

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report



Dromahair Greenway Loop:-

Proposed construction of a pedestrian bridge, and a footpath, adjacent to the existing bridge over the Edergole River, at the junction between the R287 and the L4252 at Ardakup and Killananima, Dromahair, County Leitrim

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1 Introduction

This report is the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report for a proposed pedestrian footbridge and footpath at Ardakip / Killananima, Dromahair, Co Leitrim. The report is in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) and the requirements of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2016.

1.1 The Appropriate Assessment Process

Requirement for an Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive

The requirement for an Appropriate Assessment is set out in the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The aim of the European Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora) is to create a network of protected wildlife sites in Europe, maintained at a good conservation status. The network of sites is referred to as Natura 2000 sites. In Ireland, the Natura 2000 network of European sites comprises Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's, including candidate SACs), and Special Protection Areas (SPA's, including proposed SPA's). SACs are selected for the conservation of vulnerable and threatened habitat types and species (other than birds). SPA's are selected for the conservation of vulnerable and threatened species of birds and other regularly occurring migratory birds, and their habitats.

The European Habitats Directive (EHD) (Council of the European Communities 1992) was transposed into Irish legislation by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997. The Directive specifies the scientific criteria on the basis of which Natura 2000 sites must be selected and sets out various procedures and obligations in relation to the nature conservation management which must be undertaken for the purpose of ensuring the protection of the Natura 2000 sites.

Stages in the Process

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive provides a strict assessment procedure for any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but which has the potential to have implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. The proposed project, therefore, falls under the remit of Article 6.

According to the European Commission's guidance document, it has become generally accepted that the assessment requirements of Article 6 establish a stage by stage approach. The stages proposed by the guidance document are:

- **Stage One: 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 these impacts are likely to be significant.

- **Stage Two: 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 Three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions**

The process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

- **Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain**

An assessment of 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. This report documents the first of these stages. It examines the likely effects of the proposed walking trail and footbridge on any Natura 2000 sites affected by the project and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these sites will not be significantly impacted. The format of the following assessment is derived from the European Commission's guidance document "*Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites. Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*" (2002).

2 Assessment Criteria/Screening Matrix

2.1 Description of the Project

Leitrim County Council is currently preparing a design for the development of a pedestrian footbridge and footpath at Ardakup / Killananima, Dromahair, Co Leitrim.

The works will involve the following:

- Construction of new footbridge adjacent to the existing bridge over the Edergole River at the junction between the L4252 and the R287
- Construction of a retaining wall and footpath fronting the adjacent dwelling house
- Installation of associated fencing, railing and drainage where required
- Installation of public lighting along the proposed footpath

This project is in compliance with the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan 2015 - 2021 and in particular with:

4.6.3 Walking and Cycling

Policy 46

It is the policy of the Council to encourage safe walking and cycling by providing linear parks, footpaths, cycle paths and public lighting in towns and villages.

Objective 29(a)

It is an objective of the Council to seek opportunities for the development of suitable walking routes, cycle tracks and bridle paths along redundant railway lines and other suitable locations such as; along waterways and historical access routes.

Under article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive an Appropriate Assessment of plans or projects may be necessary, with respect to ecological implications of any project whether within or outside a designated site, which does not directly relate to the management of the site, but may impact upon its conservation objectives. Thus, the purpose of this screening report is to consider whether, based

on best scientific knowledge, this project will have potential impacts upon the conservation objectives of any Natura sites, and if so, the development where necessary, of mitigation or avoidance measures to preclude negative effects.

Natura Sites refer to Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) designated under the Habitat's directive and Special Protection Areas (SPA's) designated under the Bird's Directive. These sites are protected habitats of Flora and Fauna of European importance.

It is the policy of Leitrim County Council to take appropriate steps to avoid, in these areas, the deterioration of natural habitats of species as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as the disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of the Habitat's Directive, 92/43/EEC Directive.

Following this screening, if it is found that this project may have an impact on the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site, or that such an impact cannot be ruled out, then an Appropriate Assessment of the Project must be carried out.

2.2 Natura Sites

Natura Sites are protected habitats for Flora and Fauna of European importance. They comprise of SAC's and SPA's. Site Synopsis in respect to the SAC relevant to the project is included in the appendices of this report.

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's)

These are prime wildlife conservation areas in the country, considered to be important on a European as well as Irish level. The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) lists certain habitats and species that must be protected. SAC Sites are legally protected under the Habitats Directive and EC Regulations.

The SAC's which relates to the proposed project is indicated on the attached map (Map No. 1) and listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Special Areas of Conservation in adjacent 15 km of the proposed works

Site Code	Site Name	Distance from Project
000622	Ballysadare Bay SAC	14.2 km
000623	Ben Bulbin, Gleniff and Glenade Complex SAC	14.1 km
000627	Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay (Sligo Bay) SAC	14.4 km
001403	Arroo Mountain SAC	14.0 km
001673	Lough Arrow SAC	14.0 km
001898	Unshin River SAC	10.3 km
001976	Lough Gill SAC	0.0 km
002032	Boleybrack Mountain SAC	9.5 km
001919	Glenade Lough SAC	14.0 km
000638	Union Wood SAC	10.3 km

Special Protected Areas (SPA's)

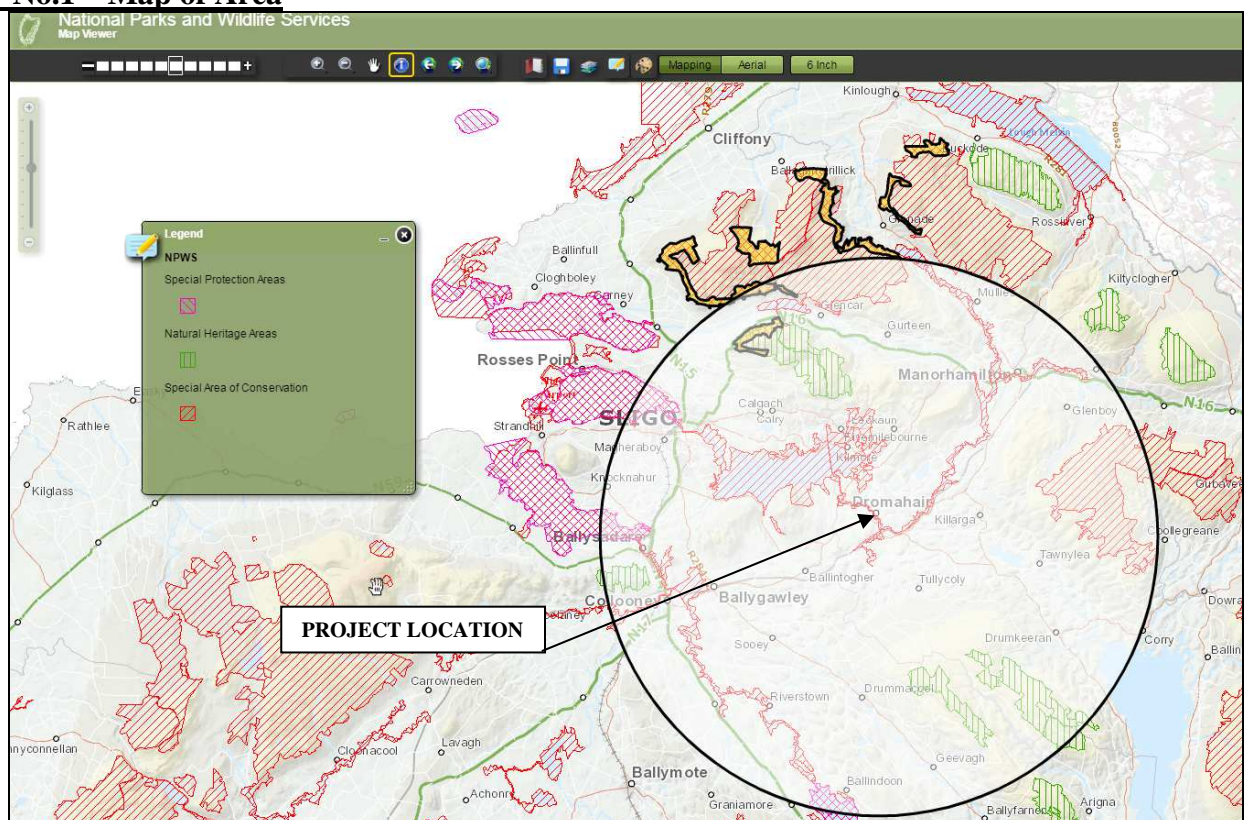
These sites are areas of importance for birds (and often are also important for other types of wildlife). The EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) requires designation of SPA's for listed rare and vulnerable species, regularly occurring migratory species and wetlands, especially those of international importance, which attract large numbers of migratory birds each year. Any development in, near or adversely affecting an SPA should avoid any significant adverse impact on the features for which the site has been designated. SPA's were given effect in Irish Law mainly under the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations 1985 (SI. 291 of 1985).

The SPA's which relates to the proposed project are indicated on the attached map (Map No. 1) and listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Special Protected Areas in adjacent 15 km of the proposed works

Site Code	Site Name	Distance from Project
004013	Drumcliff Bay SPA	14.9 km
004035	Cummeen Strand SPA	11.6 km
004050	Lough Arrow SPA	13.0 km
004129	Ballysadare Bay SPA	13.5 km
004187	Sligo/Leitrim Uplands SPA	11.6 km

MAP No.1 – Map of Area



The map above, (which is taken from the National Parks and Wildlife website), shows the study area circled and shows the location of any *Special Areas of Conservation* and *Special Protection Areas* which are within a 15km radius of the proposed site.

2.3 Assessment Criteria

Describe the individual elements of this project that have potential for having significant effects on the Natura site.

Table 1 and Table 2 above show the distances of the relevant SAC's and SPA's from the proposed site. The proposed pedestrian footbridge and footpath is located within the Lough Gill SAC (site code 001976). This project has been devised to ensure that it will not give rise to significant adverse impact on the integrity of the SAC and the SPA in so far as the objectives and criteria for determining the needs of the site can be inferred from the site synopsis. Environmental and ecological best practice as outlined in the National Roads Authority publications and guidelines will be adhered to at all times. This includes, but is not limited to, the Guidelines for the Protection of Trees, Hedgerows and Scrub (NRA (2006), Guidelines on the Management of Noxious Weeds and Non Invasive Plant Species (NRA, 2010), with regard to the protection of riparian and wetland vegetation and habitats.

- **Removal of Mature Trees**

It is hoped to avoid the unnecessary removal of any mature trees or the disturbance of the roots of trees during construction works. However, there are certain trees at the location of the proposed footbridge whose removal is unavoidable. These are denoted on the site plan. The working area along tree lines or around individual trees shall be kept to a minimum to reduce the area or length of sites or habitats that may be affected. Trees being retained along the line of the existing boundary shall be temporarily fenced or at least identified by tape to avoid accidental collisions from construction machinery. The number of trees to be removed will be minimised to ensure the impact of the works is not significant. Any tree species which will be removed to facilitate the works will be replaced with similar species.

- **Construction of Footbridge & Footpath**

The proposed works include the construction of a footbridge & footpath. All construction work will be undertaken in line with best practice, ensuring the minimisation of any impact of the surrounding environment. Waste material will be top soil and sub soil. All spoil will be taken off-site to a waste permitted facility in a timely manner in order to reduce any potential for silt run off, thereby avoiding any significant impact on the Lough Gill SAC. Material and top soil storage areas will be cordoned off and stabilised outside of the SAC boundaries and away from any watercourse or drain to prevent the possible entry of suspended solids to the river.

Describe any likely direct/indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the Natura 2000 site

The project area is within the Lough Gill SAC. However, a result of the miniscule size, scale, and area of this project, it will not give rise to any significant adverse direct, indirect or secondary impacts on the integrity of the SAC.

Describe any likely direct/indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on Water Supply

Water supply in the Dromahair area is provided via the North Leitrim Regional Water Supply Scheme (NLRWSS) treatment plant, which is located close to Dromahair and abstracts water from

Lough Gill. The treatment plant supplies approx. 4,400 ms /d to a population of 8,000 in the North Leitrim Regional public water supply. It also supplies water to a number of group water schemes. Treatment at the plant consists of coagulation (with alum and poly), dissolved air flotation, rapid gravity filtration, chlorination and fluoridation. The source of the NLRWSS is an inlet bay in Lough Gill near Greenaun. The water quality provided by the NLRWSS is deemed to be good. It is not considered that the increase in the volume surface water runoff will affect the water quality in Lough Gill.

Describe any likely direct/indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on Emissions and waste

As described previously, any waste material generated by the works will be taken off-site to a waste permitted facility in a timely manner in order to reduce any potential for silt run off, thereby avoiding any significant impact on the Lough Gill SAC. Material and top soil storage areas will be cordoned off and stabilised outside of the SAC boundary and away from any watercourse or drain to prevent the possible entry of suspended solids to the river.

Due to the small-scale nature of this project, the emissions produced by vehicles/machinery involved in the construction work are deemed not to be significant.

Describe any likely direct/indirect or secondary impacts of excavation requirements for this project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects)

The volume of excavated material for the works is estimated to be approximately 105 m³ in total. Waste material will be top soil and sub soil. All spoil will be taken off-site to a waste permitted facility in a timely manner in order to reduce any potential for silt run off, thereby avoiding any significant impact on the Lough Gill SAC.

Describe any likely changes to the Natura site arising as a result of reduction of the Habitat

The area of the proposed footbridge and footpath covers a miniscule area which is within the Lough Gill SAC. However, due to the small scale nature of this project, the loss of habitat area is considered not to be significant and no direct or indirect relationship to any qualifying interest of the SAC is evident.

Describe any Habitat or Species Fragmentation as a result of this project

Any impacts or disturbance as a result of the footbridge and footpath construction are considered temporary and a rapid re-colonisation of the area will occur. Changes in species composition and abundance are likely immediately adjacent to the re-graded embankment, however, over time natural succession should revert to its present condition or possibly enhanced.

Describe any Disturbance to Key Species as a result of this project

Due to the small-scale nature of the project, no disturbance to the sensitive habitats or species will occur.

Describe any reduction of Species Density as a result of this project

Due to the small-scale nature of the project, there is likely to be a negligible reduction in Species Density.

Describe any impact on Climate Change

The provision of the proposed footbridge and footpath will facilitate a direct increase in pedestrian usage along the route. This in turn, will result in a reduction in the carbon footprint caused by vehicular traffic, thereby providing a positive contribution to Climate Change.

Describe any likely impacts on the Natura site in terms of the key relationship that define the structure of the site

It is not considered that the increase in the volume surface water runoff will affect the hydrological system of the SAC.

Describe any likely impacts on the Natura site in terms of the key relationship that define the function of the site

Disturbance to the surrounding environment will be limited to noise and vibration during the construction period. No disturbance to sensitive habitats or species will occur as part of this project.

It is felt that the proposal will not conflict with any of the operational objectives and management strategies of the SAC. The loss of habitat is miniscule in area and nature and is considered insignificant. No in- combination effects are envisaged.

3 Finding of no Significant Effects Report

The proposed footbridge and footpath is within the Lough Gill SAC, however, having regard to the specified qualifying interests of the Lough Gill SAC, it is the opinion of the author that the project does not have the potential to significantly impact on the integrity of the site and a Stage II Appropriate Assessment is not required. No other Natura 2000 site was found to have the potential to be affected by this small-scale infrastructure project.

4 Data Collection

This assessment was carried out by members of Leitrim County Council Road Design Office. In order to acquire information on the existing environment, a number of site inspections were undertaken. Following completion of the assessment, the draft report was reviewed by the Planning Department in advance of the proposed PART 8 application being placed on public display.

5 Appendices

5.1 001976 – Lough Gill SAC - Site Synopsis

5.2 001976 - Lough Gill SAC – Standard Data Form

5.3 001976 - Lough Gill SAC – Conservation Objective Series