
Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Proposed residential development at
Slievekeale, Waterford City

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NM Ecology Ltd - Consultant Ecologists

276 Harold's Grange Road, Dublin 16

Website: www.nmecology.com

Email: info@nmecology.com

Tel: 087-6839771

Executive Summary

This *Screening for Appropriate Assessment* report has been prepared by NM Ecology Ltd on behalf of Waterford City & County Council (the applicant), as part of a planning application for a residential development at Slievekeale in Waterford City. The proposed development will consist of 58 residential units, with associated internal roads, parking spaces, green areas and services.

The proposed development site is within the catchment of the River Suir, of which the main channel and estuary has been designated a Special Area of Conservation. In accordance with their obligations under the *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011* (SI 477/2011), the competent authority must assess whether the proposed development could have 'likely significant effects' on this or any other Natura 2000 sites.

This document provides supporting information to assist the competent authority with an Appropriate Assessment screening exercise, including: a description of the proposed development, details of its environmental setting, and a map and list of Natura 2000 sites within the potential zone of impact. Following an assessment of potential impact pathways, we conclude that the proposed development will not cause direct or indirect impacts on any Natura 2000 sites, and thus that Appropriate Assessment is not required.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to Appropriate Assessment

Approximately 10% of the land area of Ireland is included in the European Network of Natura 2000 sites, which includes Special Protection Areas (SPAs) to protect important areas for birds, and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to protect a range of habitats and species. Legislative protection for these sites is provided by the *European Council Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)* and *E.C. Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC, as amended)*, which are jointly transposed into Irish law by the *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI 477/2011, as amended)*.

Regulation 42 (1) states that: “*Screening for Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project for which an application for consent is received [...] 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 [any Natura 2000 sites].*” To ensure compliance with this regulation, planning authorities must screen all planning applications for potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Supporting information may be requested from the applicant to assist with this process.

This document provides background information to assist the local authority with a *Screening for Appropriate Assessment* exercise for the proposed development. It includes an outline of the proposed works, details of the environmental setting of the site, an appraisal of future development proposals in the area (potential for ‘in-combination effects’), a map and list of Natura 2000 sites within the potential zone of impact, and an assessment of potential impacts.

1.2 Statement of authority

This assessment was carried out by Nick Marchant MCIEEM MSc, a qualified and experienced ecologist. He has ten years of professional experience, including seven years as an ecological consultant, one year as a local authority biodiversity officer, and two years managing an NGO overseas. He provides ecological assessments for developments throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland, including wind farms, infrastructural projects (roads, water mains, etc), and a range of commercial and residential developments.

He holds an MSc in Ecosystem Conservation and Landscape Management from NUI Galway and a BSc in Environmental Science from Queens University Belfast. He is a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and operates in accordance with their code of professional conduct.

1.3 Methods

This report has been prepared with reference to the following guidelines:

- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland* (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009)
- *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4), E.C., 2002*
- *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater and Coastal* (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, 2016)

In accordance with Section 3.2 of *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland*, a screening exercise comprises the following steps:

1. Description of the project and local site characteristics
2. Identification of relevant Natura 2000 sites, and compilation of information on their qualifying interests and conservation objectives
3. Assessment of potential impacts upon Natura 2000 sites, including:
 - Direct impacts (e.g. loss of habitat area, fragmentation)
 - Indirect impacts (e.g. disturbance of fauna, pollution of surface water)
 - Cumulative / 'in-combination' effects associated with other concurrent projects
4. Screening Statement with conclusions

A desk-based study was carried out using data from the following sources:

- Plans and specifications for the proposed development
- Qualifying interests / conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites from www.npws.ie
- Bedrock, soil, subsoil, surface water and ground water maps from the Geological Survey of Ireland webmapping service (www.gsi.ie/mapping.htm), the National Biodiversity Data Centre (<http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/>), and the Environmental Protection Agency web viewer (<http://gis.epa.ie/Envision/>)
- The *Waterford City Development Plan 2013 - 2019*, and details of permitted or proposed developments from the local authority's online planning records

All web-based resources were accessed between November 2016 and September 2017.

2 Description of the Project

2.1 Environmental setting

The site is located in the south-western suburbs of Waterford City. It consists of unmanaged grasslands, a former basketball court, and some hedgerows / treelines. Based on historical aerial photography of the site (via Google Earth) it appears that it was previously part of the sports fields for the adjacent Presentation Secondary School, but that the boundaries were redrawn at some time between 2005 and 2008. Since then, the site has been unmanaged, and it has become overgrown. There is a GAA stadium to the north of the site, schools to the east and south, and housing estates to the west of the site.

2.2 Description of the proposed development

The proposed development will consist of 58 residential units. The primary access point will be from Keane's Road on the western boundary, which will lead to paved internal roads and on-street parking spaces. Landscaped areas will be developed in the centre of the site, and will involve the creation of grassed areas, trees / shrubs, and sports / play facilities. Foul water will be discharged to a local authority foul sewer on Keane's Road, and treated in the municipal waste water treatment plant at Gorteens, Belview, Co. Kilkenny. Surface water runoff from roofs and paved surfaces will be discharged to a storm sewer on Keane's Road.

2.3 Environmental setting

Geology and soils

The underlying bedrock is dark-grey slate with thin siltstone of the Ross-Member formation, which is a regionally-important aquifer (fissured bedrock). Subsoils are sandstone till, and soils are acid brown earths / brown podzolics, which are deep, well-drained soils derived from acidic materials. There are no surface-water features (e.g. drainage ditches) on the site, indicating that it has good natural drainage.

Hydrology

The closest watercourse is the John's River, which is located approx. 620m to the south-east of the proposed development site, and discharges to the River Suir estuary approx. 2km to the north-east of the site. It is currently of poor status (Water Framework Directive Status Assessments 2010-2015), but the coastal waters outside the Barrow / Nore estuary are of good status. Considering the distance between the proposed development site and these watercourses, and the lack of intervening drains or streams, it appears that the proposed development site is effectively isolated from the rest of the river catchment.

2.4 Other nearby developments (potential in-combination effects)

The proposed development site is located in an urban / suburban setting in the south-west of Waterford City. It is included in Zone R2: 'Existing Residential' of the Waterford City Development Plan 2013 - 2019, for which the planning objective is *"To protect, provide and improve residential areas and their amenities"*. Most of the surrounding land is included in the same zone, but there are also some schools and commercial centres that are zoned for community facilities, general business and industrial uses. As the area is already developed, it is unlikely that there will be substantial development pressure over the next 5 - 10 years, although there may be some small-scale re-developments or modifications.

There are no pending planning applications in the vicinity of the proposed development site (Waterford City Council online planning database), and all other applications within the previous five years have been for small-scale works such as residential extensions or signage. No planning applications were identified that could act in-combination with the proposed development to increase the scale of potential ecological impacts.

3 Description of Natura 2000 sites

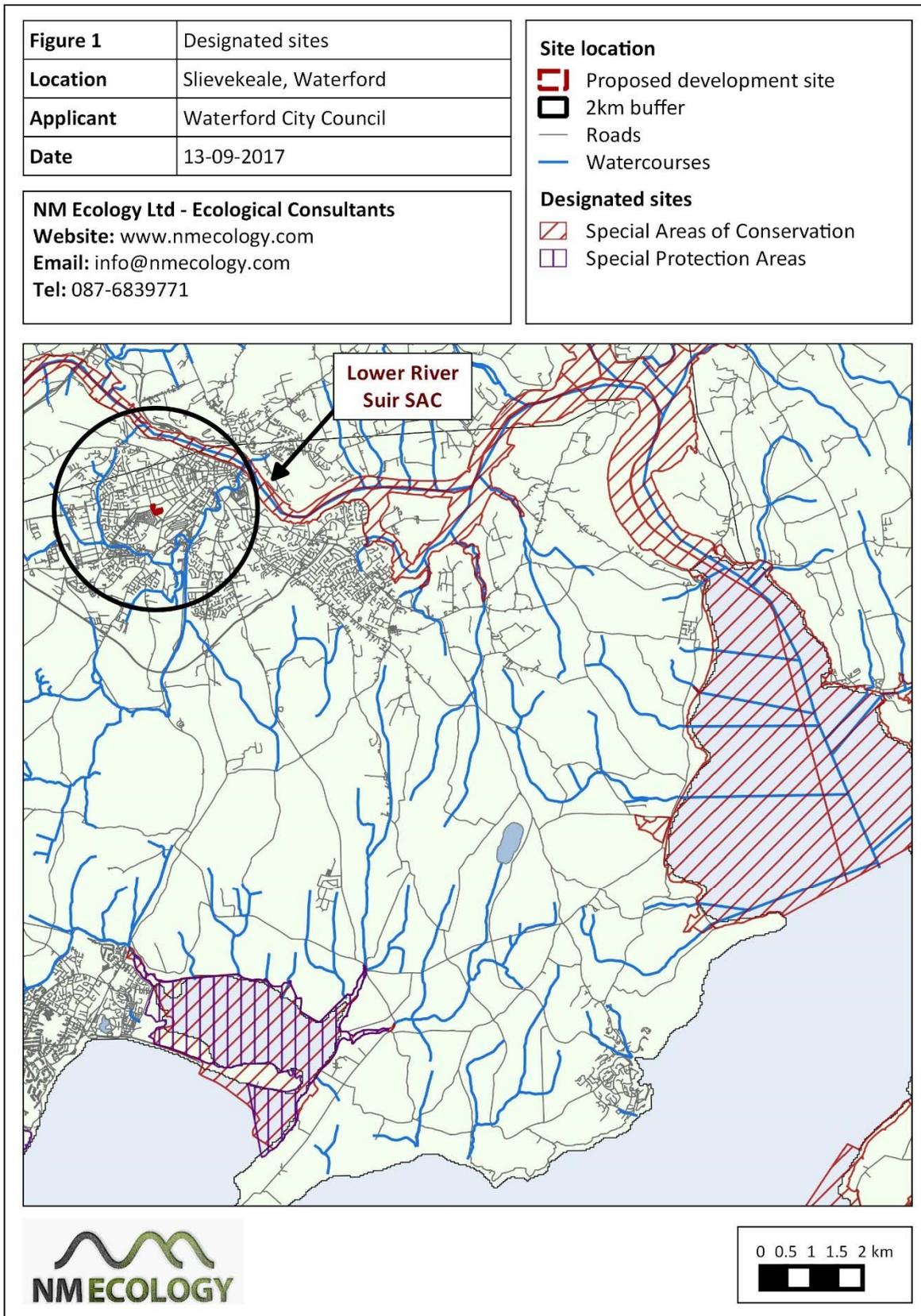
3.1 Identification of Natura 2000 sites within the zone of impact

The proposed development site is not located within or adjacent to any Natura 2000 sites, but potential indirect impacts on distant sites were considered within a potential zone of influence of 2km¹. There is one Special Area of Conservation within this distance: details are provided in Table 1, and its location is shown in Figure 1.

Table 1: Natura 2000 sites within 5km of the proposed development site

Site Name	Distance	Reasons for designation
Lower River Suir SAC (2137)	1.3 km north-east	<p>Annex I habitats: Atlantic salt meadows, Mediterranean salt meadows, water courses, hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities, old sessile oak woods, alluvial forests, yew woodlands</p> <p>Annex II species: freshwater pearl mussel, white-clawed crayfish, sea lamprey, river lamprey, brook lamprey, twaite shad, salmon, otter</p>

¹ For the purposes of this assessment we considered indirect impacts on designated sites within a potential zone of influence of 2km. This distance is considered to be proportionate to the relatively small scale of the proposed development, and its urban setting.



3.2 Conservation objectives

The standard conservation objective for all SACs and SPAs in Ireland is “to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the qualifying interests for which the SAC / SPA has been selected”. In addition, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have produced detailed conservation objectives for the Lower River Suir SAC, which can be viewed on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (<http://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>), but are not reproduced here in the interests of brevity.

3.3 Identification of potential impact pathways

The River Suir is located more than 1km from the proposed development site, and there are no intervening watercourses that could provide a hydrological connection, so are no pathways for direct or indirect impacts on the SAC.

4 Assessment of potential impacts

4.1 Direct impacts

The proposed development site is not located within any Natura 2000 sites, so there is no risk of habitat loss, fragmentation or any other direct impacts.

4.2 Indirect impacts

Potential changes in water quality (construction phase)

Construction works typically generate suspended sediments, and may occasionally result in accidental spills of oil or other toxic chemicals. However, no potential pathways were identified by which these pollutants could reach the Lower River Suir SAC (refer to Section 3.3). Consequently, the risk that pollutants from the construction site could cause significant negative impacts upon the SAC or any other Natura 2000 sites is thought to be negligible, even in a worst-case scenario and in the absence of standard site-management measures.

Potential changes in water quality (operational phase)

All foul water from the proposed development will be discharged to a local authority sewer and treated in the municipal waste water treatment plant at Gorteens, Belview, Co. Kilkenny. It is understood that the plant was upgraded in 2010 and that it is currently within capacity and providing adequate treatment before discharge to the River Suir. It is the responsibility of Irish Water to provide appropriate treatment to foul water within public sewers, and the responsibility of the local authority to assess any potential impacts on water quality at the discharge point, typically during the preparation of city / county development plans.

All surface-water runoff from hard surfaces will percolate to ground or will be discharged to a local authority storm sewer. Rainwater that percolates to ground is considered to be free of pollutants and does not pose a risk to local watercourses. Any rainwater discharged to local authority sewers will receive appropriate treatment prior to discharge to receiving waters.

Consequently, it can be concluded that foul water and surface water treatment during the operation of the development would not cause any significant impacts upon receiving waters or the SAC. There is no risk of any other ecological impacts during the operation of the proposed development.

4.3 Potential in-combination effects

As the proposed development will not have any impacts on nearby waterbodies or the SAC, there is no risk of in-combination effects with other concurrent developments.

5 Screening Statement

Article 42 (7) of the *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011* states that: *“The public authority shall determine that an Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project is not required [...] if it can 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.”*

To assist the planning authorities with the screening exercise, we have provided supporting information including: a description of the proposed development; an outline of its environmental setting; details of Natura 2000 sites within the potential zone of impact; and an assessment of potential impacts. Based on this information, we have demonstrated that there will be no risk of direct or indirect impacts on any Natura 2000 sites, so we conclude that Appropriate Assessment is not required.

References

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, 2016. *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the U.K and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater and Coastal* (2nd Edition). C.I.E.E.M., Hampshire, England.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009. *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland*. National Parks and Wildlife Service, DAHG, Dublin, Ireland.

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Fossitt, J.A., 2000. *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland*. Heritage Council, Kilkenny