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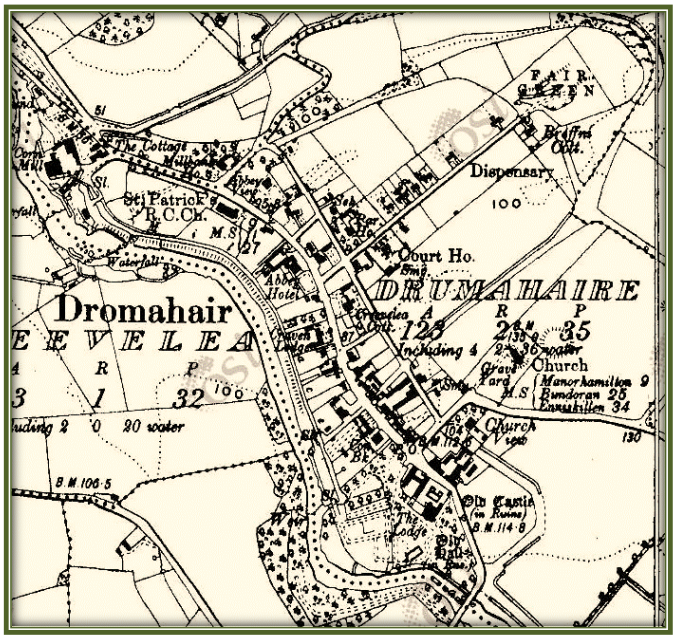
PROVISION OF INFORMATION FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING FOR A PROPOSED PART 8 DEVELOPMENT IN DROMAHAIR, CO LEITRIM

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



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

A comprehensive assessment of the potential effects of a proposed development in Dromahair, Co. Leitrim on designated Natura 2000 sites was carried out in May 2021 by Noreen McLoughlin, MSc, MCIEEM of Whitehill Environmental. This assessment allowed areas of potential ecological value and potential ecological constraints associated with this proposed development to be identified and it also enabled potential ecological effects associated with the proposed development on designated sites to be assessed.

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

This report contains information required by the competent authority (in this instance the Leitrim County Council) to undertake a screening for Appropriate Assessment. It is the responsibility of the competent authority to make a decision as to whether or not the proposed development is likely to have significant effects on European Sites, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects. In accordance with the Legislation and National Guidance, the competent authority should issue an AA Screening Determination, which should set out their decision regarding AA, including the main reasons and considerations on which the determination is based.

1.2 REGULATORY CONTEXT

The Birds Directive (Council Directive2009/147/EC) recognises that certain species of birds should be subject to special conservation measures concerning their habitats. The Directive requires that Member States take measures to classify the most suitable areas as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the conversation of bird species listed in Annex 1 of the Directive. SPAs are selected for bird species (listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive), that are regularly occurring populations of migratory bird species and the SPA areas are of international importance for these migratory birds.

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

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

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

Appropriate Assessment and the Habitats Directive

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

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

"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having

ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public."

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

Article 6(4) states:

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

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

The Appropriate Assessment Process

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

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

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

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

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

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

(b) consent for a proposed development is given.'

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

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

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

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

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

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

- European Commission (2000). Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC.
- European Commission (2002). Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.
- European Commission (2006). Nature and Biodiversity Cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice.
- European Commission (2007). Clarification of the Concepts of: Alternative Solution, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence, Opinion of the Commission.
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009). Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities.

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

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

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

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

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

The four-stage process is:

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

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment – The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts;

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

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

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

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

2.1 STATEMENT OF COMPETENCY

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

2.2 DESK STUDIES & CONSULTATION

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

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

2.3 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

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

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

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

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

2.4 FIELD STUDIES

A visit to the site of the proposed application at Dromahair was conducted on August 29th2020, when field notes, species lists and photographs were taken. Habitats within the application site were classified in accordance to Level 3 of *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossit, 2000). Particular attention was paid to invasive plant species within the application site.

3 SCREENING

3.1 DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

Leitrim County Council are seeking permission for a proposed development in Dromahair town, Co. Leitrim. Permission will be sought under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. The proposed development will consist of:

- *The Proposed Development will comprise of (a) Demolition of the existing function room & storage sheds (b) Construction of two 2-bed semidetached bungalows (c) Construction of 2 no. 2 bed two storey semi-detached houses with all associated site development works including construction of private open spaces, footpaths, car parking areas, boundary wall/fence, ducting for utilities, hard & soft landscaped areas, formation of new connections to existing foul/surface water drainage and existing utilities.*

An extract from the planning drawings submitted is shown in Figure 1.

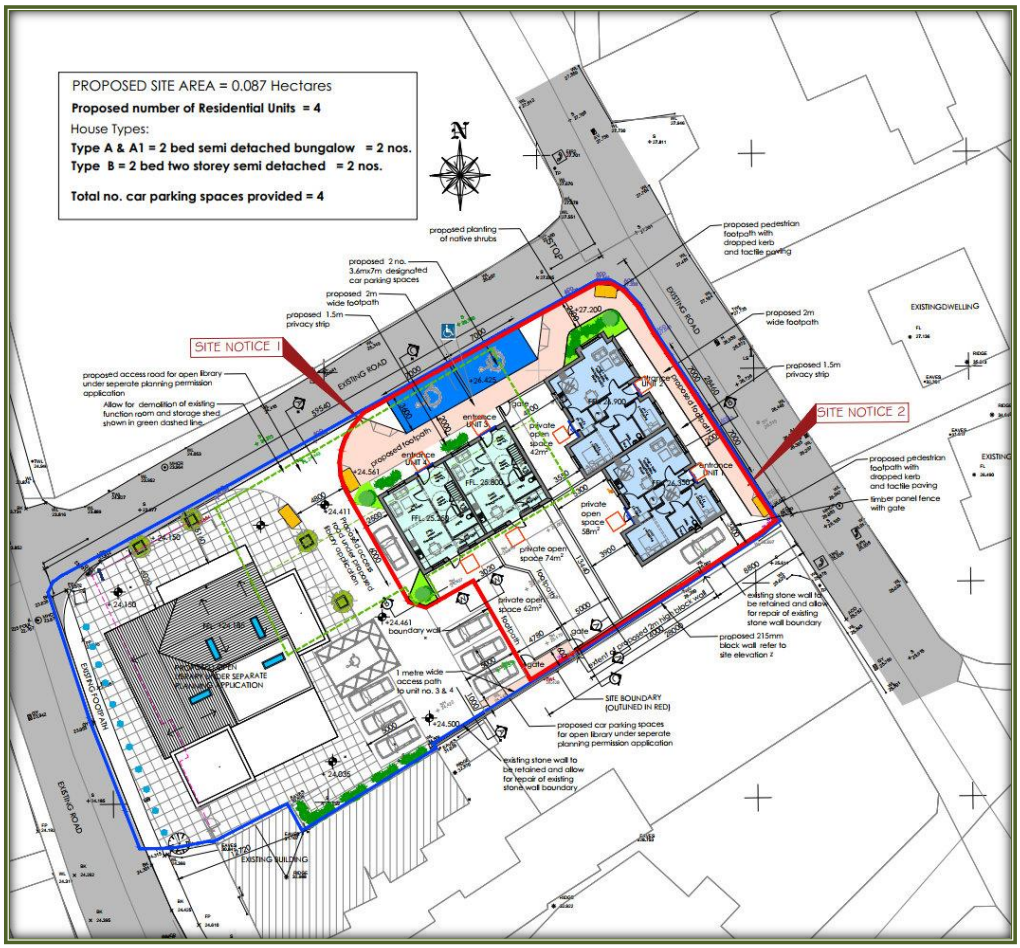


Figure 1 – Extract from Planning Drawings (as Prepared by Sweeney Architects)

Wastewater Treatment

Waste water from the development will be directed to the Dromahair Waste Water Treatment works, which is fully licensed by the EPA (Reg No. D0279-01). The Licence Application for this WWTP was accompanied by an AA screening report.

Surface Water Treatment

Clean surface water from the site will be attenuated on site and released via hydrobrake to the existing storm water sewer. This ultimately discharges to the River Bonet.

Flood Risk

A Flood Risk report for the site has been carried out by Traynor Environmental. This report concluded that the proposed site is not at risk of flooding. There will be no need for any additional infilling of the site and the proposed development will not obstruct or impede important flow paths.

3.2 Site Location and Surrounding Environment

The application site is 0.1 hectares in area and it is located in the centre of Dromahair town. The application site is bounded by an existing derelict hotel to the west and this is just off Main St. It is bounded by local roads to the east and north and by an existing domestic house and garden to the south. The site is located in GZT Zone M2 under the Leitrim County Development Plan 2015 – 2021, i.e., mixed use.

The land-use surrounding the site predominantly consists of the town of Dromahair and its associated commercial, residential and amenity areas. The habitats associated with these areas mostly include buildings and artificial surfaces, amenity grasslands and gardens, along with scattered trees and landscaping. The Bonet River and its associated riparian habitats (wet grasslands, marsh, treelines and woodland) is 93m south of the site. In the rural areas surrounding Dromahair, agriculture is the dominant land-use and improved agricultural grasslands and neutral-wet grasslands are the dominant habitats. Other habitats represented in the rural area surrounding Dromahair include mixed woodlands, scrub and watercourses.

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

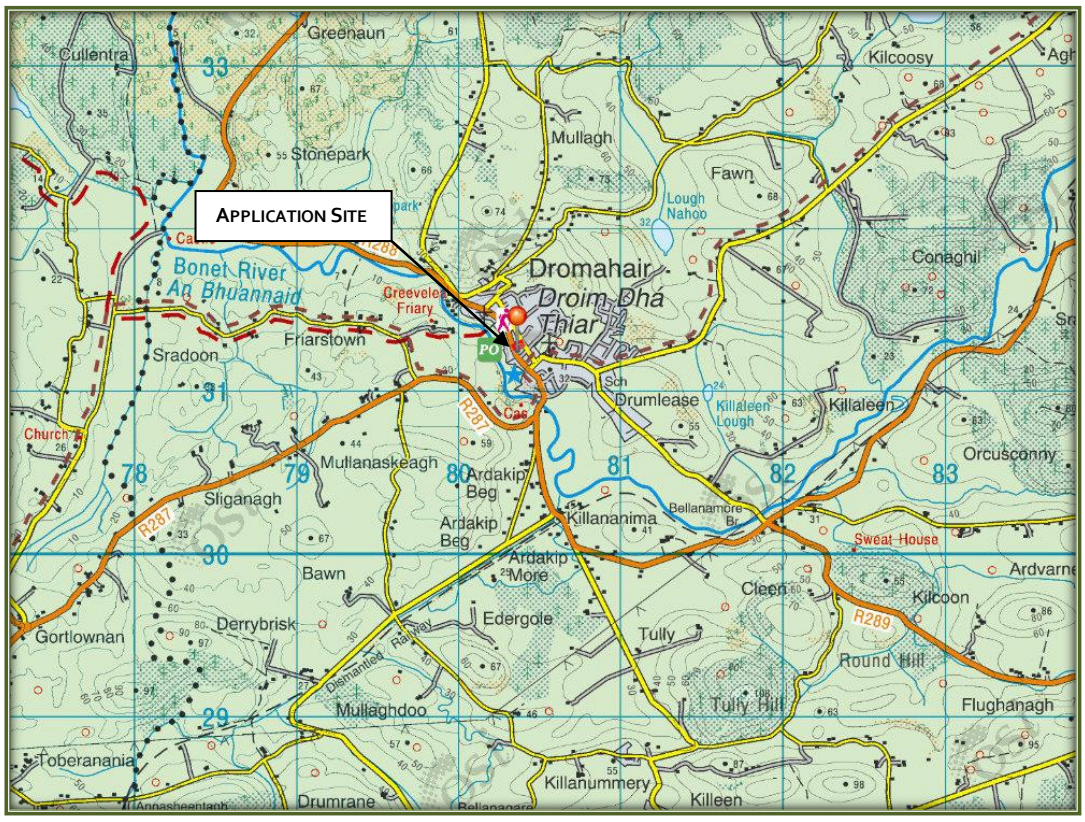


Figure 2 – Site Location Map (Pinned)

Figure 3 – Site Location Map (Site Outlined in Red)

HABITATS AND SPECIES

There are a limited range of habitats within the application site. The dominant habitat within the whole site is buildings and artificial surfaces, i.e., the existing derelict structure and the other hard surfaces. There is a small area of unmanaged grassland behind the building. This former garden has become overgrown and it is now akin to a Dry Meadows and Grassy Verge Habitat (Fossit Habitat Code GS2) with some small pockets of immature scrub within it. Meadow grasses *Poa* sp. are frequent in the site, as is cock's-foot grass *Dactylis glomerate.* Herbaceous species noted included ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris,* creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, rosebay willowherb *Epilobium angustifolium*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare,* Himalayan honeysuckle *Leycesteria formosa* and pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*. Nettles *Urtica dioica* are also common. There are small patches of developing bramble *Rubus fructicosus* and willow *Salix* scrub on the site, and these are growing occasionally with fushia and buddleia. No listed invasive species are growing on the site. Overall, it can be concluded that there are no habitats of biodiversity value within the site.

Photos depicting the habitats on the site are seen in the Plates below.

Plate 1 – Building at the Back of the Site

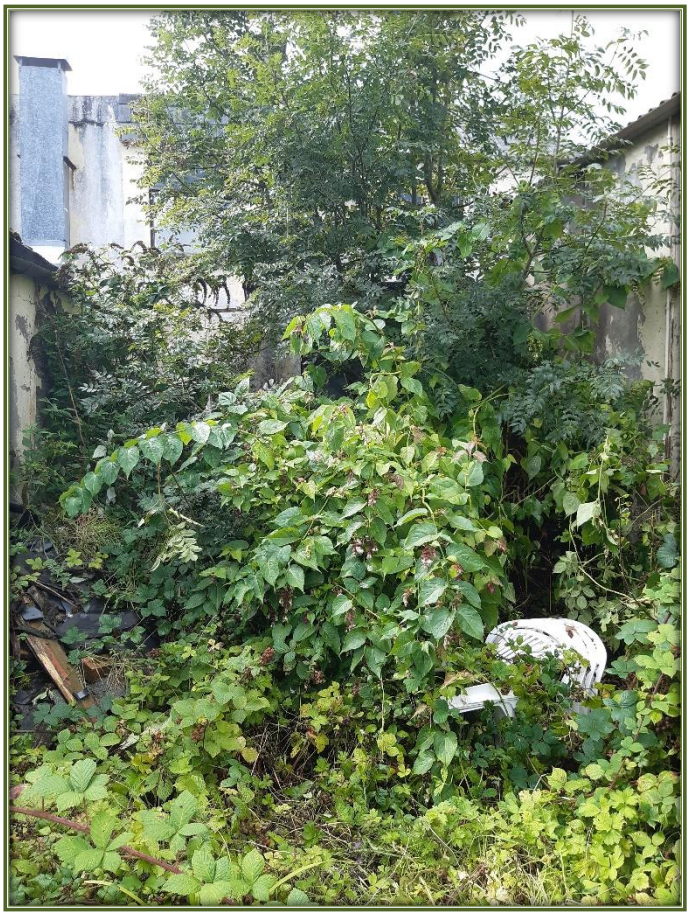


Plate 2- Scrub Habitat within the Site (Himalayan honeysuckle in the foreground)

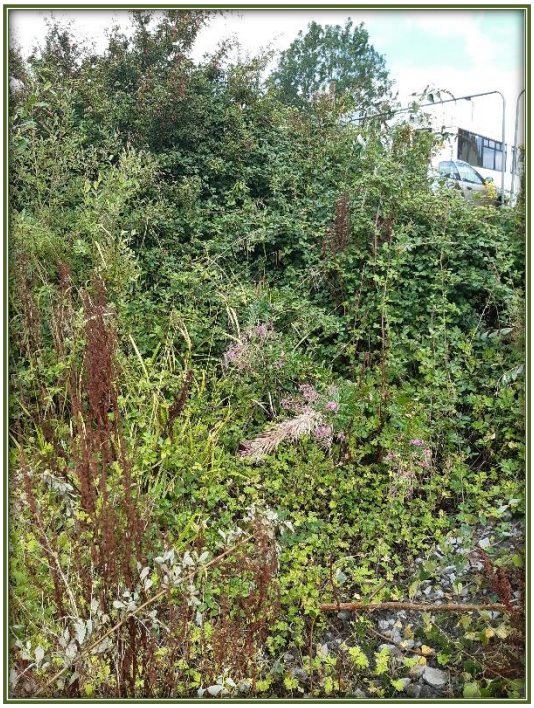


Plate 3- Scrub and Grassland Habitats within the Sites

An examination of the website of the National Biodiversity Data Centre, revealed that there are records for the presence of four protected mammal species from within the relevant 1km square (G8031) of this proposed development. These species include:

- Badger *Meles meles*
- Red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*
- Sika deer *Cervus nippon*
- Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

All these species are protected under the Irish Wildlife Acts. A custom polygon for the site revealed that these records do not pertain from within the application itself and no evidence of the use of the site by these mammals was observed on the day of the field survey. There are no habitats within the site suitable for use by any of these species.

WATER FEATURES AND QUALITY

The application site is located within the Sligo Bay and Drowse Hydrometric Area and Catchment, and the Bonet Sub-Catchment and Sub-Basin. There are no drains or streams within or adjacent to the application site. The closest watercourse to the application site is the Bonet River and this is 101m west of the application site. There is no hydrological connectivity between the Bonet River and the application site.

The Bonet River rises north of Manorhamilton at Glenade Lake. It then flows south, past Manorhamilton then west, past Dromahair and it enters the eastern end of Lough Gill at a point 3.1km north-west of Dromahair.

The EPA have classed the ecological status of the Bonet River at points upstream and downstream of Dromahair as moderate. Further downstream of Dromahair and until its confluence with Lough Gill, ecological status deteriorates to poor. Lough Gill itself has been classed as moderate ecological status. Under the requirements of the Water Framework Directive this is unsatisfactory and status must be restored to good within a specified time frame.

Figure 4 – Aerial Photograph of the Site (Outlined in Red) and its Surrounding Habitats.

3.3 NATURA 2000 SITES IDENTIFIED

In accordance with the guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, a list of Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the proposed development have been identified and described according to their site synopses, qualifying interests and conservation objectives. In addition, any other sites further than this, but potentially within its zone of interest were also considered. The zone of impact may be determined by an assessment of the connectivity between the application site and the designated areas by virtue of hydrological connectivity, atmospheric emissions, flight paths, ecological corridors etc.

There are twelve Natura 2000 designated sites within 15km of the application site. These designated areas and their closest points to the proposed development site are summarised in Table 1 and a map and aerial photograph showing their locations relative to the application site are shown in Figures 5 and 6. A full description of these sites can be read on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (npws.ie).

Site Name & Code	Distance	Special Conservation Interests	Potential Impacts?
Lough Gill SAC 001976	114m west	• Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation • Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and *Blechnum* in the British Isles • Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* • *Austropotamobius pallipes* (White-clawed Crayfish) • *Petromyzon marinus* (Sea Lamprey) • *Lampetra planeri* (Brook Lamprey) • *Lampetra fluviatilis* (River Lamprey) • *Salmo salar* (Salmon) • *Lutra lutra* (Otter)	*There is no hydrological connectivity between the application site and this SAC, however due to its proximity, potential impacts will be considered further.*
Boleybrack Mountain SAC 002032	9.3km east	• Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds • Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* • European dry heaths • Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) • Blanket bogs (* if active bog)	*No connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Unshin River SAC 001898	10.5km south-west	• Otter (*Lutra lutra*) • Salmon (*Salmo salar*) • Water courses of plain to montane levels with the	*No hydrological connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*

		Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation • Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*	
Union Wood SAC 000638	11.9km south-west	• Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and *Blechnum* in the British Isles	*No connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay (Sligo Bay) SAC 000627	12.1km north-west	• Estuaries • Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide • Embryonic shifting dunes • Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* • Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation • *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands • Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) • Vertigo angustior (Marsh Snail) • *Petromyzon marinus* (Sea Lamprey) • *Lampetra fluviatilis* (River Lamprey) • *Phoca vitulina* (Common Seal)	*No connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Cummeen Strand SPA 004035	12.4km north-west	• Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota)* • Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus)* • Redshank (*Tringa totanus)* • Wetland and Waterbirds	*No connectivity between the application site and this SPA, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Ballysadare Bay SAC 000622	13km west	• Estuaries • Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide • Embryonic shifting dunes • Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* • Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation • Humid dune slacks • *Vertigo angustior* (Marsh Snail) • *Phoca vitulina* (Common Seal)	*No connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Ballysadare Bay SPA 004129	13km north-west	• Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota)* • Grey Plover *(Pluvialis squatarola)* • Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) • Bar-tailed Godwit *(Limosa*	*No connectivity between the application site and this SPA, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*

		lapponica) • Redshank (*Tringa totanus)* • Wetland and Waterbirds	
Arroo Mountain SAC 001403	14.5km north	• Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* • European dry heaths • Alpine and Boreal heaths • Blanket bogs (* if active bog) • Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) • Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels (*Thlaspietea rotundifolii*) • Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	*No connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Ben Bulben, Gleniff And Glenade Complex SAC 000623	11.6km north	• European dry heaths • Alpine and Boreal heaths • Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation • Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels (Thlaspietea rotundifolii) • *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands • Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) • Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation	*No connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Glenade Lough SAC 001919	14.3km north	• Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition – type vegetation • *Austropotamobius pallipes* (White-clawed Crayfish) • *Najas flexilis* (Slender Naiad)	*No connectivity between the application site and this SAC, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*
Sligo/Leitrim Uplands SPA 004187	11.1km north	• Peregrine *(Falco peregrines)* • Chough *(Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax)*	*No hydrological connectivity between the application site and this SPA, therefore there is no potential for significant effects on this site.*

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

LOUGH GILL SAC

Lough Gill is a large lake, with steep limestone shores and underwater cliffs. It is fed by the River Bonet and drains into the sea via the Garvogue River, a short, wide and slow flowing river which passes through Sligo town. The lake lies along the junction between old metamorphic rocks to the south and limestone to the north. The water of the lake is thus influenced by both acidic and alkaline inputs, although nearly all the basin lies over limestone. The lake is 8 km by 2-3 km and has an area of 1,400 ha. It is a deep lake, with

maximum depth at 31 m. Islands are a feature of the lake. Much of the shoreline is wooded and there is also some swamp vegetation, wet grassland and scrub along the shoreline. The lake is an important salmonid and coarse fishery and is used for a range of recreational activities. The site also includes the Shanvans and Owenmore rivers.

Lough Gill is important example of a lake which appears to be naturally eutrophic. Quality is generally good although blooms of blue-green algae in recent years indicate some artificial enrichment. Significant areas of alluvial forest occur along the Garavogue River and at the mouth of the River Bonet. Old oak woodland of varying quality is well scattered along the shoreline and on some of the islands and it is an important example of this habitat for western Ireland. At least six Red Data Book plant species have been recorded from site. The site has three species of lamprey as well as crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*. The lake and its associated rivers support an important population of salmon *Salmo salar*. The otter *Lutra lutra* has a good population within the site. It is of minor importance for birds though the site has a small breeding colony of common tern *Sterna hirundo*. A wide range of rare or scarce invertebrates are known from the site, as well as several Red Data Book mammal species, including the badger *Martes martes*.

The NPWS has not yet prepared any site specific conservation objectives for Lough Gill SAC. However, in the preparation of this assessment, site specific conservation objectives of sites with similar qualifying interests were referred to. The Natura 2000 data form for the site was consulted along with the relevant sections in the latest NPWS Article 17 Report (2019).

The generic conservation objective of this site is:

To maintain / restore the favourable conservation status of the conservation interests of this SAC/SPA

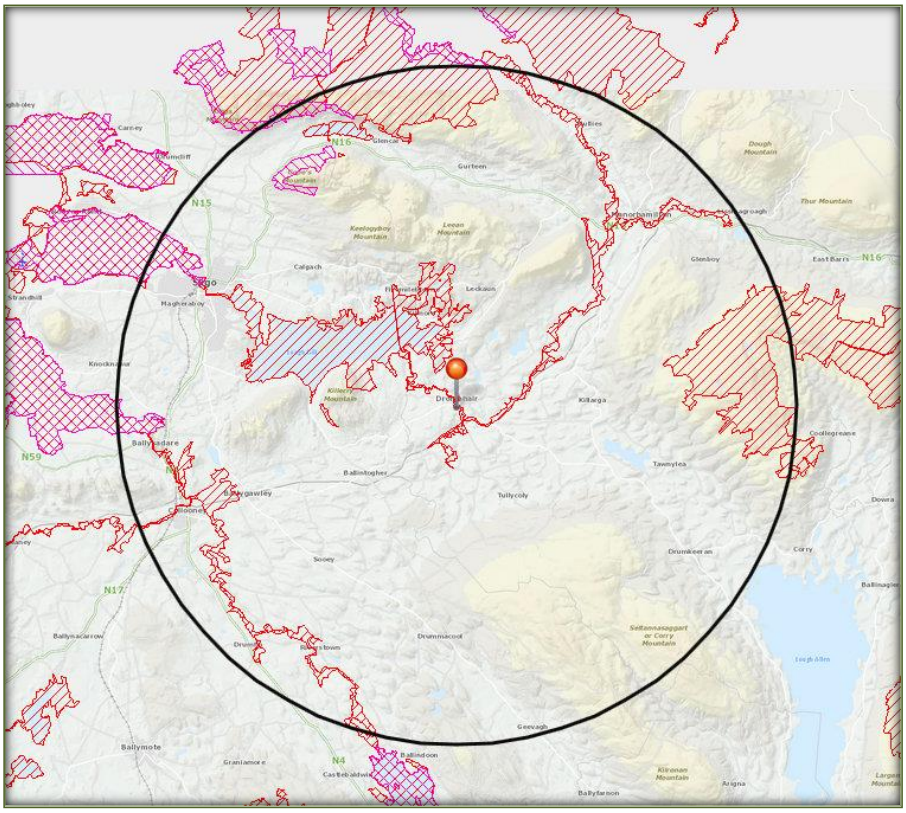


Figure 5 – The Application Site (Pinned) in relation to the Natura 2000 Sites within 15km. SACs – Red Hatching; SPAs – Pink Hatching

Figure 6 – The Application Site (Outlined in Red) in relation to Lough Gill SAC

3.4 Impact Assessment

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

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

The construction and operation of the proposed development will have no significant effects upon the integrity or the site structure of the designated sites identified. There are no individual elements of the proposed project that are likely to give rise to significant negative effects on these aforementioned sites. There will be no direct, indirect or cumulative effects upon any designated site arising from the construction or operation of the proposed development. As there are no watercourses within or immediately adjacent to the application site, there is a sufficient distance between the development site and all designated areas to ensure that no significant effects will arise.

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

Size and scale: Given the small size and scale of the development in relation to the overall size of the designated sites identified, the likelihood of any direct, indirect or cumulative effects on these designated sites arising from the construction and operation of the proposed development is low.

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

Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site: The closest designated site to the proposed development is the Lough Gill SAC and this is 114m west of the application site at the River Bonet. As there is no hydrological connectivity between these two areas, this distance is sufficient to ensure that no significant effects will arise.

Resource requirements (water abstraction etc.): No resources will be taken from any Natura 2000 site and there are no resource requirements that will impact upon any designated site.

Emissions: There are no drains or streams within or adjacent to the application site. Neither the construction nor the operation of the proposed development will result in any direct emissions to the River Bonet which is within Lough Gill SAC. There will be no emissions during construction into any watercourse. Best practice measures will be undertaken during the development of the site to prevent run-off leaving the site and encroaching onto Main St.

During operation, wastewater will be directed to the Dromahair WWTP and clean surface water will be directed into the storm water sewer which discharges into the River Bonet. These emissions will lead to no significant effects upon the River Bonet / Lough Gill SAC.

Excavation requirements: Excavated material from the construction will be used on site. Any

remaining will be disposed of in a responsible manner in a licensed facility away from any designated sites.

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

In-Combination / Cumulative Impacts: The proposed application was considered in combination with other developments or proposed developments in the Dromahair area. A number of other developments (domestic / commercial) have been granted planning permission in the preceding five years. Any future individual application that has the potential to impact upon a Natura 2000 site will be subject to Appropriate Assessment as required under Articles 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. All planning applications in Co. Leitrim that are within 15km of any designated site must be screened by the applicant for Appropriate Assessment. The proposed development will have no impacts upon any designated site when it is considered in-combination with other developments that have been properly screened for AA or where mitigation has been carried out as part of an NIS.

Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning etc: Once construction begins, it should be complete within one to two years. Operation of the site will be ongoing.

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

Reduction of habitat area: The proposed development lies outside the boundaries of the Natura 2000 sites identified in Section 3.3. There will be no reduction of designated habitat area within any SAC or SPA. There will be no effects upon the habitat qualifying interests of the Lough Gill SAC, i.e:

- Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation
- Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles
- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*

All these features are outside of the zone of influence of the development and there are no source-pathway-receptor linkages between the application site and these designated features, therefore there are no potential pollution pathways. There will be no interference with the boundaries of any SAC or SPC.

Disturbance to key species: There are six species listed as qualifying interests of the Lough Gill SAC, i.e., the crayfish, otter, salmon and three lamprey species. The ecological requirements of these species are described below.

- White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* – the crayfish occurs throughout the Gill catchment. It requires a certain level of habitat heterogeneity as well as waters with good ecological status.
- Otter *Lutra lutra* - The otter occurs throughout the Gill catchment. The presence of this species is positively correlated with good water quality and deterioration of same will lead to impacts upon this species.

- Salmon *Salmo salar* - Salmon occur throughout the Lough Gill system. The requirements of salmon depend on their life stage but clean, unpolluted water is a requirement throughout the life cycle. They are very sensitive to changes in water quality
- All lamprey species - Lampreys require clean gravels, fine sediments and free upstream migration to complete their life cycle. The main threat to these species include dredging, sedimentation of spawning gravels and the introduction of weirs or other impediments to their migration. They are also sensitive to changes in water quality arising from diffuse or point source pollution, including eutrophication from land-spreading.

These six qualifying interests are all dependent on high water quality and pollution with hydrocarbons, eutrophication and siltation all have the potential to impact upon these water dependent species. There is no direct pollution pathways between the application site and the designated sites, therefore potential impacts upon these listed species will be avoided as the development will not give rise to any deterioration in water quality.

Habitat or species fragmentation: There will be no habitat or species fragmentation within any SAC or SPA. No ecological corridors between the proposed site and the Natura 2000 sites identified will be damaged or destroyed.

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

Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.): There will be no negative effects upon surface or ground water quality within the River Bonet. There will be no negative impacts upon the water quality in any designated site or any watercourse leading to any designated site.

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

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

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

Loss - Estimated percentage of lost area of habitat: None

Fragmentation: None

Disruption & disturbance: None

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

3.5 FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

Finding of No Significant Effects Report Matrix	
Name of project	A Proposed Part 8 Development at Main St, Dromahair, Co. Leitrim
Name and location of Natura 2000 site	The closest designated site to the proposed development is the Lough Gill SAC and this is 114m west of the application site (at the Bonet River).
Description of project	A Proposed Part 8 Residential Development
Is the project directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site?	No
Are there other projects or plans that together with project being assessed could affect the site?	No
The Assessment of Significance of Effects	
Describe how the project is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site	Having regard to the location, nature and scale of the proposed development, it is considered that there is no potential for significant effects either from the proposed development on its own or in combination with other plans and projects.
Explain why these effects are not considered significant	Not applicable as there is no potential for negative impacts
Describe how the project is likely to affect species designated under Annex II of the Habitats Directive.	No impacts likely
Data Collected to Carry out the Assessment	
Who carried out the assessment	Noreen McLoughlin, MSC, MCIEEM. Consultant Ecologist
Sources of data	NPWS, EPA, National Biodiversity Data Centre, Leitrim County Council
Level of assessment completed	Stage1 Appropriate Assessment Screening
Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed	Full results included

4 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION

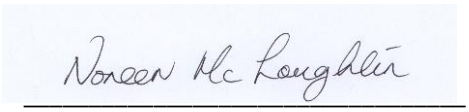
In accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the relevant case law, established best practice and the precautionary principle, this AA Screening Report has examined the details of the project in relation to the relevant Natura 2000 sites within 15km of the application site.

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

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

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

It is of the opinion of the author that an AA of the proposed development is not required as significant effects upon the Lough Gill SAC can be ruled out.



Noreen McLoughlin, MSc, MCIEEM.
Ecologist.

(PI Insurance details available on request)

Appendix I: FURTHER ECOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst the proposed development will have no impacts upon the integrity of any area that has been designated as a Natura 2000 site, it is usually best practice to undertake certain mitigation measures during the construction and operation of any development. These measures will help to protect the local biodiversity of the surrounding area and ensure the protection of local wildlife and water quality. Therefore it is recommended that the following measures are implemented: (*It should be noted that these recommended measures are **not** designed for the protection of any Natura 2000 site. Their presence does not indicate that a Stage II Appropriate Assessment is needed and they are fully outside of the Appropriate Assessment process).*

- Prior to the demolition of the building on the site, it must be checked for the presence of bats by a suitably experienced ecologist.