

**Proposed Development**

**At**

**Massey Town, Macroom, Co Cork**

**Ecology & Appropriate Assessment  
(Screening) Report**

Report for Tuath Housing on behalf of Cork County Council

December 2022

Completed By: Roger Goodwillie & Associates

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to examine the development for possible ecological impacts on its surroundings and on the integrity of the Natura 2000 network.

The development site is in the catchment of the Lee River and the application has to have due regard to Article 6 (3) of the EU Habitats Directive which states:

*Article 6 (3): Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the [Natura 2000] site in view of the [Natura 2000] site's conservation objectives.*

This is transposed into national legislation by Regulation 31 of the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997.

The Report will assess the impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site network. It begins with a description of the flora and fauna of the site to determine if any ecological connection or parallels exist between the area and the local Natura 2000 sites.

The description is derived from a field visit in November 2022, having examined the available files and online sources of information for the local Natura 2000 sites. All work was undertaken by Roger Goodwillie, a full Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). He is qualified in Botany as B.A. (Mod.), M.Sc. and has been a practising ecologist for 40 years

The sources of information used to collect data on the Natura 2000 network of sites include:

- Ordnance Survey of Ireland mapping and aerial photography available from [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie), Google Earth and Bing aerial photography.
- Online data available on Natura 2000 sites as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie) including; the Natura 2000 network Data Form; Site Synopsis; Generic Conservation Objective data.
- Online database of rare, threatened and protected species o Publicly accessible biodiversity datasets.
- Status of EU Protected Habitats in Ireland. (National Parks & Wildlife Service, 2013).

## 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF AREA

### 2.1 Habitats & Vegetation

The site consists of an abandoned area beside a private housing development and includes a tall stand of grasses (dry meadows & grassy verges GS2 in Fossitt 2000) as seen below, as well as a pile of topsoil (recolonising bare ground ED3) and some bare ground (ED2) along the roadside. A small watercourse crosses the site from a field drain to the north.



**View of western end of site with topsoil pile (arrowed)**

The grasses for the most part consist of cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, false oat *Arrhenatherum elatius* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and they are mixed with a range of broad-leaved species, for example

Creeping thistle

Bush vetch

Meadow vetchling

Hairy tare

Field stitchwort

Hedge St John's wort

Red bartsia

*Cirsium arvense*

*Vicia sepium*

*Lathyrus pratensis*

*Vicia hirsuta*

*Stellaria graminea*

*Hypericum maculatum*

*Odontites vernus*

Patches of brambles *Rubus fruticosus* and rose-bay *Chamerion angustifolium* are established in places and there are a few small bushes of downy birch *Betula pubescens*, butterfly bush *Buddleja davidii* and, somewhat commoner, gorse *Ulex europaeus*.

At the entrance to the site the ground has been trampled so that smaller species survive. Clovers *Trifolium repens*, *T. pratense*, black medick *Medicago lupulina* and creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* are widespread but there is also

Bilbao fleabane	<i>Erigeron floribundus</i>
Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla reptans</i>
Silverweed	<i>P. anserina</i>
Smooth hawksbeard	<i>Crepis capillaris</i>
Rough hawksbeard	<i>C. vesicaria</i>
Greater plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>
Creeping buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>
Eyebright	<i>Euphrasia officinalis</i>

The topsoil pile at the west end of the site is being colonised by the taller grasses but is dominated in most places by brambles and agricultural weed species – thistles *Cirsium arvense*, *C. vulgare*, white goosefoot *Chenopodium album* and charlock *Sinapis arvensis* with a little early vetch *Vicia sativa*, redshank *Persicaria maculosa* and fool's parsley *Aethusa cynapium*.



The NW boundary (seen above) is a field hedge of blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and holly *Ilex aquifolium* and it grows above a channel with seasonal

water flow. Watercress *Nasturtium officinale* and brooklime *Veronica beccabunga* are the main aquatic species with great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* along the edges. The channel N-S across the site is a new one created by upstream diversion and much of the flow is through the existing grasses. The water discharges to a roadside shore.

## 2.2 Fauna

No large mammals are resident on site though foxes may visit at times. The site is too open to be of value to bats as a feeding area.

The birds seen were associated with the hedge and bushes and were blackbird, robin, dunnock, wren, chaffinch and goldfinch, any of which could nest there.

The land is not suitable for wading or wintering birds and none would be expected.

## 2.3 Evaluation

The habitat of the development site is of low ecological interest and does not support any rare or interesting organisms. All those encountered would be expected, given the location and soil type of the area.

There are no invasive alien plants on site at present such as Japanese knotweed.

## 3.0 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

### 3.1 Introduction

Appropriate assessment was introduced by the EU Habitats Directive as a way of determining if a planned project is likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of one of the Natura 2000 sites so far designated (i.e. the candidate SAC's and SPA's), or their conservation objectives. In this case there are four Natura sites within 15km of the project area and two (Cork Harbour & Great Island channel) with a direct link. These are shown on the map at end.

Name of site	Site Code	Distance kim
The Gearagh SAC	0108	2.1
The Gearagh SPA	4109	2.1
Mullaghanish-Musheramore Mts SPA	4162	5.3
St Gobnet's Wood SAC	0106	12.6

Cork Harbour SPA	4030	38
Great Island Channel SAC (001058)	1058	38

In the Irish context the assessment has been interpreted as a four-stage process. Firstly, a screening exercise (Stage 1) determines if a project could have significant effects on a Natura

site. If it does or the situation is unclear a Natura Impact Statement (Stage 2) is provided to the planning or regulatory authority which may include specific mitigation measures. Examples of significant effects are a loss of habitat area, fragmentation of the habitat, disturbance to species using the site and changes in water resources or quality. If such negative effects come to light in the assessment, alternative solutions are investigated by the proponent (Stage 3) and modifications made unless the project is deemed to be driven by 'imperative reasons of overriding public interest' in its current form. In this case Stage 4 then deals with compensatory action.

The following guidance documents have been used in the screening process:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (DEHLG 2009, Revised February 2010).
- EU Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC (EC, 2007).
- 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 (EC, 2002).
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 9. (EC 2000).
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 and PSSP 2/10.
- Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011).
- Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.
- The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland 2013 (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2013). 2/43/EEC (EC, 2000.)
- Court of Justice EU Case C-323/17. Directive 92/43/EEC Article 6(3) — Screening in order to determine whether or not it is necessary to carry out an assessment of the implications, for a special area of conservation, of a plan or project — Measures that may be taken into account for that purpose.
- Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management OPR Practice Note PN01. March 2021

### **3.2 Project description**

The project is the building of 18 housing units of one- and two-storey height and a 5-bed building for Acquired Brain Injury Ireland.

The drain will be piped during site preparation where it cuts through the site. As mentioned above it is not an established watercourse but one created by changes around field margins to the north.



The total area of the site is 0.776ha and the amount of open space left would be 16.7%. The hedge forming the NW boundary will be maintained and the site further landscaped with small trees in the open areas and garden planting around the houses.

The estate will be connected to the public systems of water supply and wastewater treatment.

### **3.3 Screening of Natura sites**

As mentioned, there are four Natura 2000 sites within a reasonable distance of Macroom that could theoretically be affected. The Gearagh which is both an SAC and SPA is in the same catchment (Lee) but is not linked because it is on the Lee main branch while Macroom is on the Sullane. The two join some distance below the town. The only sites with a definite pathway for possible effects are Cork Harbour SPA and Great Island Channel SAC which are 38km away downriver.

St Gobnet's Wood SAC and the Mullaghanish Mountain SPA are above Macroom is altitude and have no ecological connection or link to the development. They are not considered further for this reason.

#### 3.3.1 Cork Harbour SPA

The site is included in the Natura network because of the following qualifying features (NPWS 2014a):

- Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004]
- Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) [A005]
- Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]
- Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) [A028]
- Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) [A048]
- Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) [A050]
- Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052]
- Pintail (*Anas acuta*) [A054]
- Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A056]
- Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) [A069]
- Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) [A130]
- Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]
- Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]
- Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142]
- Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149]
- Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156]
- Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]
- Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160]
- Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]
- Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179]
- Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]
- Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]
- Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]
- Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]

### 3.3.2 Great Island Channel SAC

In this case the qualifying features (NPWS 2014b) are

Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]  
Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) [1330]

### 3.3.3 Conservation objectives

For all items the objectives are

*To maintain the favourable conservation condition of the species and habitats for which the sites have been selected.* Unless otherwise stated in site-specific targets and attributes, the favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- 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, and
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

With the favourable conservation status of a habitat being achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- 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 conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

### 3.3.3 Assessment of possible effects

The works on the site will result in a temporary increase in dust and noise during construction, the displacement or exclusion of animal species during this time, the permanent loss of species and habitat where buildings and services are constructed and possible pollution events arising from accidental spillages of building materials such as cement or fuels. These latter can be confined to the immediate vicinity by established prevention measures which will be detailed by the construction management plan. It should be emphasised that they are potential local effects, most unlikely to reach any Natura 2000 site.

### 3.3.4 Likely effects

The development site supports none of the habitats or species that are qualifying interests for the SAC so it cannot act as a reserve area in case of loss from the main sites.

Although the site has a linkage to two downstream Natura 2000 sites, there are no particularly sensitive organisms or habitats that could be altered significantly by escaping material. In addition, they would be protected by the two Lee reservoirs which act as sedimentary basins.

Despite the improbability of effects, a construction management plan will be prepared by the chosen contractor to guarantee measures to prevent deposits of soil on the local roads, to safeguard the storage of fuel oil on site and to avoid release of seepage from curing concrete onto existing roadways/shores. As emphasised, these measures will be put in place in response to potential local effects which have no bearing on the Natura 2000 sites.

Once complete the development will have no likely impact on the Natura 2000 site network.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

There is no likelihood that this development will have significant impacts on the integrity and functioning of the Natura 2000 site network or its site management objectives. This is a finding of no significant effects.

This being the case there is no possibility of cumulative effects and the further, more detailed, stages of appropriate assessment are not required.

## 5.0 REFERENCES

DEHLG. 2009. Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (Revised February 2010).

European Commission. 2000. Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

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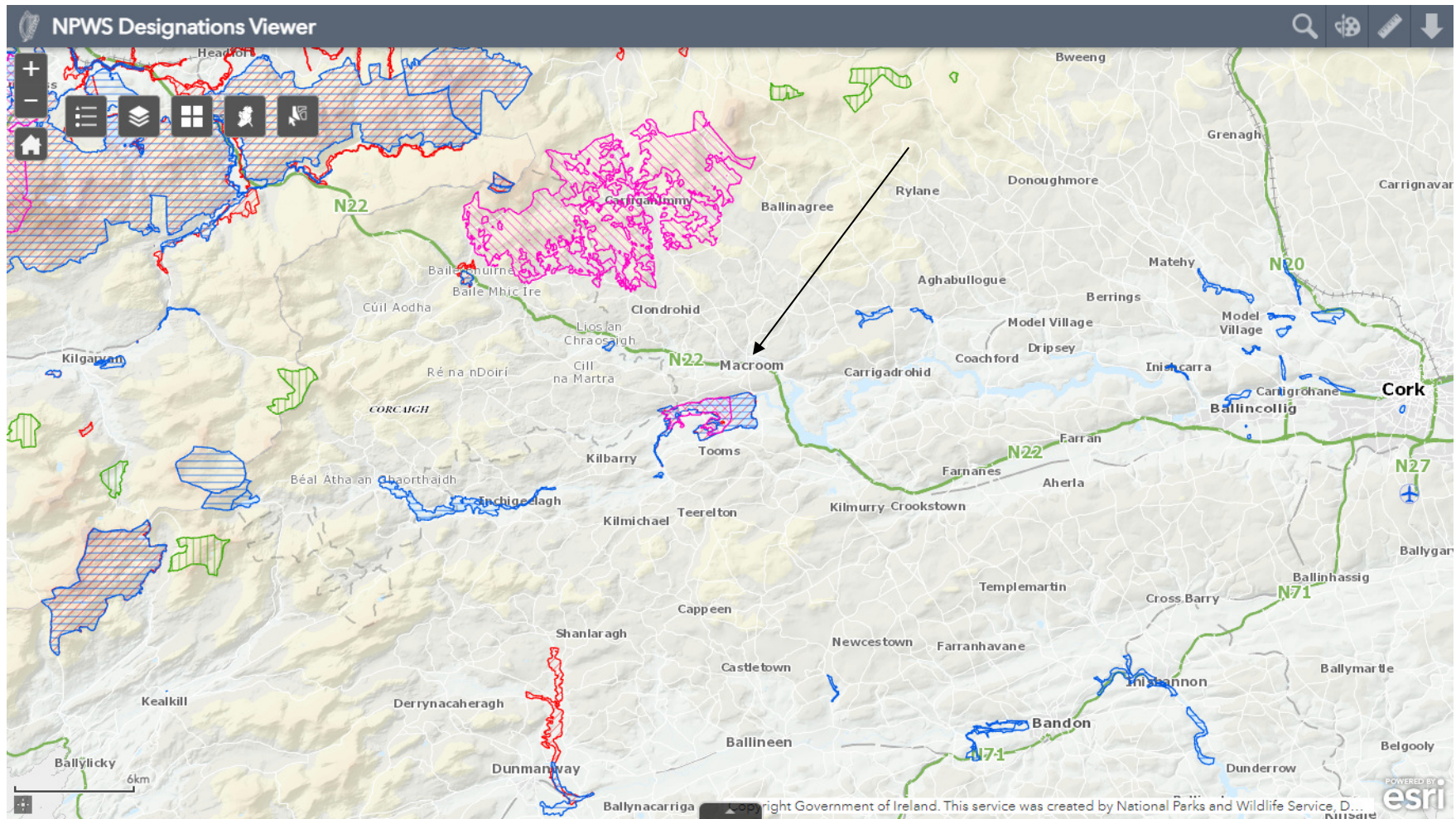
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NPWS (2014a) Conservation Objectives: Cork Harbour SPA 004030. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

NPWS (2014b) Conservation Objectives: Great Island Channel SAC 001058. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht



**Location of site in relation to Natura 2000 sites within 15km (red hatching).**