

Appropriate Assessment

Natura Impact Report **for the proposed Variation No.1** **(Strandhill Mini-Plan)** **of the Sligo County Development Plan 2011-2017**

Prepared by

Sligo County Council
Development
PlanningUnit

5 February 2013

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Background and legislative context | 1 |
| 1.2 Stages of the Appropriate Assessment | 2 |
| 1.3 Terminology | 3 |
| 2. Methodology | 4 |
| 2.1 Approach | 4 |
| 2.2 Data sources | 4 |
| 2.3 Consultation | 4 |
| 3. Stage 1 – Screening for Appropriate Assessment | 5 |
| 3.1 Description of the draft Plan | 5 |
| 3.2 Features of the Plan that could impact on Natura 2000 sites | 6 |
| 3.3 Brief description of the Natura 2000 sites | 6 |
| 3.4 Screening conclusions | 18 |
| 4. Stage 2 – Natura Impact Report | 19 |
| 4.1 Overview | 19 |
| 4.2 Commitments to the protection of Natura 2000 sites in the Plan | 20 |
| 4.3 Likely significant effects of the Plan on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites | 21 |
| 4.4 Zonings | 30 |
| 4.5 Mitigation measures | 31 |
| 5. Appropriate Assessment Conclusion | 35 |
| 6. References | 36 |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Legislative Context

Sligo County Council intends to vary the Sligo County Development Plan 2011-2017 (CDP) by incorporating a mini-plan for the village of Strandhill (replacing the Strandhill Local Area Plan 2003-2012) as Chapter 44 in Volume 2 Mini-Plans of the CDP.

An important aspect of the Development Plan is how the Plan may impact on European Sites designated for nature conservation, i.e. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA). 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. These are SACs and SPA’s designated under the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive (Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/ECC)).

In accordance with the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive (43/92/EEC) and EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), the impacts of the policies and objectives of all statutory land use plans on certain sites that are designated for the protection of nature (Natura 2000 sites¹), must be assessed as an integral part of the process of drafting of the plan. This is to determine whether or not the implementation of plan policies could have negative consequences for the habitats or plant and animal species for which these sites are designated. This assessment process is called an Appropriate Assessment (AA) and must be carried out on all stages of the plan making process.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites (Annex 1.1). Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment (AA):

Article 6(3): “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 an 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): “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, Member States shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat

¹ Natura 2000 sites include Special Areas of Conservation designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas designated under the Birds Directive. Special Areas of Conservation are sites that are protected because they support particular habitats and/or plant and animal species that have been identified to be threatened at EU community level. Special Protection Areas are sites that are protected for the conservation of species of birds that are in danger of extinction, or are rare or vulnerable. Special Protection Areas may also be sites that are particularly important for migratory birds. Such sites include internationally important wetlands.

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

This document provides a record of the Appropriate Assessment process for the proposed variation No. 1 Strandhill Mini-Plan of the Sligo County Development Plan 2011-2017.

Sligo County Development Plan 2011-2017

Sligo County Development Plan came into force on 13 June 2011. It will remain operational for a period of maximum six years. The Plan sets out the Council’s policies and objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County of Sligo.

The undertaking of Appropriate Assessment (AA) is mandatory in the case of development plans. The AA of the CDP 2011-2017 was undertaken by environmental consultants CAAS on behalf of Sligo County Council. The resultant Appropriate Assessment Screening Report was published alongside the CDP 2011-2017.

The Appropriate Assessment informed the policies and objectives of the Plan and also suggested appropriate mitigation measures, which were incorporated in to the relevant chapters of the Plan upon its adoption in 2011.

This Natura Impact Report should be read in conjunction with the CDP 2011-2017 and the associated Appropriate Assessment Screening Report.

Sligo CDP and its associated Appropriate Assessment Screening Report are available at www.sligococo.ie/cdp.

1.2 Stages of the Appropriate Assessment

This document has been prepared in accordance with the European Commission Environment DG document *“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”*, referred to as the *“EC Article 6 Guidance Document”*. The guidance document provides a non-mandatory methodology for carrying out assessments required under Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive, and is viewed as an interpretation of the EU Commission’s document *“Managing Natura 2000 sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC”*, referred to as *“MN2000”*. In addition, *“Appropriate Assessment Guidance for Planning Authorities”* was published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in December 2009 (DEHLG, 2009) and amended in March 2010. Cognisance has been taken of this document in carrying out this assessment. In complying with the obligations under Article 6(3) and with reference to the guidance documents mentioned above, this AA has been broadly structured as follows:

1) Stage 1 – Screening for Appropriate Assessment

- Description of the plan;
- Identification of relevant Natura 2000 sites potentially affected;

- Identification and description of individual and cumulative impacts likely to result from implementation of the Plan;
- 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) Stage 2 –Appropriate Assessment

- Description of the Natura 2000 sites that will be considered further in the AA;
- Description of significant impacts on the conservation features of these sites likely to occur from the Plan;
- Mitigation Measures; and
- Conclusions.

The Habitats Directive promotes a hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensatory measures. In the first instance, the Plan should aim to avoid any negative impacts on European sites by identifying possible impacts early in the plan-making, and writing the plan in order to avoid such impacts. Following that, mitigation measures should be applied, if necessary, during the AA process to the point where no adverse impacts on the site(s) remain. If the Plan is still likely to result in adverse effects, and no further practicable mitigation is possible, then it is rejected. If no alternative solutions are identified and the Plan is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI test) under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, then compensation measures are required for any remaining adverse effect.

1.3 Terminology

A number of different terms have been used in the recent past to describe the process and outputs associated with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. These include Appropriate Assessment (AA), Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA), Habitats Directive Assessment Report, Natura Impact Statement (NIS), Natura Impact Report (NIR).

In an effort to provide consistency and transparency in the planning process and to come into line with the terminology used in the most recent DEHLG guidance, it has been decided to use just two terms throughout this document.

For the purposes of this report the following terms have been adopted:

- **Appropriate Assessment (AA)** has been used to refer to the process and includes the various stages outlined in Section 1.2 above.
- **Natura Impact Report (NIR)** has been used to refer to the output from the AA process and includes the information necessary for the competent authority to carry out an appropriate assessment of the implications of the Plan.

It should also be noted that the Sligo County Development Plan 2011-2017 also uses the term Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA) in addition to the term Appropriate Assessment to describe the process and outputs associated with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the Sligo County Development Plan 2011-2017.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Approach

Appropriate Assessment of the draft Mini-Plan was undertaken and the findings of the assessment are presented in this Natura Impact Report. The approach taken in the making of this assessment follows *European Communities, 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, 2002*, and on *Local Government and Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland, Guidance for Planning Authorities, 2009*. As the Mini-Plan is progressed through the plan making process the appropriate assessment process will continue in tandem and will inform the decision making process in terms of any likely significant impacts arising from the Mini-Plan on Natura 2000 sites.

2.2 Data Sources

The appropriate assessment of potential impacts on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites in this report is based on a desktop review of information relating to these sites and to the habitats and species that they support. References and data used are cited in the back of this report.

2.3 Consultation

This report will be placed on public display with the draft Mini-Plan and will be referred to Government Departments and other statutory consultees for consideration during the consultation process. Submissions on same will be taken into consideration in the drafting of the final plan and accompanying Natura Impact Report.

3 STAGE 1 – SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

3.1 Description of the Plan

3.1.1 Main Goal – Consolidation

The Draft Strandhill Mini-Plan promotes sustainable development at a local level through the balanced allocation of land to various uses and through objectives aimed at protecting the natural and built heritage.

The Mini-Plan seeks the consolidation and sustainable development of the area to cater for the needs of the settlement’s population, its seasonal visitors and the inhabitants of the surrounding area.

In addition to the existing general policies in Chapters 3 to 12 of the CDP, and the Mini-Plan policies contained in Chapter 13, the Strandhill Mini-Plan contains detailed objectives applicable to specific areas in the village.

The Mini-Plan provides an overview of Strandhill under the following headings:

- Village profile
- Population and housing
- Community facilities
- Commercial and enterprise development
- Infrastructure
- Archaeological heritage
- Natural heritage
- Coastal erosion

3.1.2 Mini-Plan Objectives

The Mini-Plan then provides a suite of objectives in relation to the following themes:

- Landscape, natural heritage and open space
- Coastal protection
- Built heritage, streetscape and building design
- Mixed-use zones
- Transport, circulation and parking
- Community facilities
- Tourism development
- Business and enterprise
- Buffer zone
- Wastewater treatment

Note: All the policies and objectives contained in Chapters 3 to 12 of the CDP are applicable to all settlements in County Sligo. Policies in Chapter 13 are applicable to all mini-plans. These policies and objectives have already been assessed for effects on Natura 2000 Sites through the Appropriate Assessment (AA) process in preparing the CDP 2011-2017.

3.2 Features of the Plan that Could Impact on Natura 2000 Sites

The key aspects of the Plan which could give rise to direct / indirect impacts to Natura 2000 sites will principally be related to zonings, the mini-plan objectives, infrastructural provision and upgrades, coastal protection works, as well as recreational infrastructure and activities.

The main threats to Natura 2000 sites in general arise from the density of population present in the Strandhill area in close proximity to the sites. Human pressure on the sites can be manifested in a number of ways either directly in the form of land take, trampling and disturbance by people themselves; or indirectly, for example, in the form of water quality deterioration resulting from sewage effluent and storm water discharges. The relative importance of these potential impacts will vary from site to site depending on the particular circumstances of the site and of the human pressure in the vicinity.

Related to the mini-plan for Strandhill is the need for adequate recreational facilities and given the strong coastal features in Strandhill this can include provision of recreational infrastructure, promenades etc. If located in or adjacent to a protected site, such developments can have likely significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Similarly, provision of footpaths and cycleways within and close to Natura 2000 sites can have predicted and unforeseen negative impacts.

The provision of infrastructure is also a key consideration including wastewater treatment, drainage systems, waste management facilities and coastal protection works. The Natura 2000 sites within the Strandhill Mini-Plan area are all coastal, and may be directly impacted by land take for infrastructural development or through pollution of these sensitive sites; therefore, it is essential that zonings take account of the direct and indirect impacts on Natura 2000 sites particularly where inadequate or insufficient wastewater treatment or drainage may be involved.

3.3 Brief Description of the Natura 2000 Sites

This section of the screening process describes the Natura 2000 sites within a 15km radius of the Mini-Plan area. A 15km buffer zone was chosen as a precautionary measure, to ensure that all potentially affected Natura 2000 sites are included in the screening process (**Figures 1 - 4**). **Table 3.1** (candidate Special Areas of Conservation) and **Table 3.2** (Special Protection Areas) list the Natura 2000 sites that are within 15km of the plan area. The qualifying features for each site have been obtained from the 'SAC Datasheets' available through the NPWS website:

<http://www.npws.ie/en/ProtectedSites/SpecialAreasofConservationSACs/>.

The standard abbreviated name of each Annex I habitat type is given in **Table 3.1**. The full name of the habitat type and details of its characteristics, distribution in Ireland and its conservation status in Ireland can be found at:

<http://www.npws.ie/en/PublicationsLiterature/HabitatsDirectiveReport07/Habitats/>.

Each qualifying feature also has a standard EU code and these are presented in brackets in **Table 3.1** (e.g. 'Vegetated sea cliffs (1230)' means: 'habitat type 1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic Coasts'. Common names and species code are given for Annex II species, e.g. 'Narrowmouthed whorl snail (1014)'.

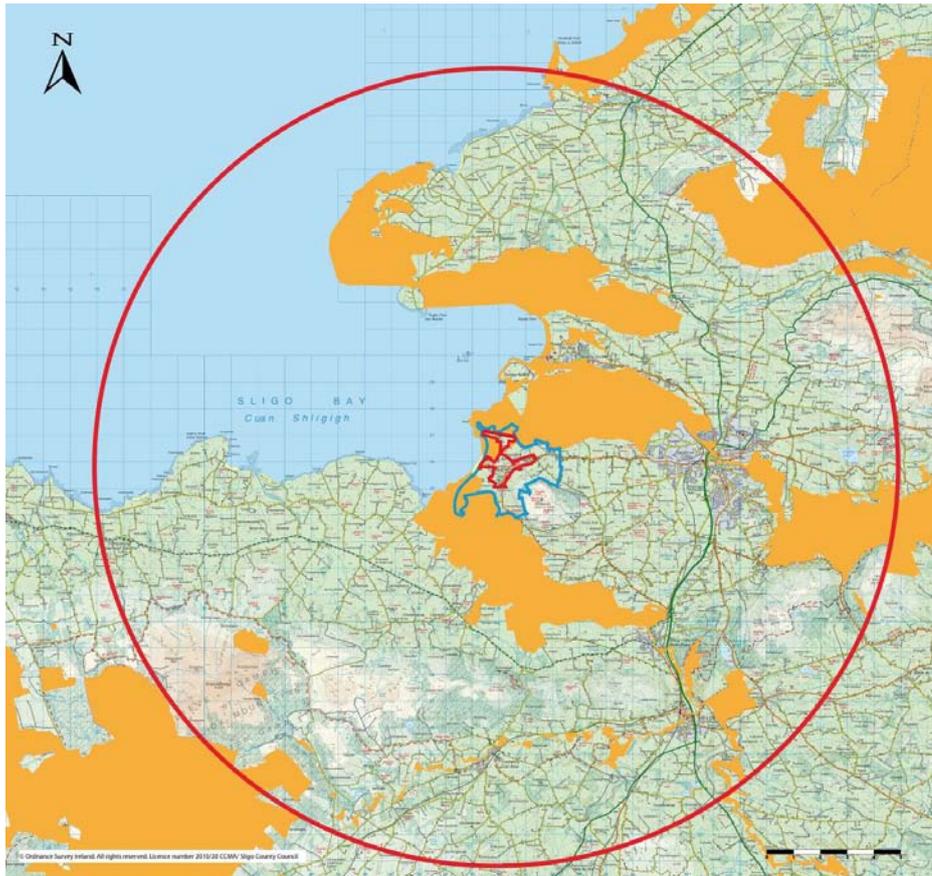


Fig. 1 Special Areas of Conservation (orange) within 15km (red circle) of Strandhill.

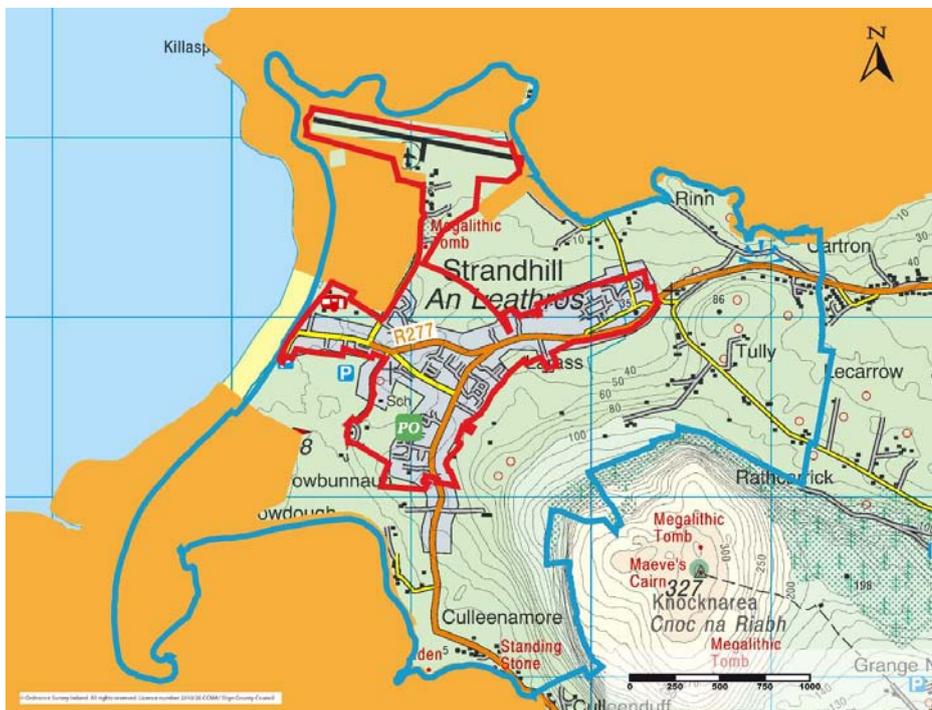


Fig. 2 Special Areas of Conservation immediately adjoining or within the Plan boundary.

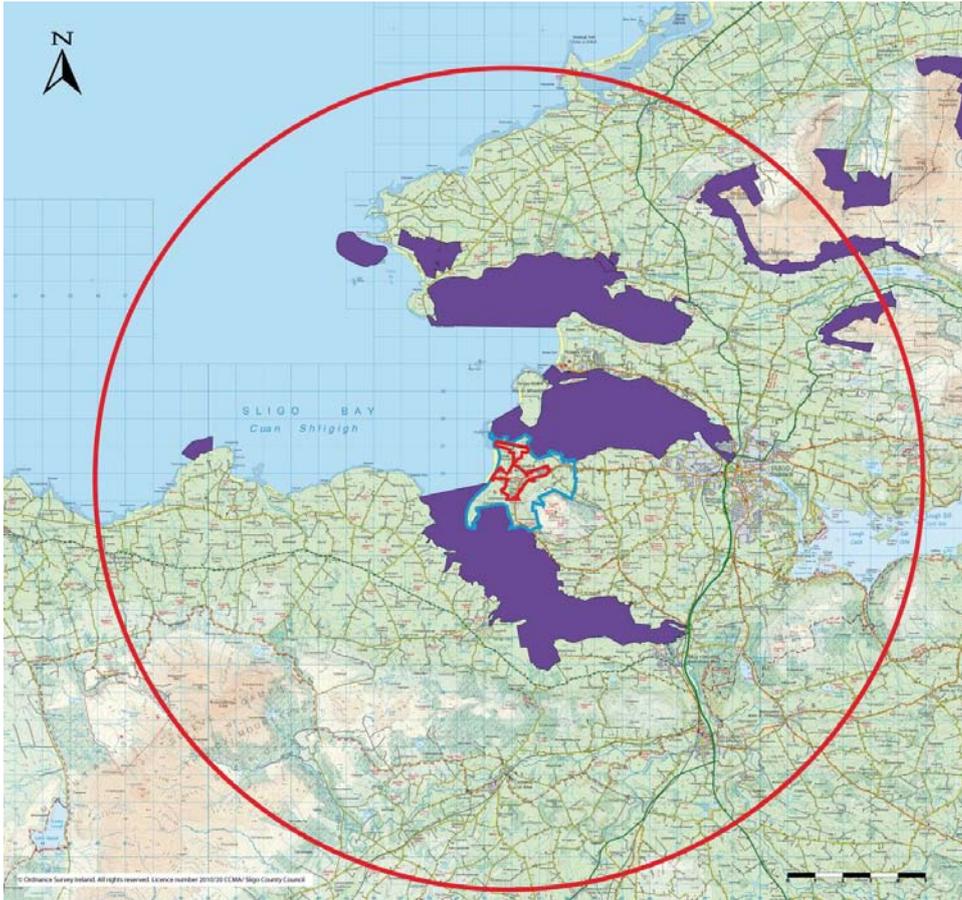


Fig. 3 Special Protection Areas (purple) within 15km (red circle) of Strandhill.



Fig.4 Special Protection Areas immediately adjoining or within the Plan boundary.

3.3.1 Priority Habitats and Species

A number of species and habitats are given 'Priority' status in the Habitats Directive by the EU because they are considered to be particularly vulnerable and are mainly, or exclusively, found within the European Union.

There are no 'Priority Species' currently known from Ireland.

Priority Habitats are present in Ireland and are present within the Natura 2000 Sites adjoining Strandhill. These are prefixed with an asterisk (for example, '*Fixed Dunes (2130)') in **Table 3.1** and in subsequent tables in this report. The importance of Priority Habitat is emphasised at several places in the Directive (Articles 4 and 5 and Annex III), not only in terms of the selection of sites, but also in the measures required for site protection (Article 6).

Table 3.1 cSAC's within 15km of the Strandhill Mini-Plan Area including known threats.

| Site Code | Site Name | Qualifying Feature | | Documented Potential Threats* |
|-----------|---|--|--|--|
| | | Annex I Habitat | Annex II Species | |
| 000623 | Ben Bulbin, Gleniff and Glenade Complex | European dry heaths(4030), Alpine and Boreal heaths(4060), Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation (8210), Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels (Thlaspietea rotundifolii) (8120), Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands(5130), * Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) (7220), Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation(3260). | Lutra Lutra (European Otter) (1355), Vertigo geyeri (Geyer's Whorl Snail) (1013). | Changes in local hydrology including drainage, Direct loss of habitat to development, Arterial drainage/water abstraction/lowering of the regional water table, Introduction of alien invasive species, Peat Extraction, Overgrazing, Forestry, Burning, Agricultural reclamation, Illegal Dumping, Burning. |

| Site Code | Site Name | Qualifying Feature | | Documented Potential Threats* |
|-----------|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| | | Annex I Habitat | Annex II Species | |
| 001680 | Streedagh Point Dunes | <p>* Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) (2130),</p> <p>Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) (2120),</p> <p>Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) (1330),</p> <p>Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) (1410),</p> <p>Perennial vegetation of stony banks (1220),</p> <p>Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide (1140),</p> | <p><i>Vertigo angustior</i> (Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail) (1014).</p> | <p>Agricultural improvements/Reclamation</p> <p>Drainage/Changes in local hydrology including water abstraction,</p> <p>Erosion (natural and anthropogenic),</p> <p>Agricultural abandonment,</p> <p>Overgrazing/undergrazing,</p> <p>Bracken and scrub encroachment,</p> <p>Tourism related development,</p> <p>Decrease in water quality/increased pollution,</p> <p>Direct loss of habitat to development,</p> <p>Tourism related development,</p> <p>Introduction of alien invasive species,</p> <p>Illegal Dumping,</p> <p>Burning,</p> <p>Quarrying/removal of sand,</p> <p>Aquaculture.</p> |
| 001976 | Lough Gill | <p>Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i>-type vegetation (3150),</p> <p>*Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) (91E0),</p> <p>Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in British Isles (91A0),</p> | <p><i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) (1095),</p> <p><i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) (1096),</p> <p><i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) (1099),</p> <p><i>Salmo salar</i> (Atlantic Salmon) (1106),</p> <p><i>Lutra lutra</i> (European Otter) (1355),</p> <p><i>Autropotamobius pallipes</i> (Freshwater White-clawed Crayfish) (1092).</p> | <p>Decrease in water quality/Increased pollution,</p> <p>Changes in water flow rates</p> <p>Arterial drainage/water abstraction/lowering of the regional water table,</p> <p>Siltation,</p> <p>Loss of fringe vegetation,</p> <p>Changes in seasonal water levels/fluctuations,</p> <p>Direct loss of habitat to development,</p> <p>Loading from effluents(WWTP),</p> <p>Recreation/amenity use</p> <p>Developments – marinas,</p> <p>Introduction of alien invasive species,</p> <p>Illegal Dumping,</p> <p>Crayfish Fishing.</p> |
| 000638 | Union Wood | <p>Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in British Isles (91A0).</p> | | <p>Direct loss of habitat to development,</p> <p>Amenity/recreational use,</p> <p>Invasive species,</p> <p>Lack of/inappropriate woodland management,</p> <p>Overgrazing (deer),</p> <p>Introduction of alien invasive species,</p> <p>Illegal Dumping,</p> <p>Felling/Removal of Trees.</p> |

| Site Code | Site Name | Qualifying Feature | | Documented Potential Threats* |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | | Annex I Habitat | Annex II Species | |
| 001898 | Unshin River | Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation (3260), *Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) (91E0). | Salmo salar (Atlantic Salmon) (1106), Lutra lutra (European Otter) (1355). | Decrease in water quality/Increased pollution, Changes in water flow rates, Arterial drainage/water abstraction/lowering of the regional water table, Siltation, Loss of fringe vegetation, Changes in seasonal water levels/fluctuations, Direct loss of habitat to development, Loading from effluents(WWTP), Recreation/amenity use, Developments – marinas, Introduction of alien invasive species, Illegal Dumping. |
| 000636 | Temple House and Cloonacleigha Loughs | Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp., (3140), Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation (3260), Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration (7120), Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) (6410), *Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (91E0). | | Decrease in water quality/Increased pollution, Changes in water flow rates, Arterial drainage/water abstraction/lowering of the regional water table, Siltation, Loss of fringe vegetation, Changes in seasonal water levels/fluctuations, Direct loss of habitat to development, Loading from effluents(WWTP), Recreation/amenity use, Developments – marinas, Introduction of alien invasive species, Illegal Dumping. |
| 002298 | River Moy | *Active raised bogs (7110), Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration (7120), Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion (7150), Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in British Isles (91A0), *Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (91E0). | Salmo salar (Atlantic Salmon) (1106), Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) (1095), Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) (1096), Lutra lutra (European Otter) (1355), Austropotamobius pallipes (Freshwater White-clawed Crayfish) (1092). | Decrease in water quality/Increased pollution, Changes in water flow rates Arterial drainage/water abstraction/lowering of the regional water table, Siltation, Loss of fringe vegetation, Changes in seasonal water levels/fluctuations, Direct loss of habitat to development, Loading from effluents(WWTP), Recreation/amenity use, Developments – marinas, Introduction of alien invasive species, Illegal Dumping, Felling/Removal of Trees, Crayfish Fishing. |

| Site Code | Site Name | Qualifying Feature | | Documented Potential Threats* |
|-----------|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | Annex I Habitat | Annex II Species | |
| 002006 | Ox Mountain Bogs | Blanket bog (*active only) (7130), Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix (4010), Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds (3160), Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) (3110), Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion (7150). | Vertigo geyeri (Geyer's Whorl Snail) (1013). | Changes in local hydrology including drainage, Peat Extraction, Overgrazing, Forestry, Burning, Direct loss of habitat to development Arterial drainage/water abstraction/lowering of the regional water table, Agricultural reclamation, Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping, Increased pollution/reduction in water quality. |
| 001669 | Knockalongy and Knockachree Cliffs | Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation (8210), Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation (8220), Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix (4010), Blanket bog (*active only) (7130), Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) (3110), | Trichomanes speciosum (Killarney Fern) (1421). | Changes in local hydrology including drainage, Peat Extraction, Overgrazing, Forestry, Burning, Direct loss of habitat to development, Arterial drainage/water abstraction/lowering of the regional water table, Agricultural reclamation, Introduction of alien invasive species, Illegal Dumping, Increased pollution/reduction in water quality, Quarrying/removal of sand. |
| 000622 | Ballysadare Bay | Estuaries (1130), Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide (1140), Embryonic shifting dunes (2110), Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) (2120), *Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) (2130), Humid dune slacks (2190), | Phoca Vitulina (Common Seal) (1365), Vertigo angustior (Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail) (1014). | Decrease in water quality/Increased pollution Development of marinas and ports Disturbance to marine mammals Dumping at sea Direct loss of habitat to development Recreational/amenity use Agricultural improvements/Reclamation Drainage/Changes in local hydrology including water abstraction Erosion (natural and anthropogenic) Agricultural abandonment Overgrazing/undergrazing Bracken and scrub encroachment Tourism related development Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Burning Quarrying/removal of sand Aquaculture |

| Site Code | Site Name | Qualifying Feature | | Documented Potential Threats* |
|-----------|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | Annex I Habitat | Annex II Species | |
| 000627 | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay | <p>Estuaries (1130), Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide (1140), Embryonic shifting dunes (2110), Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) (2120), *Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) (2130), *Petrifying springs with tufa formation (<i>Cratoneurion</i>) (7220), <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands (5130).</p> | <p><i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Common Seal) (1365), <i>Vertigo angustior</i> (Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail) (1014).</p> | <p>Decrease in water quality/Increased pollution Development of marinas and ports Disturbance to marine mammals Dumping at sea Direct loss of habitat to development Recreational/amenity use Agricultural improvements/Reclamation Drainage/Changes in local hydrology including water abstraction Erosion (natural and anthropogenic) Agricultural abandonment Overgrazing/undergrazing Bracken and scrub encroachment Tourism related development Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Burning Quarrying/removal of sand Aquaculture</p> |

Table 3.2 SPA's within 15km of the Strandhill Mini Plan Area including known threats.

| Site Code | Site Name | Qualifying Feature Annex I Species | Documented Potential Threats* |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| 004135 | Ardboline Island and Horse Island | Site is selected for: Cormorant, Barnacle Goose. Additional Special Conservation Interests: Corncrake | Direct and indirect impacts to the habitats of the bird species of conservation interests (loss of habitat) Direct loss of habitat to development Water quality/pollution Disturbance including recreation/amenity use Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Disturbance from Recreational/amenity use Inappropriate land management |
| 004234 | Ballintemple and Ballygilgan | Site is selected for: Barnacle Goose. | Direct and indirect impacts to the habitats of the bird species of conservation interests (loss of habitat) Direct loss of habitat to development Water quality/pollution Disturbance including recreation/amenity use Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Disturbance from Recreational/amenity use Inappropriate land management |
| 004013 | Drumcliff Bay | Site is selected for: Barnacle Goose, Sanderling, Additional Special Conservation Interests: Wetland & Waterbirds | Direct and indirect impacts to the habitats of the bird species of conservation interests (loss of habitat) Direct loss of habitat to development Water quality/pollution Disturbance including recreation/amenity use Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Disturbance from Recreational/amenity use Inappropriate land management |
| 004187 | Sligo/Leitrim Uplands | Site is selected for: Peregrine, Chough. | Direct and indirect impacts to the habitats of the bird species of conservation interests (loss of habitat) Direct loss of habitat to development Water quality/pollution Disturbance including recreation/amenity use Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Disturbance from Recreational/amenity use Inappropriate land management |
| 004035 | Cummeen Strand | Site is selected for: Light-bellied Brent Goose . Additional Special Conservation Interests: Oystercatcher, Redshank, Wetland & Waterbirds | Direct and indirect impacts to the habitats of the bird species of conservation interests (loss of habitat) Direct loss of habitat to development Water quality/pollution Disturbance including recreation/amenity use Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Persecution (Poisoning) Disturbance from Recreational/amenity use Inappropriate land management |

| Site Code | Site Name | Qualifying Feature Annex I Species | Documented Potential Threats* |
|-----------|-----------------|---|--|
| 004129 | Ballysadare Bay | Site is selected for: Light-bellied Brent Goose and Bar-tailed Godwit. Additional Special Conservation Interests: Grey Plover, Dunlin, Redshank, Wetland & Waterbirds. | Direct and indirect impacts to the habitats of the bird species of conservation interests (loss of habitat) Direct loss of habitat to development Water quality/pollution Disturbance including recreation/amenity use Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Disturbance from Recreational/amenity use Inappropriate land management |
| 004133 | Aughris Head | Site is selected for: Kittiwake. | Direct and indirect impacts to the habitats of the bird species of conservation interests (loss of habitat) Direct loss of habitat to development Water quality/pollution Disturbance including recreation/amenity use Introduction of alien invasive species Illegal Dumping Disturbance from Recreational/amenity use Inappropriate land management |

3.3.2 Conservation Objectives

A Natura 2000 site's Conservation Objectives are defined by DAHG and are, "intended to ensure that the relevant Annex I habitats and Annex II species present on a site are maintained in a favourable condition" (DEHLG, 2010). The DEHLG guidelines state that, "The Conservation Objectives derive from the qualifying interests, the Natura 2000 standard data form, and the management plan for the site, with summary information also available in the site synopsis." Whilst the Natura 2000 standard data forms and site synopses do present details of the qualifying features of Natura 2000 sites, and list the generic threats to those features, they do not define the Conservation Objectives of the site.

For the purposes of this assessment, information on the Conservation Objectives for the sites has been gained from consultation with NPWS relating to the Border Regional Planning Guidelines and NPWS generic Conservation Objectives for Natura 2000 Sites where no Management Plan is yet available.

Generic Conservation Objectives for SPAs are as follows:

- To maintain the bird species of special conservation interest for which the SPA has been listed, at favourable conservation status.

For cSACs, generic Conservation Objectives are as follows:

- To maintain Annex I habitats and Annex II species for which the cSAC has been selected at favourable conservation status;
- To maintain the extent species richness and biodiversity of the entire site; and
- To establish effective liaison and co-operation with landowners, legal users and relevant authorities.

The favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when:

population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when:

its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined below.

3.3.3 Documented Threats to the cSACs and to their Qualifying Features

Documented threats to Habitats Directive Annex I habitats and Annex II species in Ireland are presented in the 'Backing documents' and 'Form' for each habitat and species which are available at: <http://www.npws.ie/en/PublicationsLiterature/HabitatsDirectiveReport07/>. Not all of these threats will apply to all cSACs in which these habitats and species are present; however gathering information on the documented perceived threats to the qualifying features of the sites (and therefore to the Conservation Objectives of the sites and the integrity of the sites) is an important prerequisite for assessing what are the 'likely significant effects' on the sites resulting from the Plan. No such information is available for Birds Directive Annex I bird species, and hence this method of inferring Conservation Objectives cannot be applied to SPAs.

Table 3.1 presents details of those threats, identified by NPWS, which it is considered likely will apply to the SAC's that are included in this assessment.

It is important to realise that many of these threats do not necessarily represent activities that occur within the boundary of the Natura 2000 site. This applies in particular to aquatic and marine features and systems which can be affected by impact sources that occur a large distance from the site.

3.3.4 Documented Threats to Special Protection Areas

Similar threats will apply to many of the SPAs that often correspond geographically to the cSACs. Generally speaking, the threats to the Annex I habitats and Annex II species of the cSAC will also apply to the Annex I bird species and bird populations in general that are the qualifying features of the SPAs. However, the birds that constitute the qualifying features of the SPAs are subject to a number of additional threats that do not generally apply to the qualifying features of the cSAC such as hunting pressure (both legal and illegal); and disturbance from noise and visual cues such as movement of pedestrians and vehicles.

Table 3.2 presents a summary of the generalised threats to the SPAs relevant to the Strandhill Mini-Plan.

3.3.5 Likely Changes to the Sites

The possible impacts that might arise from the Mini-Plan have been examined in the context of a number of factors that could potentially affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites. **Tables 3.3** and **3.4** present a summary of the findings of this exercise. Those sites for which potential effects and impacts have been identified have been taken forward to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. Those for which no potential impacts are anticipated as a result of implementation of the Plan do not require Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and are ‘screened-out’ at this stage of the assessment.

Table 3.3: Possible Impacts on cSACs

| Site Name | Reduction in Habitat Area | Disturbance to Key Species | Habitats or Species Fragmentation | Reduction in Species Density | Changes in Key Indicators of Conservation Value (Water Quality etc.) |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Streedagh Point Dunes | None | None | None | None | None |
| Ben Bulbin, Gleniff and Glende Complex | None | None | None | None | None |
| Lough Gill | None | None | None | None | None |
| Union Wood | None | None | None | None | None |
| Unshin River | None | None | None | None | None |
| Temple House and Cloonacleigha Loughs | None | None | None | None | None |
| River Moy | None | None | None | None | None |
| Ox Mountain Bogs | None | None | None | None | None |
| Knockalongy and Knockachree Cliffs | None | None | None | None | None |
| Ballysadare Bay | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts |
| Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts |

Table 3.4: Possible Impacts on SPAs

| Site Name | Reduction in Habitat Area | Disturbance to Key Species | Habitats or Species Fragmentation | Reduction in Species Density | Changes in Key Indicators of Conservation Value (Water Quality etc.) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Ardboline Island and Horse Island | None | None | None | None | None |
| Ballintemple and Ballygilgan | None | None | None | None | None |
| Drumcliff Bay | None | None | None | None | None |
| Sligo/Leitrim Uplands | None | None | None | None | None |
| Cummeen Strand | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts |
| Ballysadare Bay | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts | Potential Impacts |
| Aughris Head | None | None | None | None | None |

3.4 SCREENING CONCLUSIONS

The likely impacts that will arise from the Strandhill Mini-Plan have been examined in the context of the key environmental factors that could potentially affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network, e.g. disturbance, habitat loss, etc. and the results of the Screening Assessment, as presented in **Tables 3.3** and **3.4**. These tables indicate “None” for sites where no negative impact is anticipated on the Conservation Objectives or on the overall integrity of the site and “Potential Impact” for those sites where it is certain, likely or uncertain at this stage that impacts on the site may arise as a result of implementation of the Plan. Following the screening stage of the process, two SACs and two SPAs were brought forward for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (**Table 3.5**).

Table 3.5 Summary of Sites Requiring Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment

| Site Name | Site Code | Requirement for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|--|
| Ballysadare Bay cSAC | 000622 | Required |
| Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC | 000627 | Required |
| Cummeen Strand SPA | 004035 | Required |
| Ballysadare Bay SPA | 004129 | Required |

4. STAGE 2 – DRAFT NATURA IMPACT REPORT

4.1 Overview

This section of the NIR records the assessment carried out on the Draft Strandhill Mini- Plan, as published and put on public display in January 2013. Four Natura 2000 sites were brought forward for Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment. Each individual objective in the Draft Plan was reviewed with respect to each identified Natura 2000 site and a determination was made as to whether there was potential for any aspect of the objective, either alone or in combination with other related objectives, to impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site. Where a potential negative impact was identified, mitigation measures were proposed to reduce or eliminate the impact. In line with best practice, a hierarchy of mitigation, beginning with avoidance has been followed. Where avoidance is not possible, caveats have been added or changes to the wording of the objective have been identified which will mitigate the impact at this strategic level. None of the mitigation proposed removes the legal obligation to carry out Appropriate Assessment at the project level where required by the provisions of the Habitats Directive or by the implementing legislation in Ireland.

4.1.1 The Likely Effects of the Plan on Natura 2000 Sites

The AA (and associated SEA) has assessed both the Written Statement and the associated Maps for the draft Strandhill Mini-Plan. **Table 4.1** outlines the elements of the Draft Plan likely to result in negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites within Strandhill. All of the Natura 2000 sites that are included in the Stage 2 assessment are coastal and as the settlement is consolidated, there will be continuing demands made on the coastline, its habitats and surface waters. It is important that the coastal zone is managed and developed in a way that protects Natura 2000 Sites.

Population and economic growth over the past number of years has put pressure on habitats and species within Strandhill due to urbanisation, commercial development, housing and building in general, tourism and recreation and infrastructure provision. This has put strain on Strandhill's protected sites through increased pressure from discharges e.g. from wastewater treatment, and increased recreational disturbance from residential expansion and intensification of existing developments.

A number of objectives in the Mini-Plan propose the development of a network of walking trails that either cross or run along the boundaries of Natura 2000 sites. Whilst it is acknowledged that such facilities are beneficial to people's enjoyment of the countryside and can be valuable in developing a public appreciation of Strandhill's wildlife and biodiversity, it should also be recognised that pedestrians and other recreational users can cause a significant degree of disturbance to habitats, wildlife and particularly to birds including those for which SPAs have been designated.

Other potential impacts associated with the Mini-Plan include:

- Run off of pollutants during construction and operational phases of development;
- Loss, fragmentation and disturbance to habitats due to continued development and development intensification;
- Inadequate wastewater treatment resulting in pollution of surface waters.
- Upgrade of road infrastructure, water and waste water facilities and associated networks.
- Coastal protection works.
- Provision of recreational infrastructure such as promenade, car parks and picnic areas.
- Development of a recreational trail network.

4.2 Commitments to the Protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the Draft Mini-Plan

Chapter 44. Strandhill Mini-Plan sets out the following in relation to natural heritage;

‘Strandhill is surrounded by some of Sligo’s most valuable natural heritage sites. These sites are protected by European and national legislation, as they support a large number of diverse natural and semi-natural habitats and a wide range of flora and fauna.

The following areas are protected under the EU Habitats Directive (92.43/EEC) and EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC):

- *Ballysadare Bay SAC (site code 00062)*
- *Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay SAC (site code 000627)*
- *Cummeen Strand SPA (site code 004035)*
- *Ballysadare Bay SPA (site code 004129).*

Designated sites do not represent the full extent of Strandhill’s natural heritage. The wider countryside also makes a valuable contribution to the overall coherence of the ecological network.’

The followings objectives in relation to Natura 2000 sites are provided in the draft Mini-Plan:

‘44.1 Landscape, natural Heritage, open space.

- A. Maintain and enhance the conservation value of the Natura 2000 sites surrounding the village. Ensure that Appropriate Assessment Screening is carried out for any plan or project within the Mini-Plan area with potential to impact on Ballysadare Bay SAC (site code 000622), Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay SAC (site code 000627), Cummeen Strand SPA (site code 004035) and Ballysadare Bay SPA (site code 004129).*
- B. Prepare, in consultation with the DoECLG, a management plan for the Council-owned lands at Killaspugbrone, in compliance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive. ‘*

4.2.1 Determination of the Adequacy of the Draft Plan’s Commitment to the Protection of Natura 2000 Sites

It is considered that the Draft Plan is thorough and accurate with regard to the requirement for Appropriate Assessment Screening of projects that will or may be progressed as a result of adoption and implementation of the Draft Plan (Obj. 44.1 A).

It is considered that a number of objectives in the Draft Mini-Plan should make specific reference to the requirement for Appropriate Assessment screening. These are objectives which it is considered would pose a particular threat to the integrity of Natura 2000 sites were they to be implemented in the absence of Appropriate Assessment screening. In some cases this is due to the characteristics of the proposals outlined in the objective; in other cases it is due to the location(s) to which the objective refers, or it may be a combination of these factors.

Section 4.5 of this NIR details recommended amendments to specific objectives of the Draft Mini-Plan in this regard. Each section of the Draft Mini-Plan is discussed in sequence.

4.3 LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OF THE PLAN ON THE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES OF NATURA 2000 SITES

In some cases specific objectives of the plan present specific threats to the conservation objectives of particular Natura 2000 sites. Impacts arising from the implementation of objectives of the draft plan which are likely to cause significant impacts on the integrity and conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites include activities which give rise to:

- direct impacts on habitats listed on Annex I of the Habitats Directive and for which the site is designated;
- reduction in the area of any habitats within the site;
- direct or indirect damage to the physical quality of the environment (e.g. water quality) in the Natura 2000 site.
- serious or ongoing disturbance to species or habitats for which the Natura 2000 site is selected (e.g. increased noise, illumination, human activity);
- direct or indirect damage to the size, characteristics or reproductive ability of populations of species for which the Natura 2000 site is designated;
- activities which interfere with mitigation measures put in place for other plans or projects.

All of the draft plan objectives were reviewed to identify likely significant effect of the Mini-Plan on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites. Consideration was given to direct and indirect impacts which may arise from activities which could be encouraged by objectives contained in the draft plan. Such activities could include new residential, commercial, infrastructural, recreational or other development which may give rise to direct impacts on habitats or species (loss of habitat, disturbance to species); as well as activities which could have indirect impacts (e.g. activities which could affect water quality or hydrology which could in turn affect the status/health of populations of water dependant habitats or species). Table 4.1 presents details of the specific objectives of the Mini-Plan that are considered potentially to have significant negative impacts on particular Natura 2000 sites. Section 4.5 presents the amendments to these objectives that are considered necessary to remove these specific threats.

| Draft Mini-Plan Objectives | Plan Objectives Which Might Give Rise to Impacts on Natura 2000 sites | Potential for impact on Natura 2000 sites | Natura 2000 site(s) which could be affected |
|--|---|--|---|
| 44.1 Landscape, natural heritage, open space. | A. Provision for Appropriate Assessment screening of plans and projects. | Positive impact on Natura 2000 sites. | n/a |
| | B. Provides for preparation of management plan for council owned lands. | Positive impact on Natura 2000 sites. | n/a |
| | C. Provides for Ecological Impact Assessment in respect of County Biodiversity Site. | Positive impact on biodiversity generally. | n/a |
| | D. Protection of existing views when assessing development proposals. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | E. Protection of national monuments. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | F i-v. Preservation of views. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | G i-ii. Provision of incidental public open spaces (OS1, OS2, OS3 on objectives map). | No impacts identified re OS1 & OS3.OS2 has potential for negative impact on Natura 2000 sites due to proximity to Natura 2000 site and specifically arising from site preparation, construction, future management and use/introduction of invasive species. | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay SAC |
| | H. Provides for retention of open space at Seaview House. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| 44.2 Coastal protection | A. Provides for preparation of an integrated coastal management plan for Strandhill. | Potential positive and negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Most of the soft coast environment at Strandhill is designated as Natura 2000 sites. Preparation of an integrated coastal management plan should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment. | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC Ballysadare Bay cSAC |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | B. Objective to maintain an 80m natural buffer along the shoreline. | Positive impact on Natura 2000 sites. | n/a |
| | C. Retention of a natural storm berm and dune buffer zone to west of caravan park. | Positive impact on Natura 2000 sites. | n/a |
| | D. Objective to maintain and review dune management. | Potential positive and negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Most of the soft coast environment at Strandhill is designated as Natura 2000 sites. Preparation of an integrated coastal management plan should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment. | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC Ballysadare Bay cSAC |
| 44.3 Built heritage and streetscape | A. Objective re design of new development along the Top Road. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | B. Objective to retain buildings of note in new development. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | C. Protection and conservation of Protected Structures within the Plan area. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| 44.4 Mixed-use zones | A-B. Objectives relating to urban design and development standards. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | C. Objective relating to upgrade of existing properties fronting onto promenade (MIX 1). | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | D. Objective to encourage redevelopment of the Promenade 'Corner' subject to any necessary coastal protection measures (MIX 1). | Potential negative impact on Natura 2000 sites arising from associated coastal protection measures. Most of the soft coast environment at Strandhill is designated as Natura 2000 sites. Redevelopment and coastal protection measures should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment. | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC Ballysadare Bay cSAC |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | E i-iii. Objectives re design and development standards for promenade site (MIX 1). | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | F. Objective re urban design along Buenos Aires Drive (MIX 2 and MIX 3) | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | G i-iii. Objectives re elements to be incorporated into development proposals for MIX 2 (existing Council car park). | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | H. Objective re urban design for existing property at MIX 3. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | I i-ii. Objectives re urban design for development proposals at site MIX 4. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| 44.5 Transport, circulation and parking | A. Objective re land reservation for a New Airport Road. | Potential negative impact on Natura 2000 sites. Construction of New Airport Road has potential for negative impact on Natura 2000 sites due to site preparation, road construction, future management and use/introduction of invasive species. Future road development should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment at project level. | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC |
| | B. Objective to reserve land for the creation of New Burma Road. | No impacts identified. | |
| | C. Objective to extend Promenade in a northerly direction to link with existing airport road as indicated on the Objectives Map, while incorporating coastal protection measures. | Potential negative impact on Natura 2000 sites arising from promenade development and associated coastal protection measures. Initiatives which increase human use and access to the coastal zone have the potential to give rise to impacts on habitats and cause disturbance to birds and other | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC Ballysadare Bay cSAC |

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|-----|
| | | <p>species generally. At present there is erosion of the dune systems at Strandhill. The proposed transport hub at TRANS 2 will add further to existing recreational pressure on habitats and species.</p> <p>Construction of a promenade and link road have potential for negative impact on Natura 2000 sites due to construction, future management and use/introduction of invasive species and by increasing recreational pressure within Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>Future promenade and link road development should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment at project level.</p> | |
| | D. Objective re provision of footpaths and public lighting throughout the village. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | E. Objective to upgrade Golf Club Road. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | F. Objective requiring all new developments to provide for special mobility needs. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | G. Objective to improve traffic flow on existing promenade. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | H. Objective to reserve land along Burma Road for a Public Transport Node (TRANS 1). | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | I. Objective re road junction improvements. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| 44.6 Community Facilities | A. Objective to support improvement and further development of existing sports facilities adjoining the Airport Road. | No impacts identified. | n/a |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| | B. Objectives requiring any proposed development of community facilities at the Greenfield site at CF1 to provide a range of facilities. | <p>Potential negative impact on Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>Construction of Community Facilities at CF1 has potential for negative impact on Natura 2000 sites due to site preparation, construction, future use and management and use/introduction of invasive species.</p> <p>Future development should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment at project level.</p> | <p>Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC</p> <p>Cummeen Strand SPA</p> |
| | C. Objective to require flood risk assessment for any proposed development at CF1. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| 44.7 Tourism Development | A. Objective to promote tourism related-infrastructure to increase visitor numbers and local employment. | <p>Potential negative impact on Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>Initiatives which increase human use and access to the coastal zone have the potential to give rise to impacts on habitats and cause disturbance to birds and other species generally.</p> <p>Future tourism related infrastructure development should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment at project level.</p> | <p>Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC</p> <p>Ballysadare Bay cSAC</p> <p>Cummeen Strand SPA</p> <p>Ballysadare Bay SPA</p> |
| | B. Objective to Provide a public parking and picnic area to the north of the caravan park in conjunction with the new road (TRANS 2). | <p>Potential negative impact on Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>Initiatives which increase human use and access to the coastal zone have the potential to give rise to impacts on habitats and cause disturbance to birds and other</p> | <p>Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC</p> <p>Ballysadare Bay cSAC</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | | <p>species generally.</p> <p>At present there is erosion of the dune systems at Strandhill from recreational use. The proposed transport hub at TRANS 2 will add further to existing recreational pressure on protected habitats and species.</p> <p>Future transport hub development should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment at project level.</p> <p>Obj 44.2 A (Coastal Management Plan) and Obj 44.7 C (Development of a Trail Network) will have positive impacts on Natura 2000 sites in protecting the existing soft coast environment and providing a dedicated trail network for sustainable recreational use of Natura 2000 sites.</p> | |
| | <p>C. Objective to maintain existing trails and and establish further looped recreational trails (1)-(3). Refer to objectives map.</p> | <p>Potential negative and positive impact on Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>Initiatives which increase human use and access to the coastal zone have the potential to give rise to impacts on habitats and cause disturbance to birds and other species generally.</p> <p>At present there is erosion of the dune systems at Strandhill from recreational use. The proposed recreational trail network will add further to existing recreational pressure on protected habitats and species.</p> <p>Obj 44.2 A (Coastal Management Plan) and Obj 44.7 C (Development of a Trail Network) will have positive impacts on Natura 2000 sites in protecting the existing soft coast</p> | |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | environment and providing a dedicated trail network for sustainable recreational use of Natura 2000 sites. | |
| 44.8 Business and enterprise | A. Objective to support the continued operation of Sligo Airport. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| | B i-ii. Objective relating to the protection of existing flight paths. | No impacts identified. | n/a |
| 44.9 Buffer zone | A. Objective to encourage landowners to manage land sustainably in buffer area which will remain principally in low-intensity agricultural use. | Potential negative impact on Natura 2000 sites. | |
| | B. Objective to require all new and replacement agricultural structures to be designed sensitively. | Potential negative and positive impact on Natura 2000 sites. Future agricultural development adjacent to Natura 2000 sites should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment at project level. Appropriate siting and design of structures will have positive impact on Natura 2000 sites. | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC Ballysadare Bay cSAC Cummeen Strand SPA Ballysadare Bay SPA |
| 44.10 Wastewater treatment | A. Upgrade of waste water treatment plant (WWTP) to cater for c. 3000 (Population Equivalent). | Potential positive impact on Natura 2000 sites. The Strandhill WWTP is located on undesignated lands within the Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC. The existing plant has a design PE (population equivalent) of 1,500 and is operating at capacity. The existing treatment process comprises primary treatment (screening) and secondary treatment (activated sludge, oxidisation ditch and final settlement). At present waste water and surface water are | Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay cSAC Cummeen Strand SPA Ballysadare Bay SPA |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | | <p>combined in the drainage network and coupled with limited capacity this has led to the WWTP not operating optimally on occasions.</p> <p>Strandhill WWTP is included in the Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2013. Significant work has taken place to improve the efficiency of the plant pending the proposed upgrade. An application for a wastewater discharge license is currently being considered by the EPA.</p> <p>Deterioration of water quality could affect habitats (mudflats) upon which species for which the adjoining SPAs are designated are dependent. However, increasing nutrient inputs may also have beneficial impacts by increasing invertebrate availability for birds. Taking this into account and given the distance of the discharge point to the nearest mudflat areas of the SPAs, it is considered that the proposed WWTP upgrade will have a positive impact on winter feeding/roosting sites for birds and water quality generally.</p> <p>The provision of an upgrade for the Strandhill WWTP is currently being planned for delivery.</p> <p>Future WWTP upgrade should be undertaken in consultation with NPWS, DAHG and should be subject to appropriate assessment at project level.</p> | |
|--|--|---|--|

4.4 Zonings

The Draft Strandhill Mini-Plan, Map 1, provides the proposed Zoning Map for the Plan area. The purpose of zoning is to indicate the land use objectives for all the lands within the Plan area. Zoning aspires to promote the orderly development of the Plan area by eliminating potential conflicts between incompatible land uses, and to establish an efficient basis for investment in public infrastructure and facilities. It should be noted that the portions of Natura 2000 Sites located below the high tide mark are not zoned on the zoning map because these lie outside the remit of the Plan which ends at the high water mark. This includes the majority of the areas of Cummeen Strand SPA and Ballysadare Bay SPA.

4.4.1 Zoning

Most of the zoned land within Natura 2000 Sites and most of the land immediately adjacent to them is zoned as 'Buffer zone'. The County Development Plan 2011-1017 Volume 2 Mini-Plans Chapter 13 Mini Plan General Policies provides the following in respect of buffer zones (S. 13.8) in addition to a detailed Mini Plans Zoning Matrix.

'A. Establish a buffer zone around settlements, between the plan limit and the development limit, with a view to:

- *consolidating and containing settlements within a single development limit;*
- *safeguarding land for the future expansion of settlements and for the provision of infrastructure;*
- *preserving views;*
- *protecting the integrity of archaeological sites and monuments in the area surrounding the village;*
- *protecting and enhancing designated nature conservation sites (pNHAs, SACs, SPAs etc);*
- *excluding from development those lands which are at risk from flooding.*

B. Reserve the buffer zone principally for agricultural use.

C. Ensure that the siting and construction of new roads and buildings in the buffer zone minimize their visual and environmental impact.

E. Within the Buffer Zone, proposals for one-off rural housing shall only be accommodated in cases of proven need of immediate family members of locally-resident families who wish to build on their own land and have no suitable option on their holdings outside the buffer zone.

F. In relation to housing, give preference to the sensitive renovation or replacement of existing vacant or derelict structures.'

Whilst there is potential for some forms of development to result in negative impacts on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites should they be permitted, it is considered that the Council's commitments to Appropriate Assessment that are presented in the Draft Plan, including the amendments proposed in this Report, will be sufficient to prevent inappropriate development from occurring within the boundaries of the Natura 2000 sites.

4.4.2 Other Zonings

Small areas of land immediately adjacent to Natura 2000 site boundaries (and therefore in locations where the risk of indirect impacts on the Sites is relatively high) are zoned in a number of ways. It is considered that the Council's commitments to Appropriate Assessment that are presented in the

Draft Plan, including the amendments proposed in this Report, will be sufficient to prevent inappropriate development in these areas.

4.5 Mitigation Measures

This section presents details of proposals for mitigation to the objectives of the Draft Strandhill Mini-Plan (January 2013). This mitigation, in the context of a land use plan such as the Strandhill Mini-Plan should be viewed as mitigation to ensure that the no negative impacts arise on Natura 2000 sites as a result of implementation of the Plan. It is not intended to remove the requirement (under the provisions of the Habitats Directive) for a detailed consideration of specific proposals at the project level; i.e. 'project level' AA.

Objective Emphasising the need for Appropriate Assessment Screening:

The draft Mini-Plan provides for a general commitment for appropriate assessment screening as follows:

Objective 44.1 A.

'Maintain and enhance the conservation value of the Natura 2000 sites surrounding the village. Ensure that Appropriate Assessment Screening is carried out for any plan or project within the Mini-Plan area with potential to impact on Ballysadare Bay SAC (site code 000622), Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay SAC (site code 000627), Cummeen Strand SPA (site code 004035) and Ballysadare Bay SPA (site code 004129).'

Project-Specific and Location-Specific Objectives that Require Caveats:

In undertaking the assessment of likely significant effects of the Mini-Plan objectives on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites within the impact zone there were a number of cases where the plan objectives have the potential for negative impact on Natura 2000 sites. In most cases these objectives are specific to either a particular project or a particular location and it is considered very likely that some level of conflict will arise between the objective and the need to protect the Natura 2000 sites. Accordingly in these specific cases it is considered appropriate that caveats should be amended to those objectives to ensure no negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites arise from the implementation of the Mini-Plan.

The following amendments to objectives are therefore recommended.

Section 44.1 Landscape, natural heritage, open space

Obj. G *'Provide for a number of incidental public open spaces, notably:*

- i. the Sligo entrance to the village, between the new and old R292, where a floral or shrub display might be developed, possibly in conjunction with a piece of public art (location marked OS1 on Objectives Map);*

- ii. *a strip of land to the east of the Airport Road, which would lend itself to a tree and shrub belt for amenity and shelter purposes (location marked OS2 on Objectives Map).'*
- iii. *Require any development on the site of Seaview House on Upper Buenos Ayres Drive to retain and landscape a substantial element of open space at the eastern end of the existing garden (location marked OS3 on Objectives Map).*

Should be amended to:

'Provide for a number of incidental public open spaces whilst ensuring the protection of designated sites through screening for Appropriate Assessment, notably:

- i. *the Sligo entrance to the village, between the new and old R292, where a floral or shrub display might be developed, possibly in conjunction with a piece of public art (location marked OS1 on Objectives Map);*
- ii. *a strip of land to the east of the Airport Road, which would lend itself to a tree and shrub belt for amenity and shelter purposes (location marked OS2 on Objectives Map).'*
- iii. *Require any development on the site of Seaview House on Upper Buenos Ayres Drive to retain and landscape a substantial element of open space at the eastern end of the existing garden (location marked OS3 on Objectives Map).*

Section 44.2 Coastal Protection

Obj. A *'Prepare an integrated coastal management plan for Strandhill in consultation with relevant agencies and interested parties. This plan should address, inter alia, the existing and potential recreational uses of the area.'*

Should be amended to:

'Prepare an integrated coastal management plan for Strandhill in consultation with relevant agencies and interested parties. This plan should address, inter alia, the existing and potential recreational uses of the area. The coastal management plan will ensure the protection of Natura 2000 sites through the Appropriate Assessment process.'

Obj. D *'Maintain and review dune management, to include, where necessary, appropriate fencing, boardwalks and public information boards.'*

Should be amended to:

'Maintain and review dune management, to include, where necessary, appropriate fencing, boardwalks and public information boards while taking full account of the need to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the coast and the need to avoid significant adverse impacts on Natura 2000 Sites and on species protected by law.'

Section 44.4 Mixed Use Zones

Obj. D. 'Encourage the redevelopment of the Promenade 'Corner' on the sea front (MIX 1, Objectives Map) currently comprising shops, dwellings and a public open space, subject to any necessary coastal protection measures.'

Should be amended to:

'Encourage the redevelopment of the Promenade 'Corner' on the sea front (MIX 1, Objectives Map) currently comprising shops, dwellings and a public open space, subject to any necessary coastal protection measures whilst ensuring the protection of designated sites through screening for Appropriate Assessment at project level.'

Section 44.5 Transport, circulation and parking

Obj. A. 'Reserve land for a New Airport Road linking the R292 to the existing Airport Road (R277).'

Should be amended to:

'Reserve land for a New Airport Road linking the R292 to the existing Airport Road (R277) whilst ensuring the protection of designated sites through screening for Appropriate Assessment at project level.'

Obj. C 'Extend the Promenade in a northerly direction and link up with the existing Airport Road as indicated on the Objectives Map, to include for the upgrading of the existing lane from the caravan park to the Airport Road. All necessary coastal protection measures should be incorporated into such a project. This extension should be developed in a similar fashion to the existing Promenade whilst also preserving as much as possible of the seafront area as a public amenity.'

Should be amended to:

'Extend the Promenade in a northerly direction and link up with the existing Airport Road as indicated on the Objectives Map, to include for the upgrading of the existing lane from the caravan park to the Airport Road whilst taking full account of the need to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the coast and the need to avoid significant adverse impacts on Natura 2000 Sites and on species protected by law. All necessary coastal protection measures should be incorporated into such a project. This extension should be developed in a similar fashion to the existing Promenade whilst also preserving as much as possible of the seafront area as a public amenity.'

Section 44.6 Community Facilities

Obj. B 'Require any development proposed on the greenfield site CF1 (refer to the Objectives Map) to provide a range of facilities such as a citizens' advice point, social services, tourist information, skate park and indoor sports. A youth centre and childcare facilities may be provided within the same building or in a separate structure.'

Should be amended to:

'Require any development proposed on the greenfield site CF1 (refer to the Objectives Map) to ensure the protection of designated sites through screening for Appropriate Assessment at project level. Any proposed development shall provide a range of facilities such as a citizens' advice point, social services, tourist information, skate park and indoor sports. A youth centre and childcare facilities may be provided within the same building or in a separate structure.'

Section 44.7 Tourism Development

Obj. A. *'Promote the development of tourism related-infrastructure and facilities within the village in order to increase visitor numbers and to create more local employment.'*

Should be amended to:

'Promote the development of tourism related-infrastructure and facilities within the village in order to increase visitor numbers and to create more local employment, subject to Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive'

Obj. B. *'Provide a public parking and picnic area to the north of the caravan park, in conjunction with the new road (See Section 44.5). This area will be located adjacent to the existing caravan park entrance, from where two-way traffic movements will operate (location marked TRANS 2 on the Objectives Map). In addition, adequate provision will be made for alternative circulation arrangements within the caravan park.'*

Should be amended to:

'Provide a public parking and picnic area to the north of the caravan park, in conjunction with the new road (See Section 44.5), subject to Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive and the implementation of a Coastal Management Plan (Obj. 44.2 A) and a Management Plan for the Council lands at Killaspugbrone (Obj. 44.1 B.). This area will be located adjacent to the existing caravan park entrance, from where two-way traffic movements will operate (location marked TRANS 2 on the Objectives Map). In addition, adequate provision will be made for alternative circulation arrangements within the caravan park.'

Section 44.9 Buffer Zone

Obj. B *'Require all new and replacement agricultural structures to be designed in such manner that they do not interfere with the character of the landscape.'*

Should be amended to:

'Require all new and replacement agricultural structures to be designed in such manner that they do not interfere with the character of the landscape, whilst ensuring the protection of designated sites through screening for Appropriate Assessment at project level.'

Section 44.10 Wastewater Treatment

Obj. A. 'Upgrade the wastewater treatment plant at Killaspugbrone to cater for a population equivalent (PE) of circa 3,000.'

Should be amended to:

'Upgrade the wastewater treatment plant at Killaspugbrone to cater for a population equivalent (PE) of circa 3,000, whilst ensuring the protection of designated sites through undertaking Appropriate Assessment at project level.'

5. CONCLUSION

This Natura Impact Report presents the findings of a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment undertaken on the Draft Strandhill Mini-Plan.

The Appropriate Assessment Screening (Stage 1) identified that there was potential for likely significant effect arising from the adoption and implementation of the draft Mini-Plan. Accordingly, Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (this Natura Impact Report) was undertaken to identify potential likely significant effects on Natura 2000 sites arising from the implementation of the Draft Mini-Plan.

Where it was identified that some elements of the Draft Mini-Plan had potential to result in adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site, mitigation measures in the form of amendments to the Mini-Plan have been proposed in this report. The mitigation measures seek to prevent inappropriate development that could result in significant negative impacts on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites from occurring within the boundaries of the Natura 2000 sites, or adjacent to such sites.

Together with the Council's commitments to the Habitats Directive and Appropriate Assessment that are presented in the Sligo County Development Plan 2011-2017 and this Draft Mini-Plan it is concluded that these measures will be sufficient to ensure that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites arising from the implementation of the Draft Mini-Plan.

Prepared by

Siobhán Ryan
Heritage Officer
Sligo County Council

6. References

Environment, Heritage and Local Government, National Parks and Wildlife Service. 2008. The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland.

Environment, Heritage and Local Government, National Parks and Wildlife Service. Various Years. Natura 2000 Site Synopses.

Environment, Heritage and Local Government. 2009. Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities.

European Communities. 2000. Managing Natura 2000 sites. The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Luxembourg.

European Communities. 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. Luxembourg.