018) https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/Provisions_Art_6_nov_2018_en.pdf
[4]Interpretation Manual: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/docs/Int_Manual_EU28.pdf
[5]Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS_2009_AA_Guidance.pdf
[6] Guidance Document on Article 6 (4): https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/guidance_art6_4_en.pdf
[7]Assessment of Plans and Projects in Relation to Natura 2000 sites: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/pdf/methodological-guidance_2021-10/EN.pdf
[8]Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management: 9729-Office-of-the-Planning-Regulator-Appropriate-Assessment-Screening-booklet-15.pdf
[9] EC guidance on Species Protection: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/guidance/index_en.htm
[10] Irish Legal Information Initiative: https://irlii.org/leading-cases-environmental/

- The integrity of a European site is defined as the coherent sum of the site's ecological structure, function, and ecological processes, across its whole area, which enables it to sustain the habitats, complex of habitats and/or populations of species for which the site is designated.
- Significant effect should be determined in relation to the specific features and environmental conditions of the protected site concerned by the plan or project, taking particular account of the site's conservation objectives and ecological characteristics.

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 SITE LOCATION

The proposed development site of the Newtown Road Active Travel Scheme is situated along the Newtown Road (L8017) and Old Lackanash Road (L8016) in Trim, Co. Meath. The surrounding land is predominantly comprised of improved agricultural lands, residential and commercial properties, and a cemetery. Trim town is proximate to the national road network, and closely linked to Navan and Dunshaughlin on the M3 corridor and to the M4 corridor in County Kildare to the south.

The location of the proposed development site is indicated on Figure 4-1.

Figure 4-1: Site Location Map

4.2 DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Newtown Road Active Travel involves the proposal to install high quality pedestrian facilities along the Newtown Road (L8017) and green area adjacent the Old Lackanash Road (L8016) in Trim, connecting the R161 to the R154 on the south and eastern side of a large housing development on the outskirts of the town.

The route of the proposed upgraded pedestrian facilities commences at the end of an existing pathway off the Old Lackanash Road (L8016), travels northwards for 190m along the boundary of an existing green area, parallel to the Old Lackanash Road (L8016) and L8017 Newtown Road, before emerging out onto the L8017 Newtown Road. The route then will follow the L8017 Newtown Road north for a distance of 430m to its junction with the R161 Navan Road. The total length of the proposed scheme is approximately 620m. The entirety of the scheme is situated within an urban 50km/h speed limit.

This will improve safety for pedestrians by the provision of dedicated walking facilities with public lighting. It will create a sustainable mode of active travel access to the primary and secondary schools in the town and to local amenities and also provide improved linkages to public transport on the R161 and the R154.

The proposed development will include site infrastructure and the installation of high-quality pedestrian facilities. Greenfield areas will be required for the works, with pre-existing infrastructure in place across the full extent of the scheme.

The proposed development will comprise of:

- Extension to the existing footpath within the green area that links the Old Lackanash Road (L8016) to the Newtown Abbey Housing Development, creating a link to the Newtown Road (L8017);
- Amendments to the L8017 Newtown Road; and
- All associated site and ancillary highway works including:
    - Importing and depositing fill;
    - Compacting fill;
    - Removal of up to 75m native hedgerow, embankment and planting to rear of properties
    - Removal of existing footpaths and installing new footpaths (typically between 1.8m and 2.5m wide);
    - Removal of existing kerbing and installing new kerbing (100mm) and include drop kerbing (6mm-25mm for pedestrian use respectively) and pin kerbing (100mm);
    - Removal of construction waste to a licensed waste facility;
    - Public lighting installed along Newtown road;
    - Removing and relocating of existing bollards, telecom poles, utilities and road signs;
    - Fencing;
    - Installation of a precast retaining wall and concrete footing;
    - Installation of drainage gullies;
    - Construction compound and storage facilities;
    - Earthworks (excavation);
    - Landscaping;
    - Wheel wash area; and
    - Site clearance.

The proposed site layout and proposed works are shown on site layout Drawing No. 11587-2001 and associated Part 8 Planning Drawings which are included in the Design Report, as part of the Planning Application.

4.3 CONSTRUCTION PHASE ACTIVITIES

4.3.1 Construction Phase Description

The proposed development site footprint is approximately 4,000m² between offline landtake and online footway works. The main locations and associated features of the proposed development works are described below. As noted, the proposed works are shown on Part 8 Drawings in the Design Report included as part of the Planning Application.

4.3.1.1 Section 1: Extension of Existing Footpath within Park Area to the Newtown Road

- Paving provisions and an amended landscaping design;
- 2.5m wide walkway linking the Old Lackanash Road to Newtown Road with brown stone mastic and asphalt finish;
- Excavation of soil for installation of footpath;
- Installation of lighting and cabling;
- Installation of landscaping features;
- Site clearance. The excavated material will be reinstated on site where possible or be disposed offsite to a licenced landfill.

4.3.1.2 Upgrades to the Newtown Road (L8017)

- Installation of a typical 2.5m footpath and kerbing on the left side of the Newtown Road towards the Navan Road (R161);
- Widening to the rear of existing footpaths to 1.8m where present along the Newtown Road towards the Navan Road;
- Installation of precast retaining wall on Newtown Road;
- Removal of up to 75m hedgerow, embankment to provide access between the new path through the park area and the installation of a new footpath on the Newtown Road;
- Removal of kerbing and concrete footpath to install concrete footway north of entrance to Newtown Abbey;
- Removal of Bituminous footpath in sections to install of tactile paving;
- Installation of streetlights and cabling;
- Drainage gullies;
- Installation of privacy fencing to rear of properties affected along Newtown Road;
- Repositioning of bollards, signage posts, existing poles, streetlights and fire hydrant and chain link to the rear of proposed footway;
- Resetting utility meters to finished pavement level;
- The existing pavement at Steeple Manor estate entrance will be milled in order to reach the required formation level for the adjoining area. The excavated material will be reinstated on site where possible or be disposed offsite to a licenced landfill.

4.3.2 Duration of Proposed Construction Phase Activities

The construction phase of the proposed development is expected to commence in late Q2 of 2024 and be completed by late Q3 2024, taking approximately 20 weeks to complete.

The total number of construction staff on-site will vary during the construction phase of the works but are expected to peak at approximately 8 persons.

Standard working hours during the construction period are expected to be Monday to Friday 08:00 to 17:00 hours. During certain stages of the construction phase, it is expected that some work will have to be carried out outside of normal working hours to avoid road closures however this will be kept to a minimum. All site personnel will be required to wear project notification labelling on high visibility vests and head protection so that they can be easily identified by all workers on-site. Construction light will be used during the three months when required between 8-10am and 4-5pm each day.

4.3.3 Temporary Construction Compound

A temporary construction compound will be located within the vicinity of the proposed development site. The exact location of this will be determined between the Contractor / Meath County Council and Private Landowners. The site will be located a minimum distance of 50m from any European site (SAC or SPA) and any watercourse. The Friarspark Stream and the River Boyne are located approximately 10m and 65m south respectively, of the proposed development site boundary. The proposed southern site boundary is located 5m north of a four-foot stone wall that surrounds the park area and these is a 5m buffer of green vegetation between the wall and the boundary line. There is also a raised bridge (St. Peters Bridge) at the Links/Newtown Road junction that crosses the River Boyne. This also has four-foot stone walls either side before its crossing. There is a 10m vegetation buffer from the roadside to the riverbank (i.e. Friarspark Stream).

The compound will comprise of temporary site offices (portacabins), staff welfare facilities, car parking, material and equipment storage, washout and laydown areas. Water, foul and electrical connections will be provided to accommodate the above. Water and watewater will be built into the site offices and disposed of to a licenced facility in accordance with the Contractors management plan. Trucks, mixers, and concrete pumps that have contained concrete will be washed out in a designated impermeable area within the construction compound.

Access to the compound will be from the Newtown Road and security fencing will be erected around the perimeter of the site compound.

4.3.4 Pedestrian Pavement and Kerbing

Pedestrian pavements will be installed using Bituminous flexible surface (approx. 330m bituminous footway [1.8-2.5m] at 150-200mm depth. 140m^3) and concrete pavement (approx. 300m concrete footway [1.8-2.5m] at 15-200mm depth 125m^3) in accordance with CC-SCD-01104. The new footpaths (1.8m–2.5m wide with localised narrowing due to local constrains) will be constructed within the park area boundary on the left side of the Old Lackanash Road and along the Newtown Road. Only footpaths being widened at any one time, will be closed off to the public. Existing footpaths along this section of road will be replaced by excavation and removed to a licenced waste facility. Kerbing will be installed alongside the footpaths. A 100mm height kerbing standard will be used in this urban area. This will include 360m of 50x100mm precast pin kerbing (granite or similar), 400m of 100mm Kerb CC-SCD-01101 Type A, 50m of 6mm Kerb CC-SCD-01101 Type D and 27m 100mm drop kerbing.

The footway works has been designed in accordance with the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) Publications Standards. All utility covers will be retained and reset to finished pavement level.

4.3.5 Earth Works

Site clearance activities will include preparation of the construction working area, topsoil stripping and removal of hedgerow and embankment. All existing concrete and bituminous footpaths, kerbing and pavement that are proposed for removal will be taken off site to a licenced waste facility.

Along the Newtown Road, it is proposed that 100m of verges, hedgerow and embankment located along the left side will be excavated and removed to provide the proposed 1.8m wide footpath. This will generate approximately 100m^3 of material that will be removed from site and disposed of at a licenced facility. The remaining embankment material will then be retained by a low-level mass precast concrete wall.

Landowner consultation will be required to determine if fencing or a replacement hedgerow will be installed/planted. For the purposes of this assessment, it is assumed the hedgerow habitat will be permanently lost.

A total of approximately 170m^3 of topsoil is to be removed (1,125m^2 x 0.150m) from the whole site. It is proposed to stockpile the topsoil in close proximity to the site compound location.

The stockpile will be located a minimum distance of 50m from any European site (SAC or SPA) and any watercourse. The Friarspark Stream and the River Boyne are located approximately 10m and 65m south respectively, of the proposed development site boundary. The proposed southern site boundary is located 5m north of a four-foot stone wall that surrounds the park area and these is a 5m buffer of green vegetation between the wall and the boundary line. There is also a raised bridge (St. Peters Bridge) at the Links/Newtown Road junction that crosses the River Boyne. This also has four-foot stone walls either side before its crossing. There is a 10m vegetation buffer from the 10roadside to the riverbank (i.e. Friarspark Stream).

It is envisaged that all topsoil will be reused for landscaping and reinstating verges once footpaths have been constructed.

All existing bollards, signage posts, existing poles, streetlights and fire hydrant will be relocated back behind the new footpaths.

4.3.6 Retaining wall

A retaining concrete wall, approximately 70m in length and 1m in height, will be constructed along the Newtown Road to replace the existing hedgerow, embankment and stonewall which is proposed to be removed. This will be a precast wall and will require concrete footing; therefore, concrete pouring and filling will be required for the concrete footing for the wall. The concrete pouring and filling will be fully controlled to ensure that cement bound materials do not present any pollution risk. Trucks, mixers, and concrete pumps that have contained concrete will be washed out in a designated impermeable area.

4.3.7 Signage

Existing traffic signs will be utilised where possible and moved to suit the new footpaths and kerb lines. In accordance with DMURS, signage will be kept to a minimum.

4.3.8 Lighting

Lighting will be installed along the new walkway within the park area up to Newtown Road. Twenty new streetlights and associated cabling will be installed along the Newtown Road. Two street light poles will be repositioned to the back of the new footpath along the Old Lackanash Road.

4.3.9 Drainage

The existing drainage regime will remain in place. The existing sealed surface water drainage system and the existing drainage network will be used. No new outfalls will be created with the proposed works. New gullies will be placed against new kerb lines.

4.3.10 Traffic Control

A stop-go traffic management system will be required to provide a safe buffer zone between live traffic and the construction zone. It is envisaged that this will be required for the duration of the works.

4.3.11 Fencing

Fencing through the public area is not anticipated but if provided will be mammal friendly. Privacy fencing will be provided to the rear of properties affected along Newtown Road (3 no properties, approx. 40m length). Landowner consultation will determine the fencing type.

4.3.12 Plant and Equipment

Mobile plant and equipment will be employed on-site for the proposed development for various activities such as moving materials within processes and transporting materials into the site. It is estimated that there will be 25-35 dumper truck movements per day. It is envisaged that the required mobile plant and equipment will be as follows:

- Digger and dumper (typically <10 Tonne for reduced working space in the urban environment;
- Roller compactors (Up to typically <10 Tonne);
- Rigid haulage trucks (up to 20 Tonne) for import and export of material;
- Security fencing;
- Traffic management (traffic cones and lights); and
- Pavers and milling machines as required.

4.4 OPERATION PHASE ACTIVITIES

The operation phase of the proposed development is expected to be characterised by the movement of people on the new infrastructure. The traffic levels of people and vehicles, as well as any local maintenance activities, are not expected to differ from the baseline/present conditions.

5.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

A description of the receiving environment is provided hereunder.

5.1 DESKTOP STUDY AND INFORMATION SOURCES

A desktop study was undertaken to inform this screening assessment. The desktop study comprised a review of the following key datasets and information sources:

- Identification of European sites within the Zone of Influence (ZoI) of the proposed development area through the identification of potential pathways/links from the proposed development area and European sites and/or supporting habitats.
- Review of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) site synopsis, Natura 2000 data forms and Conservation Objectives for European sites within the ZoI (Accessed [May 2023] via https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites).
- NPWS datasets on Annex I habitats and Annex II species.
- Review of available literature and web data. This included a detailed review of the NPWS and National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) websites including mapping and available reports for relevant sites and in particular Qualifying Interests (QIs) and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) described and their Conservation Objectives.
- Review of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) research data.
- Water Framework Directive (WFD) website: (Accessed [May 2023] via https://www.catchments.ie/guide-water-framework-directive/).
- GSI Online mapping: (Accessed [May 2023] via http://dcenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=a30af518e87a4c0ab2fbde2aaac3c228).
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Mapping database: (Accessed [May 2023] via https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool).
- A review of aerial photography (Google Maps, Bing Maps) and mapping (Ordnance Survey of Ireland, Geological Survey of Ireland) were used to identify non-designated habitats such as rivers, woodlands, and hedgerows of local ecological importance.
- Review of previous ecological assessments undertaken within the area.

The following Plans and their objectives and policies were also reviewed to inform this assessment:

- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021[11];
- All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025[12];
- Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027[13]; and
- Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23)[14].

5.2 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

As noted, the proposed development site is located at the south of the existing footpath in the park area north of the Old Lackanash Road, and emerging out onto the Newtown Road and then along the L8017 Newtown Road North to its junction with the R161 Navan Road.

The proposed development site is situated in an urban setting. Habitats present within the site include buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3), improved agricultural grassland (GA1), stonewalls and other stonework (BL1), flower beds and borders (BL4), hedgerows (WL1), dry meadows and grassy verges (GS2), treelines (WL2), depositing/lowland rivers (FW2) and scattered trees and parkland (WD5).

[11] https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/National%20Biodiversity%20Action%20P
[12] https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/All-Ireland-Pollinator-Plan-2021-2025-WEB.pdf
[13] https://consult.meath.ie/en/consultation/meath-adopted-county-development-plan
[14] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7bd8c-climate-action-plan-2023/

5.2.1 Hydrology and Hydrogeology

The proposed development is located within the Boyne_SC_090 sub catchment. The nearest river waterbody is the Boyne_090 (waterbody code: IE_EA_07B041400) which is located approximately 10m south of the proposed development. This waterbody, Friarspark (EPA code: 07F11) flows in a southerly direction for 65m before discharging into the River Boyne. The River Boyne is located approximately 65m south of the proposed development.

The River Boyne forms part of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (Site Code: 002299) and the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (Site Code: 004232). The River Boyne flows in an easterly direction before it ultimately discharges into Boyne Estuary Plume Zone (coastal waterbody code: IE_EA_010_0000) 56km downstream.

The Boyne_090 waterbody has been classified with a "Moderate" water quality status for the period 2016-2021. A review of the EPAs' maps show that the proposed development is not hydrologically connected to this waterbody.

The proposed development site is located within the Trim groundwater body (groundwater body code: IE_EA_G_002). The EPA published and latest available WFD status classification for the period 2016-2021 indicates that the Trim groundwater body is at "Good" qualitative (chemical) status and "Good" quantitative status (i.e., not overexploited), thus at "Good" status overall and meeting WFD "Good status" objectives. However, according to the 3rd cycle of the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) for Ireland, covering the period 2022-2027, the Trim groundwater body is considered "At Risk", with domestic wastewater identified as the significant pressure for the groundwater body (EPA, 2021)[15]. The Trim groundwater body and its associated pressures are not relevant to groundwater conditions within the site boundary as they are not connected as there is no hydrological pathway.

5.2.2 Fauna

A review of the NBDC grid square reports for the grid squares within which the proposed development lies (1km grid squares, N8157 and N8156), indicates that an Annex I bird species listed on the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) have previously been recorded within, or in close proximity to the proposed development site. This is the Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*).

The Kingfisher has been recorded in The First Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1968-1972 dataset and Bird Atlas 2007 – 2011. There are also two records within the Birds of Ireland dataset in 2020 and records show its presence within the proposed development site.

There are records of one bat species, Daubenton's Bat (*Myotis daubentonii*), recorded as present within the N8156 1km grid square. Other protected species recorded within the N8157 and N8156D 1km grid squares include; Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), Common Swift (*Apus apus*), Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos),* Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*), Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) and West European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*).

5.2.3 Flora

No Annex I habitats under the EU Habitats Directive have been recorded within the proposed

[15] Data - Catchments.ie - Catchments.ie

development site. In addition, no plant species listed under the Flora Protection Order, 2022 (FPO) have been recorded within or near the proposed development site.

There is record of an invasive non-native species (INNS) plant located within the N85D 2km grid square. Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), listed in Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the SI 477/2011, has been recorded as present within the N85D 2km grid square and is located along the banks of the River Boyne, 1.27km south west of the proposed development site boundary.

5.2.4 European Sites

There are European sites located within or adjacent to the proposed development site. The closest European site is the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (Site Code: 002299) and the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (Site Code: 004232) which are located approximately 18m east and 65m south of the proposed development site, respectively. The proposed development site is not hydrologically connected to these European sites. Further information on European sites within the Zone of Influence (ZoI) of the proposed development is outlined in Section 6.4 of this report.

6.0 OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

An overview of potential impacts from the construction and operational phases of the proposed development, on the receiving environment is discussed hereunder. There are several elements associated with the proposed development that may give rise to direct and indirect impacts on the receiving environment that could have potential to result in likely significant effects on European sites within the ZoI of the proposed development.

6.1 CONSTRUCTION PHASE IMPACTS

Potential construction phase impacts associated with the proposed development are discussed hereunder.

6.1.1 Habitat Loss

The proposed development footprint is approximately 4,000m² (0.4ha) in size. It is not located within the boundaries of any European site, and no Annex I habitats protected under the Habitats Directive, were identified within the footprint of the proposed development site.

The habitats lost within the proposed development site will include artificial surfaces, grass verges, improved agricultural land, embankments and hedgerows. All habitats, with the exception of artificial surfaces, were assessed as being of local importance. The hedgerow proposed for removal is not deemed to have bat roost potential due to its size and structure, however it is of ecological value to passerine birds in the area.

The majority of the aforementioned habitats within the development footprint are buildings and artificial surfaces. The artificial surfaces which are proposed to be removed and replaced with upgraded artificial surfaces, have been appraised as being of low local ecological value.

6.1.2 Habitat Degradation due to Water Quality Impacts

It will be necessary to remove existing hedgerows, embankments, stonewalls, kerbing, pavement material, and also relocate poles, signage posts, fire hydrants and bollards from the proposed development site to facilitate the construction of the new kerbing, pavements,

retaining wall, and streetlighting. The excavated material will be disposed offsite to a licensed landfill, with topsoil reinstated where possible.

Site clearance, excavation activities and the stockpiling of material have the potential to result in the runoff of sediment laden surface water, if not appropriately managed. Such runoff could result in an increase of suspended solids and nutrients depositing within nearby watercourses. Increased silt loading in watercourses can stunt aquatic plant growth, limit dissolved oxygen capacity and overall reduce the ecological quality of watercourses, with the most critical period associated with low flow conditions.

The pouring of concrete will be required to facilitate the foundation works associated with the installation of the precast retaining wall. Surface water runoff could be contaminated by leaks and spills of fuel, oil or other construction material from construction vehicles/machinery if not properly managed. The runoff of contaminated surface water could result in the degradation of water quality and impacts to aquatic fauna and flora, particularly if concrete is present.

The Friarspark Stream and the River Boyne are located approximately 10m and 65m south respectively, of the proposed development site boundary. The proposed footpath within the park area is located 5m north of a four-foot stone wall that surrounds the park area and a 5m buffer of green vegetation between the wall and the proposed path. There is also a raised bridge (St. Peters Bridge) at the Links/Newtown Road junction that crosses the River Boyne. This also has four-foot stone walls either side before its crossing. There is a 10m vegetation buffer from the roadside to the riverbank (i.e. Friarspark Stream).

These will act as a buffer zone between proposed footpath and the watercourse. It will provide a natural separation area between the proposed works within the public park area adjacent to the Links Road and works on the Newtown Road and prevent the risk of sediment laden runoff and/or construction pollution depositing within the watercourse.

6.1.3 Habitat Degradation due to Air Quality Impacts (Dust)

Construction activities, such as excavation works, moving of material and trackout, can result in the generation of dust. The deposition of dust on flora or habitats can inhibit effective photosynthesis and transpiration (Farmer, 1993)[16]. The Institute of Air Quality Management provide guidelines; '*Guidance on the Assessment of Dust from Demolition and Construction*' (Holman *et al.*, 2014)[17], which prescribes potential dust emission risk classes to ecological receptors. Following the guidance characterisation, considering the size of the proposed development, the scale of the earthworks was considered 'Medium' (total site area < 2,500 m– 10,000 m²) with less than five earth moving vehicles at one time per day. The guidelines also indicate that an assessment will be required where there is an ecological receptor within 50m of the boundary of a site or 50m of the route(s) used by construction vehicles. The ZoI of dust impacts was therefore established as 50m from the proposed development site boundary.

Excavation activities may result in the temporary generation of dust in the locality of the works area. However, the proposed development site is located on an existing road and the extent of the works are minor. As a result, it is likely the dust created by the proposed development will be minimal and will not extend greater than 50m from the proposed development.

[16] Farmer AM. The effects of dust on vegetation--a review. Environ Pollut. 1993;79(1):63-75. doi: 10.1016/0269-7491(93)90179-r. PMID: 15091915.
[17] Holman, C., Barrowcliffe, R., Birkenshaw, D., Dalton, H., Gray, G., Harker, G., Brett, P., Laxen, D., Marner, B. and Marsh, D., 2014. IAQM Guidance on the Assessment of Dust from Demolition and Construction. *Institute of Air Quality Management: London, UK*.

6.1.4 Habitat Degradation due to the Introduction of Invasive Species

As stated in Section 5.2.3 a review of the NBDC database was conducted for grid squares encompassing the proposed development (N8157 and N8156D) and no INNS were found to have been previously recorded within the proposed development. However Japanese knotweed has been recorded 1.27km southwest of the site boundary.

As no INNS have been recorded within the proposed development site, there is no potential for the spread of invasive species around the site or offsite. There is, however, potential that the movement of construction vehicles and material to and from the site may result in the introduction of invasive species if not appropriately managed. The introduction of invasive plant species has the potential to negatively impact habitats by shading and competitively excluding native plant species, providing less favourable habitats for native fauna (TII, 2020[18]). However, the likelihood of this impact occurring is considered to be low given the lack of suitable habitat for the establishment of plant species within the proposed development (i.e. built environment).

6.1.5 Disturbance (Noise and Lighting)

The proposed construction works will result in an increase in noise levels during the construction phase, as well as an increase in personnel and traffic movement to and from the site. It should be noted that no rock breaking or blasting will be required during the construction works. It is likely that temporary construction lighting will be required during the construction works. Fugitive lighting could deter movement of species in the area. A temporary increase in noise levels, disturbance and lighting within the proposed development site may result in disturbance to wildlife within the immediate vicinity of the site.

However, due to the proposed development site being located within an urban area, the noise levels during the proposed development works period will not significantly increase from the local baseline levels. Therefore, no significant impact due to the temporary rise of local noise levels is expected.

6.2 OPERATIONAL PHASE

The operation phase of the proposed development is expected to be characterised by the movement of traffic on the new infrastructure. The traffic levels of vehicles, as well as any local maintenance activities, are not expected to differ from the baseline/present conditions. The Old Lackanash Road and the Newtown Road will continue to function as the baseline/present conditions, with improved pedestrian facilities in place, which are not anticipated to change local traffic levels nor potential disturbance levels.

The proposed development will result in an increase in artificial lighting (for pedestrian safety) in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site, however, due to the area already being built-up, this is likely to have a negligible impact.

[18] https://www.tiipublications.ie/library/GE-ENV-01105-01.pdf

6.3 DETERMINING THE LIKELY ZONE OF INFLUENCE

As an initial approach to the assessment of likely significant effects, all European sites within a 15km radius were examined. Additionally, the source-pathway-receptor model (OPR, 2021)[19] was used to identify viable pathways between the proposed development and European sites which may result in likely significant effects on their qualifying interests or special conservation interests. This conceptual model is a standard tool in environmental assessment. In order for an effect to occur, all three elements of this model must be in place. The absence or removal of one of the elements of the model means there is no likelihood for the effect to occur. In the context of the proposed development, the model comprises:

- Source (s) – potential impacts from the proposed development, e.g. the runoff of sediment/construction pollution;
- Pathway (s) – hydrological, physical or ecological connectivity between the proposed development and European site(s); and
- Receptor (s) – qualifying interests and/or special conservation interests of European site(s).

In order to inform the source-pathway-receptor model, the ZoI needs to be established. The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) defines the ZoI of a project as the area(s) over which ecological features may be affected by the biophysical changes caused by the proposed project and associated activities (CIEEM, 2018)[20].

In order to establish the ZoI of the proposed development, the likely key biophysical changes associated with the works were determined having regard to the project characteristics set out in Section 4.0 of this report. The ZoI of the proposed development is described hereunder.

Impacts associated with the loss of habitats will be confined to within the proposed development site boundary. The ZoI in this case was, therefore, defined as all lands within the Planning Application Boundary.

With regards potential habitat degradation effects associated with the release of sediment and other pollutants to surface water, the ZoI of the proposed development is considered to include receiving waterbodies adjacent to or downstream of the proposed development site during the construction phase. Hydrological linkages between the proposed development and European sites (and their QIs/SCIs) can occur over significant distances. However, any effect will be site specific depending on the receiving water environment and nature of the potential impact. In the case of the proposed development, surface water runoff from the proposed development may enter the receiving waterbody during construction. Thus, the ZoI in relation to surface water runoff, is considered to extend to the receiving waterbody downstream of the proposed development.

The spatial limit of dust impacts was established as 50m in accordance with the *'Guidance on the Assessment of Dust from Demolition and Construction'*[17]. Therefore, the ZoI for dust impacts is 50m from the proposed development boundary.

Noise from construction activity has the potential to cause disturbance to resting, foraging and commuting qualifying and special conservation interest species. Individual species will elicit

[19]https://www.opr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/9729-Office-of-the-Planning-Regulator-Appropriate-Assessment-Screening-booklet-15.pdf
[20] https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Combined-EclA-guidelines-2018-compressed.pdf

differing behavioral responses to disturbance at different distances from the source of disturbance. Below is a summary of the documented ZoI for varying species.

- Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formally the National Roads Authority) has produced a series of best practice planning and construction guidelines[21] for the treatment of certain protected mammal species (e.g. otter), which indicate that disturbance to terrestrial mammals would not extend beyond 150m.
- Cutts *et al.* (2013)[22] notes that different types of disturbance stimuli are characterised by different avifaunal reactions, however as a general rule of thumb, a distance of 300m can be used to represent the maximum likely disturbance distance for waterfowl.

The ZoI for noise/disturbance was therefore established as the proposed development site plus a 300m buffer.

6.4 IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT EUROPEAN SITES

As mentioned above, the source-pathway-receptor conceptual model was used to identify a list of 'relevant' European sites (i.e. those which could be potentially affected). Two European sites (one SAC and one SPA) were identified within a 15km buffer, and/or have a hydrological connectivity with the proposed development. These sites are assessed in Table 6-1 and are illustrated on Figure 6-1.

[21] Transport Infrastructure Ireland (2022). Environment. Available at: Environment - (tii.ie)

[22] Cutts, N., Hemingway, K., Spencer, J., (2013). Waterbird Disturbance Mitigation Toolkit Informing Estuarine Planning and Construction Projects.

Figure 6-1: Designated Sites Within a 15km Radius of the Proposed Development Site

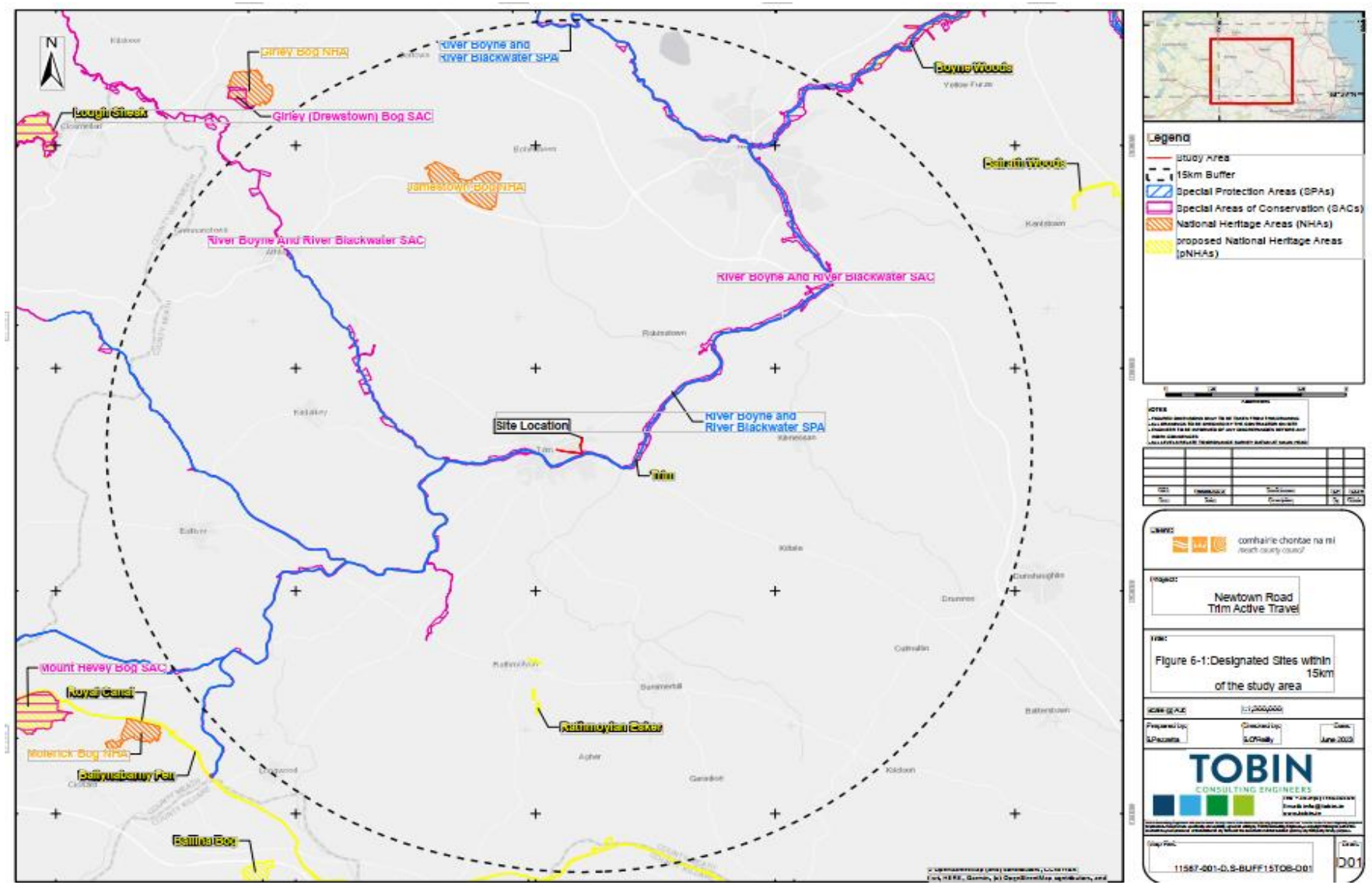

Table 6-1: European Sites within the Potential Zone of Influence of the Proposed Development and Assessment of Likely Significant Effects (indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive)*

European Site	Qualifying Interests / Special Conservation Interests	Source-Pathway-Receptor Link	Possibility of Likely Significant Effects
River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299) Distance ca. 18m east	• Alkaline fens [7230] • Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (*Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*) [91E0] • River Lamprey *(Lampetra fluviatilis*) [1099] • Salmon (*Salmo salar*) [1106] • Otter (*Lutra lutra*) [1355]	The SAC is located 18m east and a hydrological distance of c.65m south from the proposed development site. None of the proposed works occur within the SAC site boundary. There is no potential for direct habitat loss within the SAC. No Annex I habitats were recorded within the footprint of the development. Works will occur within close proximity to the Friarspark Stream. Friarspark Stream is located 10m east of the proposed development boundary, and flows southeast for 120m before entering the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC. However, the perimeter of the proposed development boundary in the park area is buffered by 5m of vegetation and two (4 ft) stone walls, one either side of the Links Road. There is also a raised bridge (St. Peters Bridge) at the Links/Newtown Road junction that crosses the River Boyne. This also has two (4 ft) stone walls either side. There is also 10m of vegetation from the roadside to the riverbank. The stone walls and vegetation are considered sufficient to act as a buffer and prevent the establishment of an effective hydrological pathway. Considering the above, there is a low risk for runoff carrying sediment and construction pollution entering the watercourse and indirectly effecting the aquatic QIs of this SAC. Instead surface water runoff from the proposed development will go to the existing sealed surface water drainage system. There is also no potential for direct and/ or indirect disturbance impacts on qualifying interest species. Construction works will be temporary and will result in an increase of noise and disturbance. However, the vegetated banks and existing stone walls (4ft) present along the Links Road and the Newtown Road near the River Boyne will provide a buffer/screen between the construction works and the River Boyne. This will help reduce noise and disturbance during construction. The volume of construction traffic estimated during the project is less than 1% compared to current AADT along the route, with approximately 9% HGV. No areas of the riverbank will be lit or	There is no potential for likely significant effects.

European Site	Qualifying Interests / Special Conservation Interests	Source-Pathway-Receptor Link	Possibility of Likely Significant Effects
		subject to an increase in disturbance during operation as a result of the proposed development. Therefore, there will be no likely significant disturbance effects on Otter as a result of the proposed development.	
River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (004232) Distance ca. 65m south	• Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) [A229]	This SPA is located at a hydrological distance of 65m south of the proposed development site and thus occurs within the ZoI for potential indirect habitat impacts and disturbance of the SCI species, Kingfisher. The proposed development site occurs inside the territory range of this designated bird species[23]. Therefore, there is potential for indirect effects on Kingfisher food resources, through the deterioration of water quality, as a hydrological connectivity exists between the proposed development and this SPA. Whilst the proposed development may fall within the foraging range for Kingfisher, given the availability of foraging areas within surrounding area, any potential impact from the proposed works would be negligible. There is also no suitable habitat for this SCI species within the proposed development site itself. There is a low risk for runoff carrying sediment or construction pollution entering the watercourses due to the presence of stone walls and vegetation buffers which provide a buffer/screen between the construction works and the River Boyne. In addition, surface water runoff from the proposed development will go to the existing sealed surface water drainage system. With regards disturbance impacts, construction phase noise levels will not increase significantly from the baseline condition and as such no disturbance impacts as a result of the proposed development are envisaged on the bird species for which this SPA is designated. The proposed development consists of minor works of a small scale which are short-term in nature.	There is no potential for likely significant effects.

[23] Robert Morgan & David Glue (1977) Breeding, Mortality and Movements of Kingfishers, Bird Study, 24:1, 15-24, DOI: 10.1080/00063657709476527

European Site	Qualifying Interests / Special Conservation Interests	Source-Pathway-Receptor Link	Possibility of Likely Significant Effects
		For these reasons, it is considered there is no potential for likely significant effects on the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA.	

7.0 IDENTIFICATION OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

7.1 POTENTIAL FOR LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

Table 6-1 lists European sites within 15km of the proposed development or which have a pathway to the proposed development. No source-pathway-receptor link was identified between the proposed development site and the two European sites listed. Therefore, there is no potential for likely significant effects on the conservation objectives of the qualifying interests/special conservation interests of these European sites, as a result of the proposed development.

7.2 POTENTIAL FOR IN-COMBINATION EFFECTS

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that:

"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."

It is therefore required that the potential impacts of the proposed development are considered in-combination with any other relevant plans or projects.

7.2.1 Projects

A search of the Meath County Council planning portal[24] was undertaken to identify projects in the surrounding area of the proposed development. There were a number of projects identified within the vicinity of the proposed development. Most of the projects involved the construction of residential properties, extension of existing residential properties and the construction and upgrades to commercial properties.

Due to the small nature of these developments and lack of connectivity to any European sites, these projects have been deemed to have no potential for significant effects on any European sites and therefore there is no possibility for in-combination effects with the proposed development.

7.2.2 Plans

Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027[25] indicates that the proposed development is part of the Economy and Employment Strategy Plan and the Movement Strategy Plan. The policies and objectives of the Economy and Employment Strategy Plan are to continue the successful implementation of the Economic Strategy which has facilitated the delivery of a number of significant foreign direct investment (F.D.I) and indigenous projects since its inception. A key priority for this plan is the development of a sustainable transport system, promoting measures to increase the use of public transport, while also increasing the modal

[24] https://www.eplanning.ie/MeathCC/searchtypes
[25] https://consult.meath.ie/en/consultation/meath-adopted-county-development-plan

share for walking and cycling in towns and villages across the county. Policy objectives for the Economy and Employment strategy include:

- ED OBJ 72: To continue to implement and facilitate environmental, amenity and recreational improvements to the public realm, including the restriction where appropriate of vehicle use in existing Core Retail Areas.
- ED OBJ 73: To promote and facilitate on-street activities including festivals, events, street markets and farmers / country markets in all existing retail centres.

Policy objectives for Meath County Movement Strategy includes preparing and commencing implementation of Local Transport Plans (LTP), in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and relevant stakeholders, for Drogheda (in conjunction with Louth County Council as part of the Joint Urban Plan), Ashbourne, Navan, Ratoath, and other settlements where Local Area Plans are undertaken, having regard to the Area Based Transport Assessment Guidance Notes (2019). Policy objectives for the Movement Strategy include:

- MOV POL 17: To identify and seek to implement a strategic, coherent and high-quality cycle and walking network across the County that is integrated with public transport and interconnected with cultural, recreational, retail, educational and employment destinations and attractions.
- MOV POL 20: To encourage, where appropriate, the incorporation of safe and efficient cycleways, accessible footpaths and pedestrian routes into the design schemes for town centres/neighbourhood centres, residential, educational, employment, recreational developments and other uses.
- MOV POL 22: To prioritise the safe movement of pedestrians and cyclists in proximity to public transport nodes.
- MOV OBJ 27: To implement, in conjunction with the NTA, the recommendations of the NTA strategy with regard to walking and cycling infrastructure.
- MOV OBJ 28: To revise road junction layouts, where appropriate, to provide dedicated pedestrian and cycling crossings, reduce pedestrian crossing distances, provide more direct pedestrian routes, and reduce the speed of turning traffic.
- MOV OBJ 29: To implement at appropriate locations pedestrian permeability schemes and enhancements.

It also seeks regular engagement between TII and the relevant Municipal District regarding road safety issues communities located on Meath's national roads.

This plan will support the investment for both new and enhanced transport infrastructure to ensure economic growth and investment, the delivery of employment opportunities, reduced commuting times, more sustainable communities and enhanced quality of life through improved connectivity within and between the settlements.

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF) to 2040 and National Development Plan (NDP)- (2021-2030)

Project Ireland 2040 is the Irish Governments overarching policy initiative for the long-term planning of the State. It is informed by the Programme for a Partnership Government 2016, which recognises that economic and social progress go hand in hand and is made up of the "National Planning Framework to 2040" and the "National Development Plan 2021-2030".

One of the principal purposes of preparing the NPF is to allow shared national development goals, including improved living standards, quality of life, prosperity, competitiveness & environmental sustainability, to be more broadly considered. In particular, the Trim Public Realm Scheme aims to provide based on the below NPF objectives;

- NPO15: Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.
- NPO17: Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets through appropriate and sensitive use now and for future generations.
- NPO18a: Support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.
- NPO27: Ensure the integration of safe & convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking & cycling accessibility to both existing & proposed developments & integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.
- NPO64: Improve air quality & help prevent people being exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution in our urban & rural areas through integrated land use & spatial planning that supports public transport, walking & cycling as more favourable modes of transport to the private car, the promotion of energy efficient buildings & homes, heating systems with zero local emissions, green infrastructure planning & innovative design solutions.

As part of Project Ireland 2040, the revised NDP sets out the Government's over-arching investment strategy and budget for the period 2021-2030. The plan identifies 10 National Strategic Outcomes which it aims to deliver a number of these NSOs relate directly to this project.

The NDP outlines several key rural initiatives, that set out to revitalise rural areas & to enhance economic growth. As part of the plan, the Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme supports the development & necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of infrastructure – covering a broad spectrum & range of active travel developments. The plan also identifies funding for Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities and prioritises regional and local roads.

National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)

The NIFTI has been developed to ensure sectoral investment is aligned with the National Planning Framework (NPF) and supports the delivery of the ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) in the National Development Plan. As the economy has grown in recent years, transport activity and emissions have risen also, and the correlation between emissions and economic growth must be broken. This will require considerable investment in walking, cycling and public transport, which will also bring environmental benefits in terms of air quality and noise pollution. It is essential that sustainable mobility alternatives take account of the needs of transport users whose experience has not always been well considered in the design of transport systems to provide viable alternatives to car travel that are accessible to all.

The NIFTI sets out the following investments priorities relevant to this proposed development:

- Investment Priority: Decarbonisation – "Decarbonisation and protection of our natural environment will mean investing in sustainable modes so that transport users have safe, accessible, reliable and efficient alternatives to the private car."
- Investment Priority: Protection and Renewal – "Protecting and renewing the existing land transport network is a key priority for transport investment." "Necessary improvements to ensure safety or increase accessibility are considered a form of asset protection and renewal."

- Investment Priority: Enhanced Regional and Rural Connectivity: – "The types of measures that might be supported under this Investment Priority are diverse and will depend on specific transport needs and local contexts but could include the introduction of a regional bus service in an area poorly served by public transport or the realignment of a road to improve safety, journey speeds and reliability.

Climate Action Plan 2021

The Climate Action Plan sets out a range of measures to reduce emissions in the transport sector. These measures consist of a mix of investments in sustainable transport infrastructure designed to deliver an additional 500,000 daily journeys by walking, cycling and public transport. Under chapter 15 "Transport" the following climate actions are identified and considered relevant to this proposed development:

- Action 231 - Continue the improvement and expansion of the Active Travel.
- Action 233 – Construct an additional 1,000km of cycling and walking infrastructure.
- Action 234 – Encourage an increased level of modal shift towards Active Travel (walking and cycling) and away from private car use.

Potential effects on European sites from the proposed development in-combination with the plans listed above were identified and assessed. Considering the environmental protection policies included within these plans, they pose no identifiable risk of resulting in likely significant effects on the integrity of any European sites in-combination with the proposed development.

8.0 SCREENING ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION

The screening assessment has examined potential effects via source pathway linkages on designated SACs and SPAs within the ZoI of the proposed development, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects. A total of two European sites were identified within the ZoI; the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and the River Boyne SPA.

The potential impacts of the proposed development have been considered in the context of the European sites potentially affected, their Qualifying Interests and/or Special Conservation Interests, and their Conservation Objectives. Using best scientific knowledge through an assessment of the source-pathway-receptor model, which considered the ZoI of effects from the proposed development, and the potential in-combination effects with other plans or projects, it is the considered the opinion of TOBIN that the proposed development, either alone or in-combination with other projects and plans, will not result in likely significant effects on the Qualifying Interests/Special Conservation Interests of any European site(s). As such, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is, therefore, not required for the proposed development.

Fairgreen House
Fairgreen Road
Galway
H91 AXK8
Tel: + 353 (0)91
565211
Email: info@tobin.ie

Block 10-4,
Blanchardstown Corporate
Park
Dublin
D15 X98N
Tel: + 353 (0)1 8030401
Email: info@tobin.ie

Market Square
Castlebar
Mayo
F23 Y427
Tel: +353 (0)94 9021401
Email: info@tobin.ie

Ducart Suite
Castletroy Commercial Campus
Limerick
V94 Y6FD
Tel: +353 (0)61 574 413
Email: info@tobin.ie

The Gateway Building,
Floor 3, Northwest Business Park,
Collooney,
Sligo
F91W40H
Email: info@tobin.ie

AA Preliminary Examination

Meath County Council
Appropriate Assessment
Determination

From: Transportation

File Reference: *To be confirmed by Planning upon submission of 'Part 8' application*

Description of Development: This application relates to the provision of walking facilities at Newtown, Trim.

Location: Newtown Road, Newtown, Co. Meath.

AA Preliminary Examination Determination:
The Screening for Appropriate Assessment was carried out by Tobin Consulting Engineers (TOBIN) and their Screening Assessment Conclusion states that:

> *"The screening assessment has examined potential effects via source pathway linkages on designated SACs and SPAs within the ZoI of the proposed development, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.*
>
> *Using best scientific knowledge through an assessment of the source-pathway-receptor model, which considered the ZoI of effects from the proposed development, and the potential in-combination effects with other plans or projects, it is the considered the opinion of TOBIN that the proposed development, either alone or in-combination with other projects and plans, will not result in likely significant effects on the Qualifying Interests/Special Conservation Interests of any European site(s). As such, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is, therefore, not required for the proposed development."*

Having regard to this screening report, Meath County Council has determined that there is no likelihood of significant effects on any designated sites a s result of the proposed development. The assessment as reported is adopted as the determination of Meath County Council.

Martin Murray
Director of Services