# Proposed Footbridge and Walking Trail at Glenwood, Coolaney, Co.Sligo

## Appropriate Assessment Screening Report & Natura Impact Statement

Prepared for:

Coillte

Prepared by:

JKW Environmental

Easkey

Co. Sligo

**January 2025**

## Document Control

| Project Title | Glenwood Footbridge and Walking Trail | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Document Title | Appropriate Assessment Screening Report & NIS | | | |
| Status | Final | | | |
| Revision | Issue Date | Author | Reviewed By | Approved By |
| 00 | 28/01/2025 | KN | | |

This report is written Katie Neary. She is an Ecologist with JKW Environmental. Katie has completed a honours B.Sc. in Environmental Science. She is a Full Member of the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES) and a full member of the Institute of Environmental Science and the Association of Ecological and Environmental Clerk of Works. She regularly carries out reporting on Ecological Impact Assessment and to inform Natura Impact Assessments / Appropriate Assessments carried out by statutory authorities. Furthermore, she has several years' experience in habitat surveys, mammal surveys, bird and bat surveys for a number of large infrastructure schemes, commercial and residential projects. Katie is an experienced Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW).

This report was reviewed by Jamie Wood. Jamie holds a Degree in Environmental Science and a Master's Degree in Environmental Management, Health and Safety. Jamie is a full member of the Institute of Environmental Science and the Association of Ecological and Environmental Clerk of Works. Jamie is also Chartered with the Society for the Environment holding the postnominal C.Env. Over the past 20 years, working as an Environmental / Ecological Consultant, Jamie has gained extensive experience in a range of ecological surveys and assessment techniques including bird surveys, bat surveys and Ecological Clerk of Works.

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

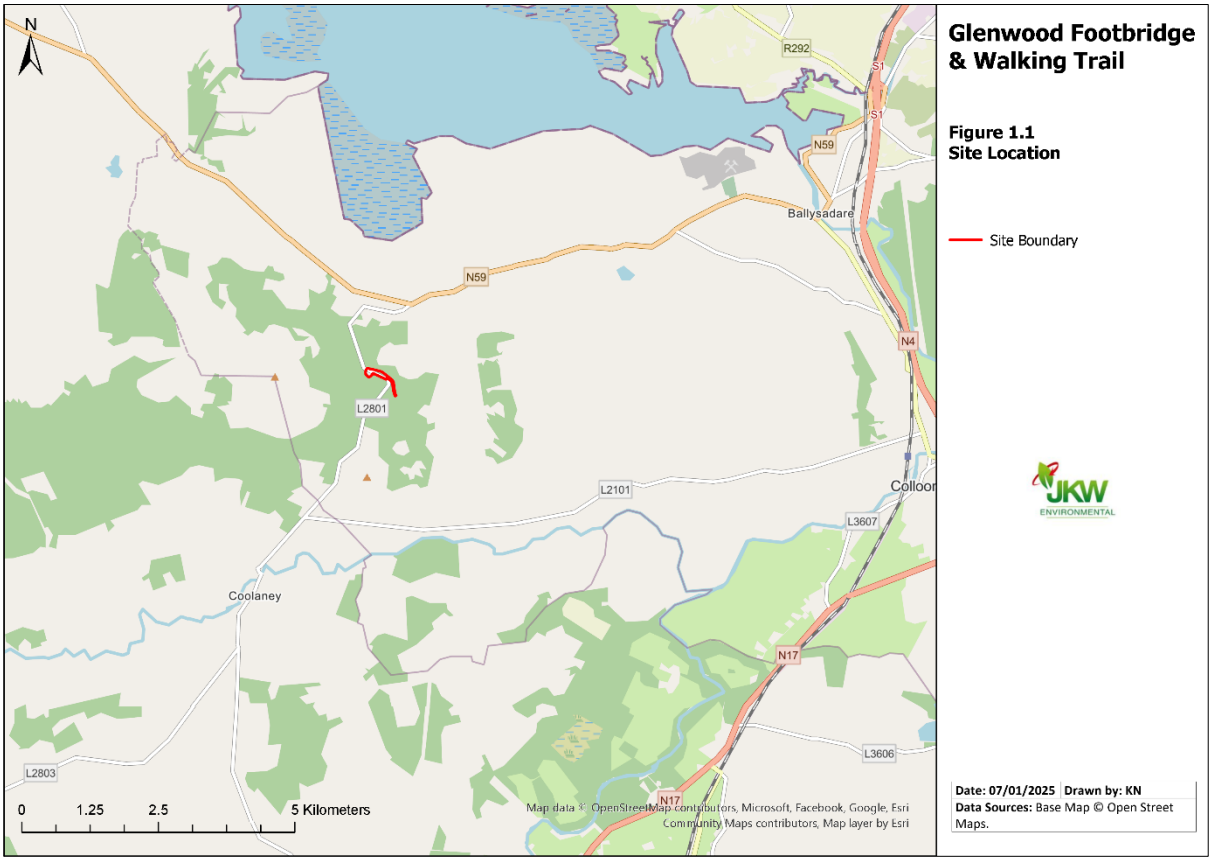
## 1.1 Background

This document has been prepared by JKW Environmental Ltd to allow the relevant competent authority to conduct an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC). The development which is subject to this Appropriate Assessment relates to the provision of a footbridge, across the L2801, and a new walking trail to the north of the L2801 which will connect the Glenwood carpark to an existing forest road/walking trail which provides access to Hawks Rock. The information has been prepared on behalf of the applicant, Coillte.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment is required under Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive). Where it cannot be excluded that a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, would have a significant effect on a European Site then same shall be subject to an appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives.

The current project is not directly connected with, or necessary for, the management of any European Site consequently the project has been subject to the Appropriate Assessment Screening process.

The proposed works site location (hereinafter referred to as “the Site”) is shown in Figure 1.1.



## 1.2 Characteristics of Proposed Development

The proposed development at Glenwood, Lugnafeeda, Co. Sligo, aims to enhance recreational opportunities in the area by creating a safe and accessible walking trail, installing a pedestrian footbridge, and upgrading car parking access and facilities. The project is located on Coillte lands and designed to connect the existing Glenwood Carpark to a nearby forestry road while ensuring minimal environmental impact.

The walking trail will consist of a 2-meter-wide gravel path, designed to follow a carefully chosen alignment to minimize ecological and environmental disturbance (Figures 1.2). The trail will provide a high-quality recreational route for walkers and visitors to the area, enhancing connectivity between existing paths and facilities. Alongside the trail, the construction of a pedestrian footbridge will ensure a safe crossing over the L2801 road. This footbridge, constructed with a prefabricated steel frame and a recycled plastic deck, will be installed on concrete foundations to provide long-term durability and low-maintenance requirements.

The existing carpark at Glenwood will also undergo significant upgrades (Figure 1.3&1.4). Improvements will include new access points to enhance safety, increased capacity to accommodate higher visitor numbers, and better integration with the newly constructed trail. The carpark will feature appropriate drainage infrastructure to manage surface water runoff effectively and minimize impacts on the surrounding environment.

The project involves limited vegetation clearance to facilitate construction activities, ensuring that any such work is carried out with minimal disruption to local biodiversity. All works will adhere to ecological best practices, including the implementation of a comprehensive Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). The development will also include the installation of appropriate signage to guide users and improve accessibility, with all works designed to blend seamlessly with the natural surroundings.

Appendix I contains all relevant site layouts and drawings.

### 1.2.1 Construction Methodology

The construction phase of the proposed development will follow a systematic methodology to ensure the works are carried out efficiently, safely, and with minimal environmental impact. A preliminary Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been prepared to guide construction activities, outlining measures to mitigate environmental risks and protect sensitive habitats and species. This CEMP will be updated as required throughout the construction process to reflect site-specific conditions and any additional requirements that arise.

**Site Setup and Preparation**

Before construction begins, a secure site compound will be established at a location more than 50 meters from any watercourse. This compound will serve as the central hub for welfare facilities, storage of materials and equipment, and refuelling activities. Limited vegetation clearance and tree removal will be undertaken along the trail alignment and footbridge location, with all works carefully managed to minimize ecological impacts. The removal of identified trees within Coillte lands will be the subject of a felling license application to the Dept Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The licence application will be subject to an Appropriate Assessment Screening, a Natura Impact Statement will be prepared if required.

**Walking Trail Construction**

The walking trail will be constructed by first clearing the alignment of any vegetation and topsoil. The ground will then be prepared by excavating unsuitable material and laying a geotextile membrane to stabilize the subgrade. The trail surface will consist of two compacted layers of Class 804 crushed stone, each 150mm thick, topped with a 50mm layer of quarry dust to provide a durable and accessible finish.

**Footbridge Installation**

The pedestrian footbridge will consist of a prefabricated steel frame with a recycled plastic deck, designed for durability and low maintenance. Foundations for the footbridge will be excavated to reach stable ground or bedrock and cast with reinforced concrete. Once the foundations are complete, the bridge will be delivered to the site in sections and assembled using a crane. Temporary traffic management measures will be implemented during the installation to ensure safety for both workers and road users.

**Carpark Upgrades**

The existing carpark will be upgraded to provide increased capacity and improved safety. Works will involve the excavation and compaction of subbase material, followed by resurfacing with durable materials. New access points will be created, and visibility improvements will be achieved by removing hedges and vegetation as required.

**Drainage and Surface Water Management**

Drainage works will be carried out to prevent surface water runoff from impacting nearby watercourses. Measures will include the installation of twin-wall plastic drainage pipes, interceptor drains, and sediment traps along the construction corridor. Temporary erosion control measures, such as silt fencing and buffer zones, will also be implemented to protect water quality during construction.

**Environmental Management**

All hazardous materials, including fuels and oils, will be stored in bunded areas within the site compound to prevent accidental spills. Refuelling of machinery will be restricted to designated areas within the compound, and spill kits will be readily available on-site. Regular environmental monitoring and inspections will ensure compliance with the CEMP, and mitigation measures will be adjusted as needed to address any unforeseen environmental risks.

**Construction Programme**

The project is expected to be completed within a four-month period, with construction activities scheduled between 8:00 AM and 7:00 PM on weekdays, and limited hours on Saturdays. Works will be phased to minimize disruption to local ecology and the surrounding environment.

This construction methodology, guided by the preliminary CEMP and informed by best practices, ensures that the development will be delivered responsibly and with minimal environmental impact. Regular updates to the CEMP will address any changes or challenges encountered during the construction phase.

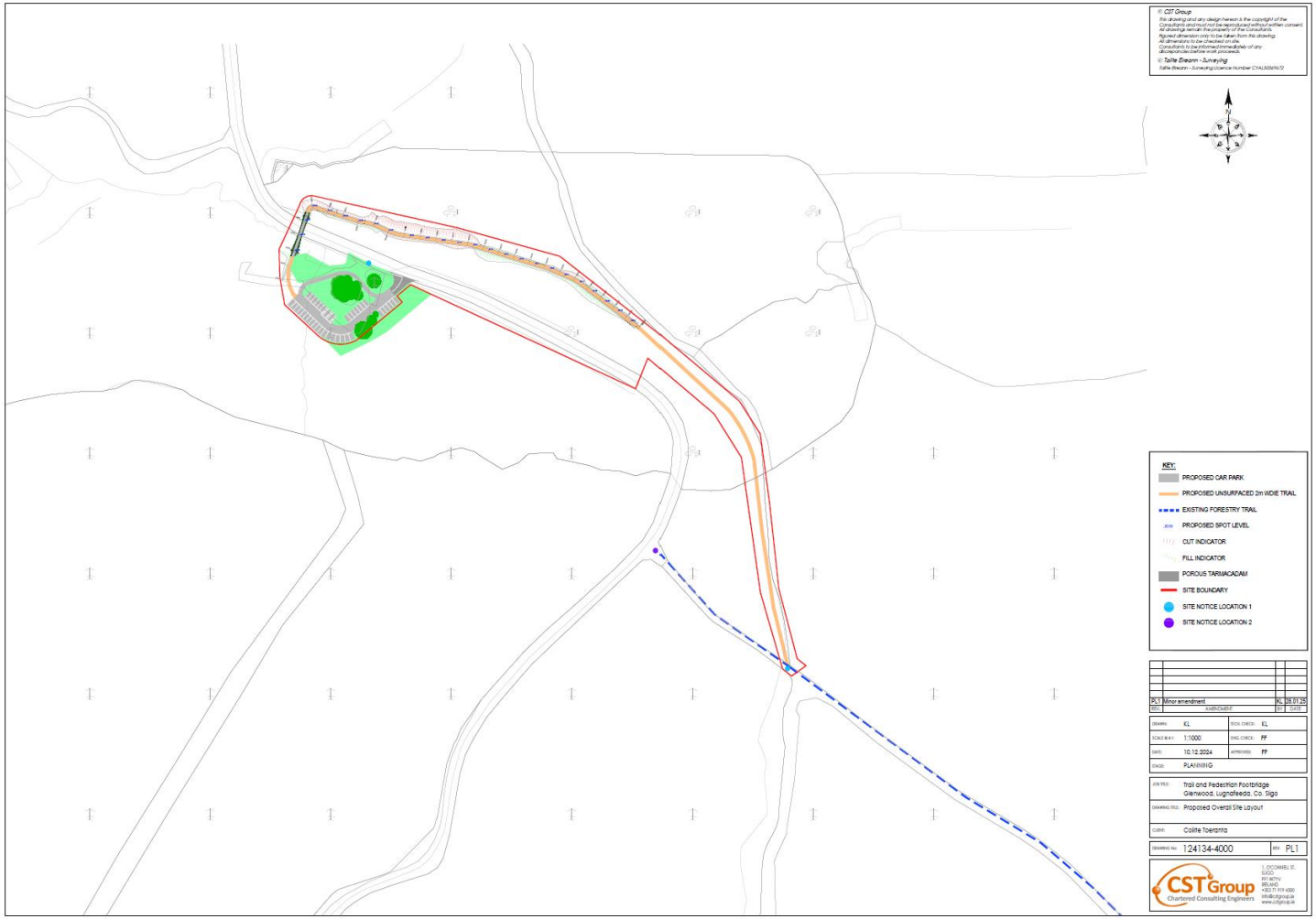



**Figure 1.2 : Site Layout showing location of proposed footbridge and new walking trail**


**Figure 1.3: Site layout showing proposed new access and carpark**

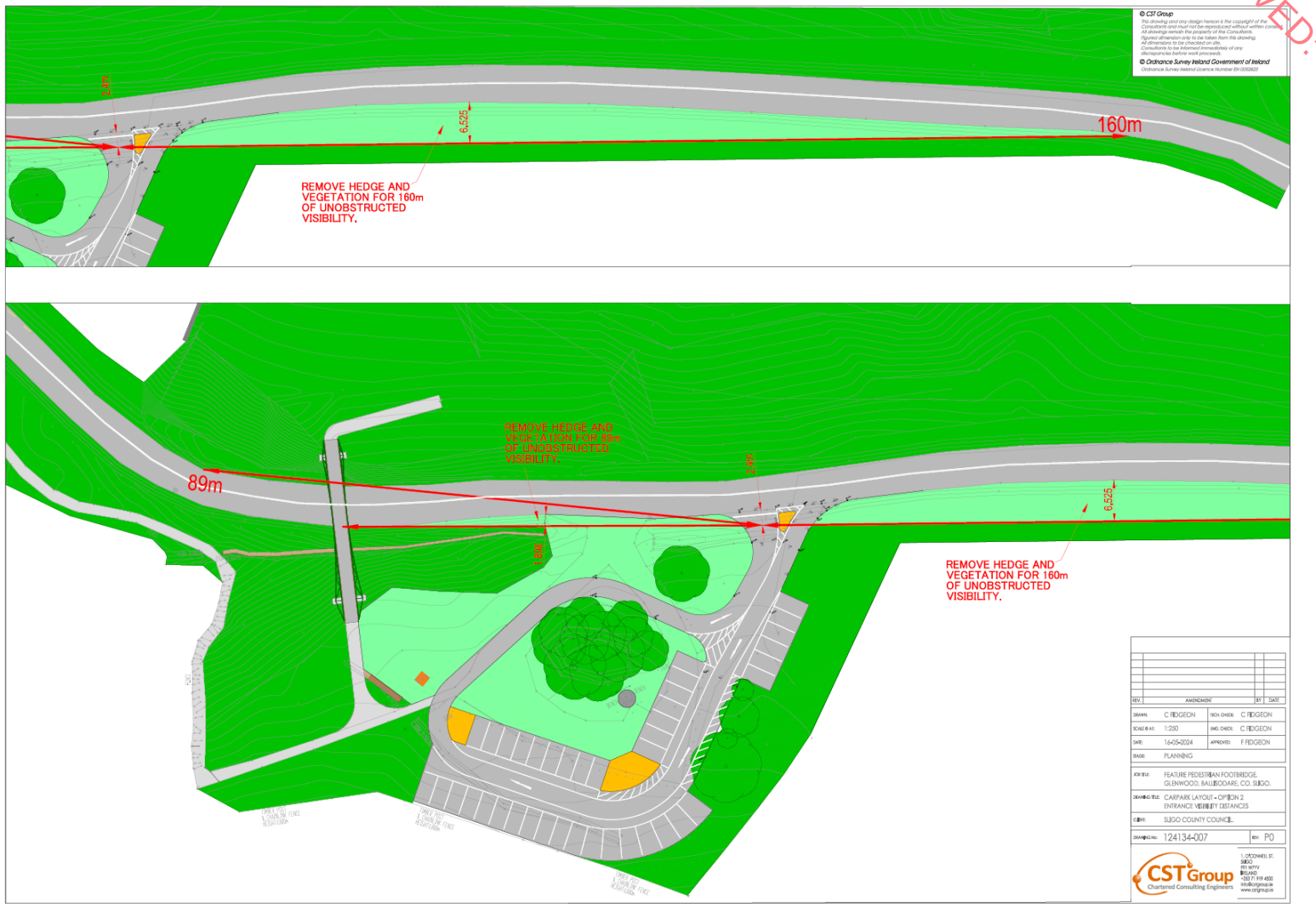



**Figure 1.4: Proposed hedgerow removal for access sightlines**

# 2. Relevant Legislation

European Nature Directives (Habitats and Birds)

The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora) forms the basis for the designation of Special Areas of Conservation. Similarly, Special Protection Areas are classified under the Birds Directive (Council Directive 2009/147/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds). Collectively, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) are referred to as the Natura 2000 network. In general terms, they are considered to be of exceptional importance for rare, endangered or vulnerable habitats and species within the European Community.

Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive an appropriate assessment must be undertaken for any plan or project that is likely to have a significant effect on the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site. An appropriate assessment is an evaluation of the potential impacts of a plan or project on the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site[1], and the development, where necessary, of mitigation or avoidance measures to preclude negative effects.

Article 6, paragraph 3 of the EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC ("the Habitats Directive") states that: "*Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public*"

The Habitats Directive is transposed into Irish law by the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 – 2015. Part XAB of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2020 transposes Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive in respect of land use plans and proposed projects requiring development consent.

EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 to 2021 – Part 5

Part 5 of the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 – 2021 sets out the circumstances under which an 'appropriate assessment' is required. Section 42(1) requires that '*a screening for Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project for which an application for consent is received, or which a public authority wishes to undertake or adopt, and which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European Site, shall be carried out by the public authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the site, if that plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on the European site*.' Section 42(2) expands on this, stipulating that a public authority must carry out a screening for Appropriate Assessment before consent for a plan or project is given, or a decision to undertake or adopt a plan or project is taken. To assist a public authority to discharge its duty in this respect, Section 42(3)(a) gives them the authority to direct a third party to provide a Natura Impact

[1] Also referred to as European Sites in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2021.

Statement and Section 42(3)(b) allows them to request any additional information that is considered necessary for the purposes of undertaking a screening assessment.

Section 42(6) requires that 'the public authority shall determine that an Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project is required where the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European Site and if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information following screening under this Regulation, that the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site'.

Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2021 - PART XAB

The relevant sections of Part XAB of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2021 are set out below.

*Screening for appropriate assessment*

Section 177U requires that— (1) A screening for appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or application for consent for proposed project shall be carried out by the competent authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if that Land use plan or proposed project, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the European site.

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

(a) a Land use plan is made including, where appropriate, before a decision on appeal in relation to a draft strategic development zone is made, or

(b) consent for a proposed project is given.

(3) In carrying out screening for appropriate assessment of a proposed project a competent authority may request such information from the applicant as it may consider necessary to enable it to carry out that screening, and may consult with such persons as it considers appropriate and where the applicant does not provide the information within the period specified, or any further period as may be specified by the authority, the application for consent for the proposed project shall be deemed to be withdrawn.

(4) The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or a proposed project, as the case may be, is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the draft Land use plan or proposed project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

(5) The competent authority shall determine that an appropriate assessment of a draft Land use plan or a proposed project, as the case may be, is not required if it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the draft Land use plan or proposed project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

(6) (a) Where, in relation to a proposed project, a competent authority makes a determination that an appropriate assessment is required, the competent authority shall give notice of the determination, including reasons for the determination of the competent authority, to the following—

(i) the applicant,

(ii) if appropriate, any person who made submissions or observations in relation to the application to the competent authority, or

(iii) if appropriate, any party to an appeal or referral.

(b) Where a competent authority has determined that an appropriate assessment is required in respect of a proposed project it may direct in the notice issued under paragraph (a) that a Natura impact statement is required.

(c) Paragraph (a) shall not apply in a case where the application for consent for the proposed project was accompanied by a Natura impact statement.

(7) A competent authority shall, as soon as may be after making the Land use plan or making a decision in relation to the application for consent for proposed project, make available for inspection by members of the public during office hours at the offices of the authority, and may also publish on the internet —

(a) any determination that it makes in relation to a draft Land use plan under subsection (4) or (5) as the case may be, and reasons for that determination, and

(b) any notice that it issues under subsection (6) in relation to a proposed project.

(8) In this section 'consent for proposed project' means, as appropriate —

(a) a grant of permission,

(b) a decision of the Board to grant permission on a planning application or an appeal,

(c) consent for development under Part IX,

(d) approval for development that may be carried out by a local authority under Part X or Part XAB or development that may be carried out under Part XI,

(e) approval for development on the foreshore under Part XV,

(f) approval for development under section 43 of the Act of 2001,

(g) approval for development under section 51 of the Roads Act 1993, or

(h) a substitute consent under Part XA.

(9) In deciding upon a declaration or a referral under section 5 of this Act a planning authority or the Board, as the case may be, shall where appropriate, conduct a screening for appropriate assessment in accordance with the provisions of this section.

(10) In deciding upon an application under section 176A or a determination review or an application referral under section 176C, a planning authority or the Board, as the case may be, shall, where appropriate, conduct a screening for appropriate assessment in accordance with the provisions of this section.

*Natura impact report and natura impact statement*

Section 177T states that— (1) (a) A Natura impact report means a statement for the purposes of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, of the implications of a Land use plan, on its own or in combination with

other plans or projects, for one or more than one European site, in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites.

(b) A Natura impact statement means a statement, for the purposes of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, of the implications of a proposed development, on its own or in combination with other plans or projects, for one or more than on European site, in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), a Natura impact report or a Natura impact statement, as the case may be, shall include a report of a scientific examination of evidence and data, carried out by competent persons to identify and classify any implications for one or more than one European site in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites.

(3) As respects a draft National Planning Framework, the Government shall prepare a Natura impact report in relation to a draft Land use plan and the following bodies shall also prepare a Natura impact report in relation to a draft Land use plan—

(a) as respects a draft regional spatial and economic strategy, the regional assembly for whose area the draft strategy is made,

( aa ) as respects a draft National Planning Framework, the Minister

( b ) as respects a draft planning scheme in respect of all or any part of a strategic development zone, the planning authority (which term shall be construed in accordance with section 168(5) ) for whose area the draft scheme is made,

( c ) as respects a draft development plan or draft variation of a development plan, the planning authority for whose area the draft plan or draft variation is made, and

( d ) as respects a draft local area plan, the planning authority in whose area the local area concerned is situate.

(4) The applicant for consent for proposed development may, or if directed in accordance with subsection (5) by a competent authority, shall furnish a Natura impact statement to the competent authority in relation to the proposed development.

(5) At any time following an application for consent for proposed development a competent authority may give a notice in writing to the applicant concerned, directing him or her to furnish a Natura impact statement

(6) Where an applicant for consent for proposed development who, having been directed in accordance with subsection (5), fails to furnish a Natura impact statement within the period specified in the notice, or any further period as may be specified by the competent authority, the application for consent for the proposed development shall be deemed to be withdrawn.

(7) ( a ) Without prejudice to subsection (1) a Natura impact report or a Natura impact statement shall include all information prescribed by regulations under section 177AD.

( b ) Where appropriate, a Natura impact report or a Natura impact statement shall include such other information or data as the competent authority considers necessary to enable it to ascertain if the draft Land use plan or proposed development will not affect the integrity of the site.

# 3. Methods

## 3.1 Desk Study

A desk study was carried out to collate information available on Natura 2000 sites within the potential zone of influence of the proposed development. The Site and the surrounding area were viewed using satellite imagery[2]. Sligo County Council planning portal[3] was accessed for information on other permitted and proposed development within the zone of influence of the project. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) website[4] was accessed for information on Natura 2000 sites. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Maps[5] was accessed for other environmental information relevant to preparation of this report.

The following documents were referenced during the desk-top study to inform the Appropriate Assessment and the baseline ecology information:

- Online data available on European sites and habitats/species as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from www.npws.ie, including conservation objectives documents
- Online data available on protected species as held by the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) from www.biodiversityireland.ie, specifically related to the records recorded within the 1 km grid squares (ITM) – G6127 & G6227.
- Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (Gilbert et al, 2021), available at https://birdwatchireland.ie/birds-of-conservation-concern-in-ireland/
- Information on the surface water network and surface water quality in the area available from www.epa.ie
- Information on soils, geology and hydrogeology in the area available from the Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) online Spatial Resources service. Available from https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/data-and-maps/Pages/Groundwater.aspx
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland mapping and aerial photography available from www.osi.ie • GeoHive online mapping (https://geohive.ie/index.html)
- Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030
- Guidelines for the Crossing of Watercourses during the Construction of National Road Schemes' (NRA, 2005);
- CIRIA C648 Control of Water Pollution from Linear Construction Projects: Technical Guide (Murnane et al., 2006);
- CIRIA C649 Control of Water Pollution from Linear Construction Projects: Site Guide (Murnane et al., 2006);
- 'Control of Water Pollution from Construction Sites, Guidance for Consultants and Contractors' (CIRIA, 2001);
- IFI Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and adjacent to Waters" (IFI, 2016);

[2] www.google.ie/maps
[3] https://www.sligococo.ie/planning/SearchPlanningApplications/OnlinePlanningTools/
[4] https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites
[5] https://gis.epa.ie/)

## 3.2 Zone of Influence

The 'zone of influence' for a project is the area over which ecological features may be affected by biophysical changes as a result of the proposed project and associated activities. This is likely to extend beyond the project site, for example where there are ecological or hydrological links beyond the site boundaries. The zone of influence will vary for different ecological features depending on their sensitivity to an environmental change (CIEEM, 2018).

Sites are screened out based on one or a combination of the following criteria:

- The existence of potential for pathways for significant effects, such as hydrological links, proposed project proposals and the site to be screened;
- The distance of the relevant site from the proposed project boundary; and
- The existence of a link between identified threats or vulnerabilities at a site to potential impacts that may arise from the proposed project.

Irish guidance (DoEHLG, 2010)[6] states, for the zone of influence of plans, that "*A distance of 15 km is currently recommended in the case of plans, as a potential zone of influence, and this distance is derived from UK guidance (Scott Wilson et al, 2006)". The guidance goes on to state that "for projects, the distance could be much less than 15 km, and in some cases less than 100 m, but this must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in-combination effects.*"

Guidance from the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR)[7] states that "*The zone of influence of a proposed development is the geographical area over which it could affect the receiving environment in a way that could have significant effects on the Qualifying Interests of a European site. This should be established on a case-by-case basis using the Source-Pathway-Receptor framework and not by arbitrary distances (such as 15 km)".*

The zone of influence for this project was identified through a review of the nature of the project, the type of impacts and effects that could arise as a result of the project, the distance between the project and European sites, and the qualifying interests of the European sites.

## 3.3 Field Survey

The Site was walked on the 8th of November 2024. A habitat survey was undertaken of the proposed development site by JKW Environmental Ltd., following the methodology described in Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Survey and Mapping[8]. All habitat types were classified using the Guide to Habitats in Ireland[9] recording any species of conservation interest. Incidental sightings or evidence of birds, mammals or amphibians were also noted during the Site survey and the habitats within the study area were evaluated for their potential to support protected species. The study area was searched for use of the area by mammals, features such as scat / latrines, feeding remains and hair, were noted where they occur within the study area.

[6] Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland -Guidance for Planning Authorities

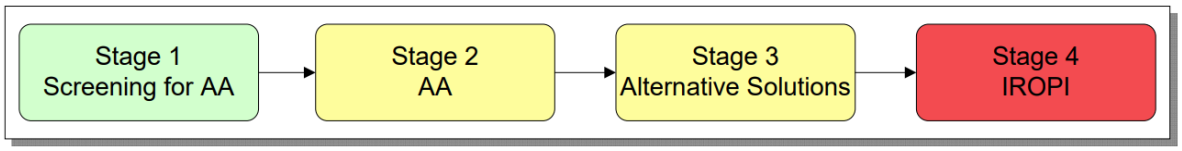
[7] https://www.opr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/9729-Office-of-the-Planning-Regulator-Appropriate-Assessment-Screening-booklet-15.pdf

[8] Smith, G.F., O'Donoghue, P., O'Hora, K. & Delaney, E. (2011) Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Survey and Mapping. The Heritage Council Church Lane, Kilkenny, Ireland.

[9] Fossitt, J.A. (2000) A Guide to Habitats in Ireland. Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

## 3.4 Appropriate Assessment Process

The Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government Guidelines (DELHG, 2009), outlines the European Commission's methodological guidance (EC, 2002). This guidance promotes a four-stage process in completing an AA. An important aspect of the process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required. Throughout the process, the precautionary principle must be applied, so that any uncertainties do not result in adverse impacts on a site. These guidance documents identify a staged approach to conducting an AA, as shown below.




**Stage 1: Screening** – Initial screening is the process that addresses and records the reasoning and conclusions in relation to the first two tests of Article 6(3):

- whether a plan or project is directly connected to or necessary for the management of the site, and
- whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives.

For those sites where potential adverse impacts are identified, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, further assessment is necessary to determine if the proposals will have an adverse impact on the integrity of a European designated site, in view of the site's conservation objectives (i.e. the process proceeds to Stage 2).

**Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment** - This stage requires a more in-depth evaluation of the plan or project, and the potential direct and indirect impacts of them on the integrity and interest features of the European designated site(s), alone and in-combination with other plans and projects, taking into account the site's structure, function and conservation objectives. Where required, mitigation or avoidance measures will be suggested.

The competent authority can only agree to the plan or project after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site(s) concerned. If this cannot be determined, and where mitigation cannot be achieved, then alternative solutions will need to be considered (i.e. the process proceeds to Stage 3).

**Stage 3: Alternative Solutions** - Where adverse impacts on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites are identified, and mitigation cannot be satisfactorily implemented, alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the plan or project that avoid adverse impacts need to be considered. If none can be found, the process proceeds to Stage 4.

**Stage 4: Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI)/Derogation** - This stage is required where an alternative solution is not available. In this situation, the project can only proceed for Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI), despite the plan or project resulting in adverse effects on European Site(s). This stage provides for an assessment of compensation measures to maintain or enhance the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network. The Commission must be

informed of the compensatory measures. Compensatory measures must be practical, implementable, likely to succeed, proportionate and enforceable, and they must be approved by the Minister.

# 4. Description of Baseline Ecology

**Desk Study**

A desktop study was undertaken in advance of the field study walkovers to identify the ecological habitats present within the proposed walking trail footprint and adjacent areas. The desktop study was undertaken using the sources of information outlined above in section 3.1.

The areas surrounding the Site have been classified as mixed forests, moors and heathlands and coniferous forests (Corinne, 2018).

A review of species records on the National Biodiversity Data Centre Ireland (NBDC) website shows records indicating the presence of rare and/or protected species: Pine Marten (*Martes martes*), within the 1km polygons (G6227 & G6127) surrounding the Site.

With respect to regional hydrology, the proposed development is within the Sligo Bay WFD Catchment. The carpark, footbridge and majority of the new walking trail is located within the Dunmoran_SC_010 WFD sub-catchment, a small section, c.79m, of the walking trail is located within the Owenmore[Sligo]_SC_040 WFD sub-catchment.

A tributary of the Barnabrack_010, the Lugnadeffa stream (EPA Code: 35L35) is located c.51m (at its closest point) north west of the proposed footbridge location. An unnamed stream is located adjacent to the existing path from the Glenwood carpark. This stream flows into the Lugnadeffa. The Lugnadeffa flows north for approximately 1.6km before discharging into Sligo Bay. Another tributary of the Barnabrack_010 stream is located c. 21m at its closest point to the proposed walking trail. The Barnabrack stream flows for approximately 2.6km north before discharging into Sligo Bay. The Branabrack_010 is classified as having 'Good' status under the WFD River Waterbody Status 2016-2021. The WFD River Waterbody Risk status is currently under review.

The Site is located within the Collooney groundwater catchment. This groundwater body has been classified as having 'Good' status under the Ground Waterbody WFD Status 2016-2021 and 'Not at risk' as per the WFD risk 3rd Cycle.

The aquifer in the region here is a Poor Aquifer - Bedrock which is Generally Unproductive with extreme to groundwater vulnerability and rock at the surface within the study area.

**Field Survey**

A multidisciplinary ecological walkover survey of the site was conducted on the on the 8th of November 2024 in line with NRA (2009) guidelines (Ecological Surveying Techniques for Protected Flora and Fauna during the Planning of National Road Schemes). The approach to the field surveys is based on accepted standard practice and methods. Habitats within the site boundary were classified using 'A Guide to Habitats in Ireland' (Fossitt, 2000). The dominant plant species present in each habitat were recorded during the field surveys and this is considered sufficient to allow accurate classification of the habitats present.

Incidental sightings or evidence of birds, mammals or amphibians were also noted during the Site survey and the habitats within the study area were evaluated for their potential to support protected species.

The predominant habitats within the proposed site are **Dry siliceous heath HH1**, **Conifer plantation WD4** and **(Mixed) broadleaved woodland WD1.**

The woodland area surrounding the trail includes a large areas of conifer plantations with smaller pockets of mixed broadleaves dominated by Beech with occasional Oak and Holly (Plate 1&2). The dry heath area is dominated by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), accompanied by species such as Bell Heather *(Erica cinerea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), and Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*). Mosses, including Sphagnum species, are present but not dominant (Plate 3). The vegetation also includes patches of bracken, greater wood rush, bramble, and stunted willows.

No Annex I habitats were recorded within or adjacent to the Site during the multidisciplinary site walkover.

**Plate 1: Mixed broadleaved woodland**

**Plate 2: Conifer plantation surrounding trail**

**Plate 3: Heath area surrounding proposed trail**

# 5. Appropriate Assessment Screening

This section of the report identifies the potential zone of influence of the proposed development, provides information on the Natura 2000 sites within the identified zone of influence and sets out the potential impacts and effects and the likelihood of significant effects.

## 5.1 Identification of Natura 2000 Sites

The first step in identification of Natura 2000 sites is to determine the potential zone of influence of the proposed works. When the zone of influence of the proposed works has been determined, Natura 2000 sites within this area can be identified. The potential for these sites to be affected can be evaluated by considering:

- Scale and type of the proposed works.
- Proximity to the proposed works.
- Qualifying interests.
- Ecological[10] and Landscape[11] connectivity.

A source-pathway-receptor model has been used to establish which European Sites could occur within the zone of influence of the project. Under such a model the project, as described above, represents the source. The receptors represent European Sites and their associated qualifying features of interest.

Potential impact pathways are restricted to hydrological pathways as these represent the principal emissions generated by activities at the project site. As can be seen in Table 5.1 below, other emissions generated by the project, such as noise will not have the potential to influence European Sites due to the distance between the project site and these Sites and the lack of suitable habitat surrounding the Site for mobile species.

European Sites and their associated qualifying features are likely to occur in the zone of influence of the project only where the above pathways establish a link between the project site and European Sites or where the project site is likely to play an important role in supporting populations of mobile species that are listed as special conservation interests/qualifying species for surrounding European Sites.

Table 5.1 provides a determination as to whether each of the European Sites listed occur within the zone of influence of the project. Figure 5.1 show the locations of the Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the proposed project.

[10] Connectivity is defined as a measure of the functional availability of the habitats needed for a particular species to move through a given area. Examples include the flight lines used by bats to travel between roosts and foraging areas or the corridors of appropriate habitat needed by some slow colonising species if they are to spread (CIEEM, 2018)

[11] Landscape connectivity is a combined product of structural and functional connectivity, i.e. the effect of physical landscape structure and the actual species use of the landscape (Kettunen et al. 2007)

**Table 5.1. Natura 2000 Sites within zone of influence**

| Natura 2000 site | Distance from Site[12] | Qualifying Interests | Conservation Objectives | Likely Zone of Influence Determination |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)** | | | | |
| Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay (Sligo Bay) SAC [000627] | c. 8.6km north | **Habitats:**<br>[1130] Estuaries<br>[1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats<br>[2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes<br>[2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)<br>[2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*<br>[5130] Juniper Scrub<br>[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*<br>[7220] Petrifying Springs*<br>**Species:**<br>[1014] Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (*Vertigo angustior*)<br>[1095] Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*)<br>[1099] River Lamprey (*Lampetra fluviatilis*) | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within the Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay (Sligo Bay) SAC which is defined by alist of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000627.pdf | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>No hydrological connectivity between the Site and the SAC was identified. No potential for indirect effects on the SAC due to deterioration of water quality through hydrological pathways was identified.<br><br>The site does not support suitable habitat for narrow mouthed whorl snail, lamprey or harbour seal. No potential for significant indirect effects on the SAC due to disturbance or displacement of QI species was identified.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |

[12] Measured in a straight line between the Site and closest point of Natura 2000 site boundary

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | [1365] Common (Harbour) Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) | | |
| Ballysadare Bay SAC [000622] | c. 1.4km north | **Habitats:**<br>[1130] Estuaries<br>[1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats<br>[2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes<br>[2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)<br>[2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*<br>[2190] Humid Dune Slacks<br>**Species:**<br>[1014] Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (*Vertigo angustior*)<br>[1365] Common (Harbour) Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within Ballysadare Bay SAC which is defined by alist of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000622.pdf | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>The unnamed stream, located adjacent to the proposed footbridge location, flows into the Barnabrack stream which provides a hydrological pathway between the Site and the SAC. In addition, the proposed new walking trail is located c.21m from the Barnabrack stream at its closest point. Therefore, taking a precautionary approach, a potential pathway for likely significant effects on the SAC due to deterioration of water quality via surface water, was identified.<br><br>The qualifying habitats of the SAC are coastal in nature, no Annex I habitats were recorded within or adjacent to the Site.<br><br>The site does not support suitable habitat for narrow mouthed whorl snail or harbour seal. No potential for significant indirect effects on the SAC due to disturbance or displacement of QI species was identified.<br><br>**This site is within the likely zone of influence and further assessment is required.** |
| Lough Gill SAC [001976] | c. 10km north east | **Habitats:**<br>[3150] Natural Eutrophic Lakes<br>[6210] Orchid-rich | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within Lough | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>No hydrological connectivity between the Site and the SAC was |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Calcareous Grassland*<br>[91A0] Old Oak Woodlands<br>[91E0] Alluvial Forests*<br>**Species:**<br>[1092] White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*)<br>[1095] Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*)<br>[1096] Brook Lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*)<br>[1099] River Lamprey (*Lampetra fluviatilis*)<br>[1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)<br>[1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*) | Gill SAC which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO001976.pdf | identified. No potential for indirect effects on the SAC due to deterioration of water quality was identified.<br><br>The Site does not provide suitable habitat for any of the QI species for which the SAC is designated. Given the absence of suitable habitat and the distance between the Site and the SAC, no potential for significant indirect effects via disturbance or displacement was identified.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |
| Union Wood SAC [000638] | c. 5.7km east | **Habitats:**<br>[91A0] Old Oak Woodlands | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within Union Wood SAC which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected- | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>There is no connectivity between the Site and this SAC and the habitat for which the SAC is designated is terrestrial in nature.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |

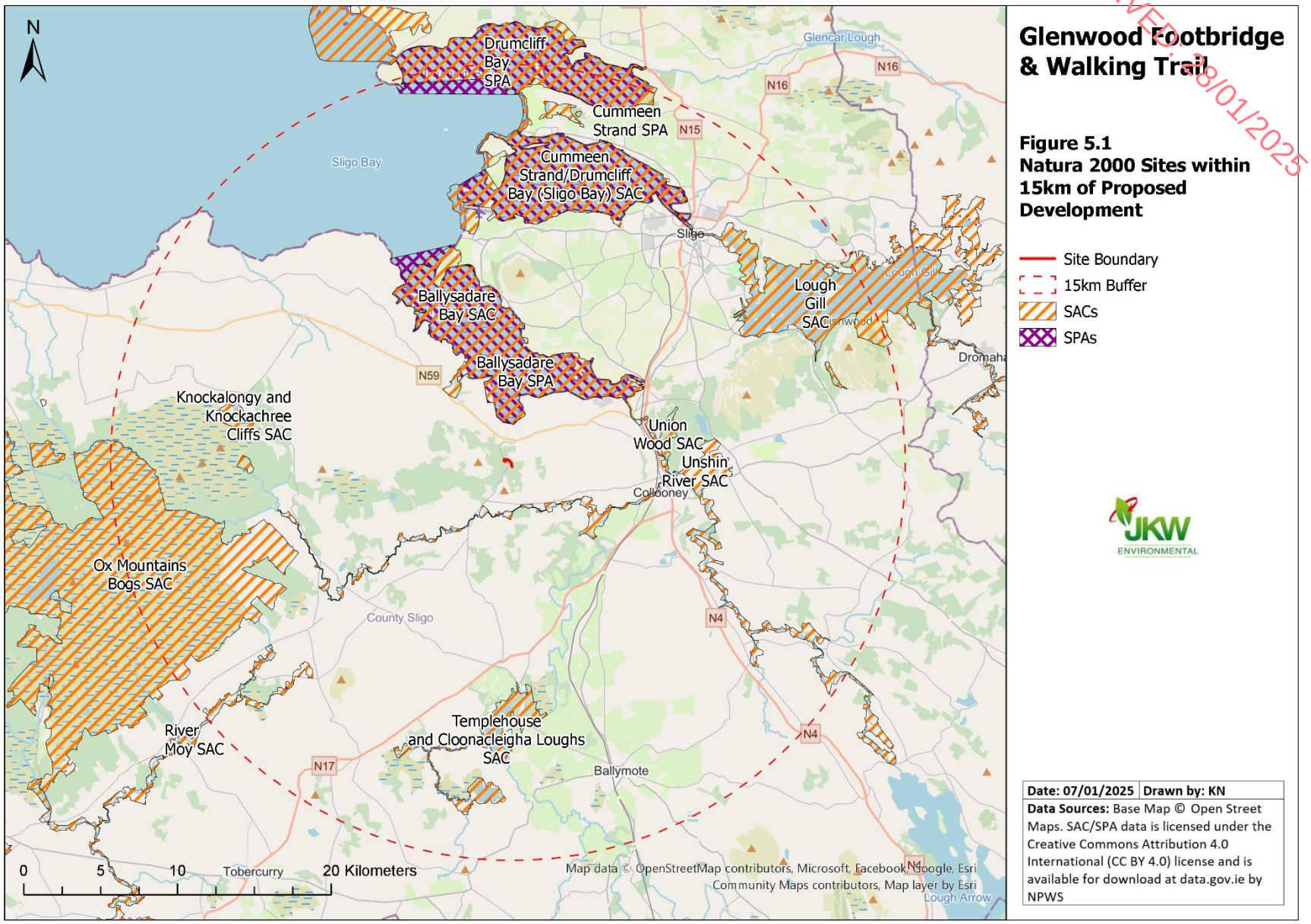
| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | sites/conservation_objectives/CO000638.pdf | |
| Knockalongy and Knockachree Cliffs SAC [001669] | c. 9.5km west | **Species:**<br>[1421] Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*) | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within Knockalongy and Knockachree Cliffs SAC which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO001669.pdf | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>There is no connectivity between the Site and this SAC and the species for which the SAC is designated is non-mobile in nature.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |
| Unshin River SAC [001898] | c. 1.5km south | **Habitats:**<br>[3260] Floating River Vegetation<br>[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*<br>[6410] Molinia Meadows<br>[91E0] Alluvial Forests*<br>**Species:**<br>[1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)<br>[1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*) | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within Unshin River SAC which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at: | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>The majority of the proposed works are located within a separate WFD sub-catchment (Dunmoran_SC_010) to the SAC (Owenmore[Sligo]_SC_040). A small section, c.79m, of the new trail is located within the Owenmore[Sligo]_SC_040. Drainage in this area flows towards the existing forestry drains which eventually discharge into a tributary of the Owenbeg (Coolaney)_030 stream. The Owenbeg stream flows south for approximately 1.7km before discharging into the Unshin River SAC. Therefore, taking a |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO001898.pdf | precautionary approach, a potential pathway for likely significant effects on the SAC due to deterioration of water quality via hydrological pathways, was identified.<br><br>The Site does not provide suitable habitat for any of the QI species for which the SAC is designated. Given the absence of suitable habitat and the distance between the Site and the SAC, no potential for significant indirect effects via disturbance or displacement was identified.<br><br>**This site is within the likely zone of influence and further assessment is required.** |
| Ox Mountains Bogs SAC [002006] | c. 8.6km south west | **Habitats:**<br>[3110] Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals<br>[3160] Dystrophic Lakes<br>[4010] Wet Heath<br>[4030] Dry Heath<br>[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*<br>[7140] Transition Mires<br>[7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation<br>**Species:**<br>[1013] Geyer's Whorl Snail (*Vertigo geyeri*)<br>[1528] Marsh Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*) | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within Ox Mountains SAC which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002006.pdf | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>No hydrological connectivity between the Site and the SAC was identified.<br><br>The Site does not provide suitable habitat for any of the QI species for which the SAC is designated. Given the absence of suitable habitat and the distance between the Site and the SAC, no potential for significant indirect effects via disturbance or displacement was identified.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| River Moy SAC [002298] | c. 10.8km south west | **Habitats:**<br>[6510] Lowland Hay Meadows<br>[7110] Raised Bog (Active)*<br>[7120] Degraded Raised Bog<br>[7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation<br>[7230] Alkaline Fens<br>[91A0] Old Oak Woodlands<br>[91E0] Alluvial Forests*<br>**Species:**<br>[1092] White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*)<br>[1095] Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*)<br>[1096] Brook Lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*)<br>[1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)<br>[1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*) | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within River Moy SAC which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002298.pdf | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SAC and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>No hydrological connectivity between the Site and the SAC was identified.<br><br>The Site does not provide suitable habitat for any of the QI species for which the SAC is designated. Given the absence of suitable habitat and the distance between the Site and the SAC, no potential for significant indirect effects via disturbance or displacement was identified.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |
| **Special Protection Areas (SPA)** | | | | |
| Cummeen Strand SPA [004035] | c. 9km north | Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*) [A046]<br>Oystercatcher | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within the | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SPA and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>The Site is located outside the boundary of this SPA and there is no |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | (*Haematopus ostralegus*) [A130]<br>Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]<br>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999] | Cummeen Strand SPA which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004035.pdf | potential for direct effect.<br><br>No hydrological connectivity between the Site and the SPA was identified. No potential for indirect effects on the SPA due to deterioration of water quality was identified.<br><br>The Site does not provide significant suitable habitat for any of the SCI species. Given the absence of significant habitat and the distance of 9km between the Site and the SPA, there is no potential for significant effects on this SPA due to disturbance of SCI species.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |
| Ballysadare Bay SPA [004129] | c. 1.4 km north | Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*) [A046]<br>Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]<br>Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149]<br>Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]<br>Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]<br>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999] | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within the Ballysadare Bay SPA which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004129.pdf | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SPA and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>The unnamed stream, located adjacent to the proposed footbridge location, flows into the Barnabrack stream which provides a hydrological pathway between the Site and the SPA. In addition, the proposed new walking trail is located c.21m form the Barnabrack stream at its closest point. Therefore, taking a precautionary approach, a potential pathway for likely significant effects on the SPA due to deterioration of water quality via hydrological pathways, was identified.<br><br>The Site does not provide significant suitable habitat for any of the SCI species. Given the absence of significant habitat, the small scale of the proposed works and the distance between the Site and the SPA, there is no potential for significant effects on this SPA due to disturbance of SCI species. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | **This site is within the likely zone of influence and further assessment is required.** |
| Drumcliff Bay SPA [004013] | c. 13.9km north | Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) [A144]<br>Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica)* [A157]<br>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999] | To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of habitats and species designated within the Drumcliff Bay SPA which is defined by a list of specific attributes and targets.<br><br>Full details of the conservation objectives can be found at:<br><br>https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004013.pdf | The Site is located outside the boundary of this SPA and there is no potential for direct effect.<br><br>No hydrological connectivity between the Site and the SPA was identified. No potential for indirect effects on the SPA due to deterioration of water quality was identified.<br><br>The Site does not provide significant suitable habitat for any of the SCI species. Given the absence of significant habitat and the distance of 13.9km between the Site and the SPA, there is no potential for significant effects on this SPA due to disturbance of SCI species.<br><br>No source-pathway-receptor chain for effects has been identified.<br><br>**This site is not within the likely zone of influence and no further assessment is required.** |




**Glenwood Footbridge & Walking Trail**

**Figure 5.1**
**Natura 2000 Sites within 15km of Proposed Development**

- Site Boundary
- 15km Buffer
- SACs
- SPAs

| Date: 07/01/2025 | Drawn by: KN |
|---|---|

**Data Sources:** Base Map © Open Street Maps. SAC/SPA data is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license and is available for download at data.gov.ie by NPWS

As shown in Table 5.1, a functional pathway exists between Ballysadare Bay SAC [000622], Ballysadare Bay SPA [004129] and Unshin River SAC [001898] and the Site. All other Natura 2000 sites can be excluded due to the absence of functional impact pathways between the project site and the European Sites and will ensure that the project will not have the potential to result in likely significant effects to the future conservation status of qualifying features of interest and special conservation interests for which these European Sites are designated and will not undermine the achievement of their site-specific conservation objectives.

## 5.2 Description of Natura 2000 Sites

**Ballysadare Bay SAC**

Ballysadare Bay, located in County Sligo, Ireland, is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to its diverse and ecologically significant habitats and species. The bay extends approximately 10 km westward from Ballysadare town and forms the southernmost inlet of Sligo Bay. It is characterized by a mix of geological features, including sedimentary rocks, low cliffs, and bedrock shores, with the estuarine channel of the Ballysadare River winding through it. The site supports a range of habitats listed under Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, such as estuaries, tidal mudflats, embryonic shifting dunes, marram dunes, fixed dunes (a priority habitat), and humid dune slacks.

The bay contains extensive intertidal sand and mudflats that support rich plant life, including eelgrass and tasselweed, and provide food for wildfowl and waders. Salt marshes, found at various locations, host a variety of plant species such as sea rush, parsley water-dropwort, and the uncommon flowering rush. A dynamic sand dune system at Strandhill, largely undisturbed, displays well-developed shifting dunes, fixed dunes, and humid dune slacks, home to species like marram grass, kidney vetch, bee orchid, and marsh helleborine.

Ballysadare Bay is notable for its populations of two Annex II species: the narrow-mouthed whorl snail (*Vertigo angustior*) and the common seal (*Phoca vitulina*), with the latter having a recorded population of 257 individuals during a 2003 survey. The bay also supports nationally and internationally significant numbers of waterfowl, including Brent geese, red-breasted mergansers, and several wader species. Golden plovers and bar-tailed godwits, listed under Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, are among the notable bird species.

Human activities, such as marsh shooting and limited aquaculture, have minimal impact compared to neighboring bays. However, the site faces threats from overgrazing, agricultural intensification, and potential developments that could damage its sensitive dune systems. The conservation value of Ballysadare Bay lies in its intact and dynamic dune systems, high-quality coastal habitats, and the presence of rare species, making it a critical site for biodiversity on Ireland's west coast.

**Ballysadare Bay SPA**

Ballysadare Bay, located in County Sligo, Ireland, is a designated Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive due to its importance for wetland and waterbird conservation. Extending about 10 km westwards from Ballysadare town, it forms part of the larger Sligo Bay complex. The bay features extensive intertidal sand and mudflats that support rich populations of macro-invertebrates, such as polychaete worms and bivalves, which serve as crucial food sources for wintering waterfowl. Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and beaked tasselweed (*Ruppia maritima*), along with well-developed salt marshes, provide additional feeding and roosting habitats for birds.

The SPA is of special conservation interest for species such as the Light-bellied Brent Goose, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Redshank. The bay supports an internationally significant population of Light-bellied Brent Goose (188 individuals) and nationally important populations of Grey Plover (70), Dunlin (1,420), Bar-tailed Godwit (251), and Redshank (435). Other notable species include Whooper Swan, Golden Plover, and Lapwing, with some species listed under Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

This site is of high ornithological value as part of the Sligo Bay complex, supporting diverse bird populations in autumn and winter while providing critical feeding, roosting, and breeding habitats. Its conservation significance is amplified by the international and national importance of the bird populations it sustains.

**Unshin River SAC**

The Unshin River SAC, located in County Sligo, Ireland, encompasses the Unshin River from Lough Arrow to Ballysadare Bay, along with its tributaries and adjacent semi-natural habitats. This largely undisturbed river system features unique physico-chemical qualities that support diverse plant and animal populations, including habitats and species listed under Annex I and II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Key habitats include floating river vegetation, orchid-rich calcareous grasslands, molinia meadows, and priority alluvial forests. The river's aquatic vegetation is exceptionally diverse, with species indicative of both base-rich and acidic conditions, as well as rare species like the river water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fluviatilis*).

The SAC supports critical populations of Atlantic salmon, making it the most important salmon-producing river in County Sligo, alongside trout populations. Otters, an Annex II species, are also recorded here. The site includes wet woodlands dominated by alder, ash, and willow, as well as invasive non-native plants like Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed. Grasslands and wetlands further enhance its biodiversity, hosting species such as swamp meadow-grass.

Bird species of conservation importance, including Whooper Swan and Kingfisher, frequent the site, with the former feeding in wet grasslands along the river. Despite some enrichment downstream, the Unshin River is among Ireland's most pristine rivers, noted for its high-quality aquatic habitats and ecological significance in both Irish and European contexts.

## 5.3 Identification of Potential Impacts on Natura 2000 Sites

The potential impacts of the project on the habitats and species listed as qualifying interests for the Ballysadare Bay SAC [000622], Ballysadare Bay SPA [004129] and Unshin River SAC [001898] are discussed in this section.

DoEHLG (2010) guidance for planning authorities states *"If the effects are deemed to be significant, potentially significant, or uncertain, or if the screening process becomes overly complicated, then the process must proceed to Stage 2 (AA). Screening should be undertaken without the inclusion of mitigation, unless potential impacts clearly can be avoided through the modification or redesign of the plan or project, in which case the screening process is repeated on the altered plan. The greatest level of evidence and justification will be needed in circumstances when the process ends at screening stage on grounds of no impact."* This approach is adopted in this report to considering the likely significant effects of the proposed development.

A significant effect is defined in paragraph 49 of the Waddenzee Case C-127/0214[13] as follows "…..pursuant to the first sentence of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, where a plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a site is likely to undermine the site's conservation objectives, it must be considered likely to have a significant effect on that site. The assessment of that risk must be made in the light inter alia of the characteristics and specific environmental conditions of the site concerned by such a plan or project."

The likelihood of impacts occurring as a result of this application is established in light of the type and scale of the development, the location of the development with respect to Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence and the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of those Natura 2000 sites.

### 5.3.1 Potential Impacts and Effects

The Site is located entirely outside the boundaries of any designated site, therefore, there is no potential for direct effects.

The primary considerations for this project are identified to be the following:

- risk of the project giving rise to deterioration of water quality via surface water pathways.

The following activities associated with the project construction phase that may impact European sites are as follows:

- Clearance of the proposed walking trail footprint, new carpark access and footbridge installation leading to exposure of soil and parent material and consequent run-off to adjoining and interconnected watercourses providing connectivity to designated European sites;
- General construction related materials such as aggregates, hydrocarbons and bituminous materials being released from the proposed walking trail footprint entering the surrounding environment and the European sites within the project ZoI.

The proposed development has identified potential hydrological pathways that connect the Site to the Ballysadare Bay SAC and SPA via the unnamed stream, which flows into the Barnabrack stream. While no Annex I habitats were identified within or adjacent to the site, and the site does not provide suitable habitat for the qualifying species of the SAC or SPA, precautionary measures must be considered due to the site's proximity and potential impacts on water quality. The Ballysadare Bay SAC includes coastal habitats sensitive to water quality changes, which could be affected by sedimentation or pollution resulting from construction activities.

The installation of the footbridge will require localized excavation and drilling, introducing the potential for sediment mobilization and pollutants, such as drilling fluids, entering the hydrological pathway that leads to the Ballysadare Bay SAC and SPA. This activity may expose soil and parent material, increasing the risk of runoff into the unnamed stream and downstream watercourses. Furthermore, construction-related activities, such as equipment operation, could lead to accidental spills of hydrocarbons, cementitious materials, or other construction-related pollutants, further elevating the risk of water quality deterioration.

Excavation and soil disturbances associated with the proposed walking trail and carpark access may increase sediment loads and nutrient transport into connected watercourses. Although the majority

[13] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A62002CJ0127

of the proposed works are located within a separate WFD sub-catchment (Dunmoran_SC_010), a small section of the new trail (approximately 79m) lies within the Owenmore (Sligo)_SC_040 sub-catchment. This sub-catchment discharges into the Unshin River SAC via forestry drainage networks and the Owenbeg tributary. While the in-stream distance between this section of the walking trail and the River Unshin is greater than 2km, a precautionary approach is warranted. Construction activities associated with the trail, such as soil exposure and potential pollutant mobilization, may lead to impacts on water quality within the Unshin River SAC through sedimentation or the transport of contaminants via the hydrological network.

Given the potential for sedimentation and pollutant discharge to impact the water quality of downstream habitats, a precautionary approach is warranted to prevent significant indirect effects on the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, and Unshin River SAC. No significant disturbance-related effects are anticipated, as the site does not provide suitable habitat for the qualifying interest species of these European sites, and the activities are unlikely to cause displacement.

The operational phase of the proposed development, which will consist solely of the presence of walkers using the new walking trail and footbridge, is not anticipated to have any significant impact on the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, or Unshin River SAC. The walking trail is located entirely outside the boundaries of these designated sites, and no direct interaction with their qualifying habitats or species is expected. Furthermore, the trail's design will ensure that walkers remain confined to designated paths, thereby minimizing the potential for any disturbance or degradation of nearby habitats.

## 5.4 Screening Conclusion

It cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt, in view of best scientific knowledge, on the basis of objective information and in light of the conservation objectives of the relevant European sites, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, would be likely to have a significant effect on

- Ballysadare Bay SAC
- Ballysadare Bay SPA
- Unshin River SAC

As a result, an Appropriate Assessment is required, and a Natura Impact Statement shall be prepared in respect of the proposed development.

# 6. Natura Impact Statement

The competent authority will be required to carry out an appropriate assessment to determine whether the proposed development would adversely affect the integrity of Ballysadare Bay SAC [000622], Ballysadare Bay SPA [004129] and Unshin River SAC [001898] The 'integrity of the site' can be defined as 'the coherence of the site's ecological structure and function, across its whole area, or the habitats, complex of habitats and / or populations of species for which the site is or will be classified"

The headings within the appropriate assessment report template provided in the European Commission guidance document 'Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites' have been used to provide a framework to examine the potential impacts of the proposed project on Ballysadare Bay SAC [000622], Ballysadare Bay SPA [004129] and Unshin River SAC [001898]

## 6.1 Assessment of the effects of the project on the integrity of Natura 2000 Sites

This section of the report sets out the potential effects of the project (either alone or in combination with other projects or plans) on the integrity of Ballysadare Bay SAC [000622], Ballysadare Bay SPA [004129] and Unshin River SAC [001898] with respect to the conservation objectives of this site and to its structure and function. The focus is on demonstrating, with supporting evidence, that there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of Ballysadare Bay SAC [000622], Ballysadare Bay SPA [004129] and Unshin River SAC [001898] should the proposed development proceed as planned and with appropriate mitigation.

### 6.1.1 Elements of the project or plan (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that are likely to give rise to significant effects on the environment.

The proposed development includes several elements that are likely to give rise to significant effects on the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, and Unshin River SAC in the absence of mitigation. Key activities include excavation and soil disturbance associated with the construction of the walking trail, carpark access, and footbridge installation. These activities have the potential to mobilise sediment and pollutants, such as hydrocarbons and construction materials, which could enter hydrological pathways and affect water quality in the designated sites.

The hydrological connectivity between the site and the European sites through adjacent streams creates a potential pathway for pollutants and sediments to reach sensitive habitats and species. This risk is particularly relevant to the qualifying interests of the SACs, which include water-dependent habitats and species.

### 6.1.2 Conservation Objectives of the Sites

The conservation objectives for the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA and Unshin River SAC, the list of specific attributes and the targets defining the conservation objectives for each qualifying interest (likely to be affected), are listed within the supporting information available on the NPWS website.

These conservation objectives were considered when preparing this report.

The conservation objectives for the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA and Unshin River SAC, can be broadly summarised as:

- To maintain or restore the favourable condition of the habitats and species for which the SAC has been designated.
- To maintain or restore the favourable condition of the habitats and species for which the SPA has been listed.

### 6.1.3 How The Project or Plan Will Affect Key Species And Key Habitats

The key qualifying interests, habitats and species, likely to be affected as a result of the proposed development are as follows:

***Ballysadare Bay SAC:***

- Estuaries [1130]
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]
- *Phoca vitulina* (Harbour Seal) [1365]

The remaining qualifying interests of the Ballysadare Bay SAC, including Embryonic shifting dunes [2110], Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes) [2120], Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130], and Humid dune slacks [2190], are terrestrial habitats located outside the potential impact zone of the proposed development. These habitats are not hydrologically connected to the site and are unaffected by changes in water quality. Additionally, there is no potential for effects on *Vertigo angustior* (Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail) [1014] due to the known locations of the snail populations being within a separate groundwater body, Drumcliff-Strandhill, which is hydrologically disconnected from the site which is within the Collooney groundwater body. As such, these qualifying interests are not at risk of direct or indirect effects from the proposed development.

***Ballysadare Bay SPA:***

The key species of Ballysadare Bay SPA likely to be affected by the project are:

- Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*) [A046]
- Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]
- Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149]
- Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]
- Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]
- Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]

***Unshin River SAC:***

- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation [3260]
- *Salmo salar* (Salmon) [1106]
- *Lutra lutra* (Otter) [1355]

The remaining qualifying interests of the Unshin River SAC, including Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) [6210], *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*) [6410], and Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*) [91E0], are terrestrial habitats with no reliance on water quality. Furthermore, the alluvial woodland is located upstream

from the site, placing it entirely outside the zone of potential impact. As such, these qualifying interests are not at risk of direct or indirect effects from the proposed development.

**Construction Activities**

Construction activities associated with the proposed development have the potential to cause deterioration in water quality, which could result in downstream effects on connected European sites. Key activities such as excavation, soil disturbance, and the installation of infrastructure like the walking trail, carpark access, and footbridge can lead to the mobilization of sediments and the potential release of pollutants, including hydrocarbons, concrete wash, and drilling fluids. These substances can enter watercourses via surface runoff or accidental spills, particularly during periods of heavy rainfall or inadequate site management

Hydrological pathways linking the site to downstream watercourses create a direct risk of sediment and pollutants being transported to sensitive habitats in the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, and Unshin River SAC. This could result in a range of water quality impacts, including deterioration of water quality, increases in siltation or suspended solids, changes in water chemistry, reduction in habitat quality, and alterations in food and prey availability. Increased sedimentation can smother aquatic and intertidal habitats, reducing the availability of resources for species dependent on these environments. Changes in water chemistry from pollutants can further degrade habitat suitability, impacting ecosystem function and species health.

These impacts may arise from uncontained surface runoff, poorly managed stockpiles, or accidental discharges during construction. Without adequate controls, such changes in water quality could adversely affect the integrity of the hydrologically connected European sites, emphasizing the need for careful consideration and management of these risks during the construction phase.

### 6.1.4 How Is The Integrity Of The Natura 2000 Site Is Likely To Be Affected By The Project Or Plan

**Deterioration in Water Quality**

Deterioration in water quality resulting from construction activities has the potential to affect the qualifying interests of the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, and Unshin River SAC. Construction activities such as excavation, soil disturbances, and the installation of the footbridge and walking trail could result in the release of sediments and pollutants into hydrological pathways. This could lead to increased siltation, suspended solids, and changes in water chemistry, reducing habitat quality and food availability for species dependent on aquatic and estuarine environments. These changes could undermine the ability of these sites to meet their conservation objectives.

**Ballysadare Bay SAC**

*Estuaries [1130]*

Estuaries are dynamic habitats that are particularly sensitive to changes in water quality. Construction-related sedimentation can smother estuarine substrates, altering the balance of these ecosystems and affecting the abundance and diversity of benthic invertebrates, which are a key food source for higher trophic levels. Increased suspended solids in the water column can lead to turbidity, reducing light penetration and impacting primary production by photosynthetic organisms within the estuarine habitat. Furthermore, pollutants such as hydrocarbons or construction materials can degrade water quality, disrupt nutrient cycling, and reduce the functionality of these habitats. Persistent or significant

changes to water quality during construction could impair the ecological processes of the estuary, undermining its ability to support the SAC's conservation objectives.

*Mudflats and Sandflats Not Covered by Seawater at Low Tide [1140]*

Mudflats and sandflats are highly sensitive to sedimentation and pollution. These intertidal habitats depend on stable sediment conditions to support benthic communities, which are a critical food source for birds and other species. Increased sedimentation during construction could alter sediment composition, smothering benthic invertebrates and reducing habitat suitability. Pollution from hydrocarbons, concrete wash, or other construction-related substances could degrade sediment quality, disrupt invertebrate populations, and impair the mudflats' ability to function as productive feeding grounds. Such impacts would compromise the conservation objectives of the SAC for this habitat type, reducing its capacity to support the ecological integrity of the site.

*Phoca vitulina (Harbour Seal) [1365]*

Harbour seals rely on estuarine habitats within the SAC for foraging and resting. A reduction in water quality, particularly through sedimentation or pollution, could impact the availability and quality of fish prey species, such as herring, sand eels, and other small fish. Pollutants like hydrocarbons could bioaccumulate in the food chain, posing a direct threat to seal health and reproductive success. Disturbance to estuarine habitats could result in seals being displaced from their preferred foraging areas, reducing the suitability of the SAC to support viable populations of this species.

**Ballysadare Bay SPA**

*Light-bellied Brent Goose (Branta bernicla hrota) [A046], Grey Plover (Pluvialis squatarola) [A141], Dunlin (Calidris alpina) [A149], Bar-tailed Godwit (Limosa lapponica) [A157], Redshank (Tringa totanus) [A162], and Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]*

The waterbird species listed as qualifying interests for the SPA depend on the estuarine and intertidal habitats for foraging, roosting, and other life-cycle functions. Siltation and pollution from construction activities could reduce the availability of invertebrates and plant material within these habitats, directly impacting the food supply for these bird species. Increased turbidity can further disrupt the ecological balance of the estuary, making it less suitable as a feeding ground.

In addition to reducing prey availability, pollutants entering the SPA could lead to bioaccumulation of harmful substances within the food web. This could affect bird health, reduce reproductive success, and compromise the ability of bird populations to withstand adverse weather or temporary food shortages. The ecological integrity of the SPA depends on maintaining these habitats in a condition that supports robust populations of its qualifying bird species.

**Unshin River SAC**

*Watercourses of plain to montane levels with Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260]*

This habitat type is particularly sensitive to reductions in water quality caused by sedimentation and pollutants. *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation communities depend on clean, well-oxygenated water with stable substrate conditions to thrive. Construction activities, such as excavation and soil disturbance, may introduce sediments into the watercourses, increasing turbidity

and smothering aquatic vegetation. This can disrupt photosynthesis and reduce the structural integrity of the habitat, leading to declines in associated biodiversity.

Changes in water chemistry, such as nutrient enrichment or the introduction of pollutants like hydrocarbons or cementitious materials, can further degrade habitat conditions. Nutrient enrichment could lead to eutrophication, promoting algal blooms that outcompete and overshadow these aquatic vegetation communities, while toxic pollutants may directly harm plant life and aquatic invertebrates that rely on this habitat.

These impacts can cascade through the ecosystem, as this habitat supports a range of aquatic invertebrates and serves as a vital resource for fish and other species. A decline in habitat quality could reduce the food availability for species like Atlantic salmon and otters, which depend on the ecological integrity of these watercourses. Therefore, reductions in water quality could significantly compromise the SAC's ability to achieve its conservation objectives for this habitat type..

*Salmo salar (Atlantic Salmon) [1106]*

Atlantic salmon require clean, well-oxygenated water for spawning and juvenile development. Increased sedimentation can smother spawning gravels, reducing oxygen availability to salmon eggs and fry. Suspended solids can also irritate gills, impairing the health and migration of smolts and adults. Pollution from construction materials or accidental spills could degrade water quality, disrupt food availability, and create unsuitable conditions for migration and spawning. Such impacts would compromise the SAC's ability to support healthy and sustainable salmon populations.

*Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]*

Otters are a key qualifying species of the Unshin River SAC, relying on healthy aquatic ecosystems to support their survival and reproduction. They are apex predators in freshwater systems and depend on abundant fish populations, such as salmon and other species, which are directly influenced by water quality. Construction activities associated with the proposed development have the potential to impact otters indirectly through reductions in prey availability and directly through habitat degradation caused by sedimentation and pollution.

Sedimentation during construction could smother fish spawning grounds, reduce oxygen levels, and disrupt aquatic food chains, leading to a decline in fish populations that otters rely on for sustenance. Suspended solids can also increase turbidity, making prey more difficult to locate and capture, particularly in shallow watercourses. Any reduction in prey availability can force otters to expend additional energy searching for food, potentially reducing their breeding success and fitness.

Pollutants such as hydrocarbons, cement wash, and other construction-related materials pose a significant risk to otters. These pollutants can enter watercourses via surface runoff or accidental spills, degrading water quality and bioaccumulating in the food chain. Contaminated prey species can negatively affect otter health, leading to reduced reproductive success, increased susceptibility to disease, and even mortality in extreme cases. Such impacts would compromise the SAC's ability to meet its conservation objectives for this species.

### 6.1.5 In-Combination Effects

A search and review in relation to other projects and/or plans that may have the potential to result in cumulative and/or in-combination impacts on European Sites was conducted. This assessment focuses on the potential for cumulative in-combination effects on the European Sites where potential for

adverse effects was identified. This included a review of online Planning Registers, development plans and other available information and served to identify past and future projects and/or plans, their activities and their predicted environmental effects.

Assessment material for this in-combination impact assessment was compiled on the relevant developments within the vicinity of the proposed project and was verified in January 2025. The material was gathered through a search of relevant online Planning Registers, reviews of relevant documents, planning application details and planning drawings, and served to identify past and future projects and/or plans, their activities and their environmental impacts. All relevant projects and/or plans were considered in relation to the potential for in-combination effects. Relevant data was reviewed (e.g. individual EISs/EIARs, NISs, layouts, drawings etc.) for all relevant projects and/or plans where available.

The following development plans have been reviewed and taken into consideration as part of this assessment:

- Sligo County Development Plan 2024 – 2030
- 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2027

The review focused on policies and objectives that relate to European Designated Sites. No relevant applications which could give rise to cumulative effects were identified.

Following the detailed assessment provided in the preceding sections (Sections 6.1.3 & 6.1.4) and the implementation of mitigation measures outlines in Section 6.1.6, it is concluded that, the Proposed Project will not result in any residual adverse effects on any of the European Sites, their integrity or their conservation objectives when considered on its own. There is therefore no potential for the Proposed Project to contribute to any cumulative adverse effects on any European Site when considered in-combination with other projects and/or plans.

Taking into consideration the reported residual impacts from other projects and/or plans in the area and the predicted impacts with the current proposal, no residual cumulative impacts have been identified with regard to any European Site

### 6.1.6 Mitigation Measures to Avoid, Reduce or Remedy Adverse Effects on the Integrity of the Natura 2000 Sites

Deterioration in water quality has the potential to adversely affect the qualifying interests of Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA and Unshin River SAC. The mitigation measures proposed focus on the protection of the water quality during construction.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

A suitably experienced Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will be appointed by the client for the duration of the project. The ECoW will oversee the implementation of all protection measures required to ensure that mitigation measures are implemented to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA and Unshin River SAC.

The main contractor will be required to designate a member of staff, or engage a specific person, with demonstrable experience of environmental management and monitoring on construction sites. The appointed individual will assume responsibility for overseeing the implementation of all environmental protective measures which are not encompassed by the ECoW role.

The appointed contractor will be responsible for ensuring all mitigation measures set out in this document, CEMP and any site-specific method statements are fully and correctly implemented. The appointed contractor will be responsible for employing good working practice during all phases of the project. The appointed contractor will be responsible for providing a briefing on environmental protection measures and ecological sensitivities of the Site to all site personnel in advance of commencement of works.

The names and contact details of the individuals with responsibility for implementation and supervision of mitigation measures during all phases of the development will be clearly identified and displayed on notice boards at the site compounds as well as set out in documents such as the CEMP and site- specific method statements as appropriate.

**Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)**

A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be required to ensure that potential impacts on water quality during the construction phase are effectively managed and mitigated. The CEMP will include detailed surface water management measures, such as the installation of silt fences, sediment traps, and buffer zones, to minimize sedimentation and runoff into nearby watercourses. It will also outline protocols for the safe storage of hazardous materials, including fuels and other chemicals, to prevent accidental spills. In addition, the CEMP will incorporate a comprehensive spill management plan and an emergency response plan to address any unforeseen incidents promptly, ensuring the protection of downstream habitats and species within the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, and Unshin River SAC. These measures will collectively minimize the risk of water quality deterioration and support the conservation objectives of the designated European sites.

**Good Working Practice**

Good working practices such as those set out in, but not limited to Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries During Construction Works In and Adjacent to Waters (IFI,2016), and Environmental Good Practice on Site Guide (CIRIA, 2015) will be followed at all times.

**Environmental Protection Measures**

**Pollution Prevention:**

- A designated site compound will be set up more than 50m from any watercourse. This compound will include facilities for welfare, material storage, and machinery overnight storage.
- All refuelling and storage of fuels, oils, and chemicals will take place within the site compound.
- Site run-off will not discharge directly to the adjacent water bodies.
- Re-vegetation or reinstatement of the site as soon as possible to stabilise any bare soil and reduce the potential for silting and consequential suspended solids.
- Hydrocarbons and other toxic substances must not enter any waterbody. Should such substances be required to be stored on-site, they will be kept in secure bunded areas away from the adjacent watercourses. The bunded area will accommodate 110% of the total capacity of the containers within it.

- All machinery will be maintained in good working order, free from leakage of fuel or hydraulic fluid.
- Spill kits will be provided at refuelling locations and stored with machinery for immediate use in the event of an accidental release.
- Silt fences, sediment traps, and buffer zones will be installed along all watercourses to prevent sediment-laden runoff from entering streams.
- Drainage controls, such as interceptor ditches or swales, will be established to direct surface water away from sensitive areas where required.
- Works adjacent to watercourses will be limited to dry weather periods to reduce the risk of sediment mobilization.
- Stockpiles of excavated material will be placed at least 10m from any watercourse and will be covered or stabilized to prevent erosion.
- Refuelling and maintenance will only occur in designated areas within the site compound.
- Vehicle and equipment washing will be conducted off-site or in a controlled area with appropriate containment.
- An Emergency Response Plan (ERP) will be in place to address potential environmental incidents such as spills.
- All personnel will be trained in spill response procedures.
- Regular site inspections will be conducted to ensure the effectiveness of sediment control measures.
- Sediment and pollution control structures will be maintained and cleared of blockages as needed.
- All works will comply with IFI Biosecurity Protocols and Guidance documents on protection of fisheries during construction works in and adjacent to waters.
- Precautions will be taken to avoid the introduction and / or spread of invasive species. All machinery and equipment will be washed down prior to arrival on site to avoid the spread of invasive species, ensuring all organic material is removed from personal equipment including clothing and footwear, and ensuring all water retaining compartments of machinery and equipment are drained before leaving site.

**Efficiency of Environmental Protection Measures**

The environmental measures set out above are proven to work and provide certainty that the integrity of the Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA the Unshin River SAC and will not be affected by the construction and operation of the project**.**

# 7. Concluding Statement

This Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has evaluated the three European sites within the zone of influence of the proposed walking trail, along with the potential sources and pathways of impact in the context of the proposed works. The assessment considered the potential impacts on the qualifying interests of each European site—Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, and Unshin River SAC—and whether these impacts could adversely affect their integrity. No other European sites have been identified as being at risk from the proposed walking trail.

The assessment outlines mitigation measures designed to avoid and minimize potential effects, ensuring the structure and function of these European sites remain intact. By implementing the proposed mitigation measures in full, it is concluded that the proposed walking trail will not result in residual adverse impacts on the integrity of Ballysadare Bay SAC, Ballysadare Bay SPA, or Unshin River SAC.

Based on the analysis and evaluation of the relevant information, including the predicted impacts associated with the proposed walking trail, it is determined that the project will not adversely affect the integrity of any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This completes the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment process.

# 8. References

Chanin P (2003). Ecology of the European Otter. Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers Ecology Series No. 10. English Nature, Peterborough.

CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

Ciria (2015) Environmental Good Practice on Site Guide (Fourth Edition).

DoEHLG (2010). Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Dublin.

European Commission (2021) Assessment of Plans and Projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 Sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

European Commission (2018) Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats Directive'92/43/EEC.

European Union Habitats Directive, (1992) Council Directives 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

European Union Birds Directive (2009) Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (codified version).

Fossit, J.A. (2000). A Guide to Habitats in Ireland. The Heritage Council.

Mason CF (1997). The significance of PCBs in otters at national and regional scales. IUCN Otter Spec. Bull., 14, 1, 3–12.

Scott Wilson and Levett-Therivel, (2006). Appropriate Assessment of Plans. Scott Wilson, Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants, Treweek Environmental Consultants and Land Use Consultants.

# Appendix 1 – Layout Drawings