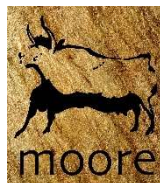


Report for the purposes of
Appropriate Assessment Screening

N72 Christchurch Junction Upgrade

Prepared by: Moore Group – Environmental Services

11 October 2023



On behalf of Cork County Council

Project Proponent	Cork County Council
Project	N72 Christchurch Junction Upgrade
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. General Introduction.....	1
1.2. Legislative Background - The Habitats and Birds Directives	1
2. Methodology.....	2
2.1. Guidance	3
2.2. Data Sources	4
3. Description of the Proposed Development.....	4
4. Identification of Natura 2000 Sites	9
4.1. Description of Natura Sites Potentially Significantly Affected	9
4.2. Ecological Network Supporting Natura 2000 Sites.....	14
5. Identification of Potential Impacts & Assessment of Significance.....	14
5.1. Assessment of Likely Significant Effects.....	15
5.2. Assessment of Potential In-Combination Effects.....	17
6. Conclusion.....	19
7. References	20

Abbreviations

AA	Appropriate Assessment
EEC	European Economic Community
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographical Information System
LAP	Local Area Plan
NHA	Natural Heritage Area
NIS	Natura Impact Statement
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OSI	Ordnance Survey Ireland
pNHA	proposed Natural Heritage Area
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage System
WFD	Water Framework Directive

1. Introduction

1.1. General Introduction

This report for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening contains information required for the competent authority to undertake screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) in respect of the construction and operation of alterations to Christchurch Junction on the N72 at Fermoy, Co. Cork (hereafter referred to as the Proposed Development) to determine whether it is likely individually or in combination with other plans or projects to have a significant effect on any European sites, in light of best scientific knowledge.

Having regard to the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 – 2021 (the “Planning Acts”) (section 177U), the purpose of a screening exercise under section 177U of the PDA 2000 is to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on a European site.

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 have a significant effect on a European site then it is necessary to carry out a Stage 2 appropriate assessment under section 177V of the Planning Acts.

When screening the project, there are two possible outcomes:

- the project poses no potential for the possibility of a significant effect and as such requires no Stage 2 assessment; or
- the project has potential to have a significant effect (or this is uncertain and therefore cannot be excluded) and therefore a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment of the project is necessary.

This report has been prepared by Moore Group - Environmental Services to enable the competent authority to carry out AA screening in relation to the Proposed Development. The report was compiled by Ger O’Donohoe B.Sc. Applied Aquatic Sciences (ATU Galway, 1993) & M.Sc. Environmental Sciences (TCD, 1999) who has over 30 years’ experience in environmental impact assessment and has completed numerous Appropriate Assessment Screening Reports and Natura Impact Statements on terrestrial and aquatic habitats for various development types.

1.2. Legislative Background - The Habitats and Birds Directives

Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive are transposed into Irish Law inter alia by the Part XAB of the Planning Acts (in particular section 177U and 177V) which governs the requirement to carry out appropriate assessment screening and appropriate assessment, where required, per Section 1.1 above.

The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora) is the main legislative instrument for the protection and conservation of biodiversity in the European Union (EU). Under the Habitats Directive, Member States are obliged to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which contain habitats or species considered important for protection and conservation in a EU context.

The Birds Directive (Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds), transposed into Irish law by the Bird and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 as amended, and the Wildlife Act 1976, as amended, is concerned with the long-term protection and management of all wild bird species and their habitats in the EU. Among other things, the Birds Directive requires that Special Protection Areas (SPAs) be established to protect migratory species and species which are rare, vulnerable, in danger of extinction, or otherwise require special attention.

SACs designated under the Habitats Directive and SPAs, designated under the Birds Directive, form a pan-European network of protected sites known as Natura 2000. The Habitats Directive sets out a unified system for the protection and management of SACs and SPAs. These sites are also referred to as European sites.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the requirement for an assessment of proposed plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on Natura 2000 sites.

Article 6(3) establishes the requirement to screen all plans and projects and to carry out an appropriate assessment if required (Appropriate Assessment (AA)). Article 6(4) establishes requirements in cases of imperative reasons of overriding public interest:

Article 6(3): *“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 subjected to an appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”*

2. Methodology

The Commission’s methodological guidance (EC, 2002, 2018, 2021 see Section 2.1 below) promotes a four-stage process to complete the AA and outlines the issues and tests at each stage. An important aspect of the process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required.

Stages 1 and 2 deal with the main requirements for assessment under Article 6(3). Stage 3 may be part of Article 6(3) or may be a necessary precursor to Stage 4. Stage 4 is the main derogation step of Article 6(4).

Stage 1 Screening: This stage examines the likely effects of a project either alone or in combination with other projects upon a Natura 2000 site and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these effects will not be significant. In order to screen out a project, it must be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment: This stage examines whether it is likely that the project, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, will have a significant effect upon a European site. In order to 'screen out' a project (i.e. in order to conclude that it is not necessary to move to the 'Stage 2' appropriate assessment stage (see immediately below), the possibility that the Proposed Development (individually or in combination with other plans or projects), will have a significant effect on a European site must be excluded on the basis of objective information.

Stage 3 Assessment of Alternative Solutions: This stage examines alternative ways of implementing the project that, where possible, avoid any adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Stage 4 Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain: Where imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) exist, an assessment to consider whether compensatory measures will or will not effectively offset the damage to the sites will be necessary.

To ensure that the Proposed Development complies fully with the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and all relevant Irish transposing legislation, Moore Group compiled this report to enable the competent authority to carry out AA screening in relation to the Proposed Development to determine whether the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with another plan or project will have a significant effect on a European site.

2.1. Guidance

This report has been compiled in accordance with guidance contained in the following documents:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities. (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 rev.).
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPWS 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2018).
- Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive (EC, 2021).
- Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2021).

- Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) Practice Note PN01 Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management (OPR, 2021).

2.2. Data Sources

Sources of information that were used to collect data on the Natura 2000 network of sites, and the environment within which they are located, are listed below:

- The following mapping and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) data sources, as required:
 - National Parks & Wildlife (NPWS) protected site boundary data;
 - Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) mapping and aerial photography;
 - OSI/Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rivers and streams, and catchments;
 - Digital Elevation Model over Europe (EU-DEM);
 - Google Earth and Bing aerial photography 1995-2023;
- Online data available on Natura 2000 sites as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from www.npws.ie including:
 - Natura 2000 - Standard Data Form;
 - Conservation Objectives;
 - Site Synopses;
- National Biodiversity Data Centre records;
 - Online database of rare, threatened and protected species;
 - Publicly accessible biodiversity datasets.
- Status of EU Protected Habitats in Ireland. (National Parks & Wildlife Service, 2019); and
- Relevant Development Plans;
 - Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028

3. Description of the Proposed Development

The Proposed Development consists of the construction and operation of a scheme to redesign the junction between the N72 national road and the R639 regional road at Christchurch, Fermoy Co. Cork.

Physical works will include breaking out and removal of existing traffic islands, relocation of existing lighting columns, construction of paved build outs at the N72/R639, R639/Allen's Walk, and N72 / Church Hill junctions, overlay of existing road surface and provision of raised table across N72 / R639 junction, provision of new road markings and signage, installation of new drainage gullies to connect to existing closed drainage network, and incorporation of low level planting strips to enhance the public realm and to accommodate public realm stormwater runoff.

The scheme will comprise the following changes:

- Removal of left turn slip road from N72 (S) to N72 (W)
- Removal of left turn lane from N72 (W) to R639
- Removal of traffic islands throughout
- Reduction in carriageway widths and turning radii via extension of public realm areas and revision of kerb lines aligning with the Design Manual for Urban Streets as much as possible considering the requirement to accommodate large numbers of HGV's on the N72
- Incorporation of a raised table across the junction extending into all approaches.
- Modification of the junction between the N72 (W) and Church Hill comprising realignment of the Church Hill approach, removing the left turn slip lane and right turning facility from the N72, narrowing the junction mouth, and providing an uncontrolled pedestrian crossing.
- Modification of the junction between the R639 and Allen's Walk comprising realignment of the Allen's Walk approach, narrowing the junction mouth, providing an uncontrolled pedestrian crossing, modifying parking at the junction to improve visibility, and extension of the footpath at the junction mouth to define the junction and improve pedestrian facilities.
- Incorporation of Sustainable Drainage Systems and enhancement of public realm areas.
 - SuDS measures will include bioretention tree pits / rain gardens to collect runoff from the public realm areas.
 - Paved road area reduces from 18,098m² to 12,531m².
- Resurfacing the vehicular carriageway within the scheme extents.
- Relocation of existing gullies with new connections to the existing surface water drainage system.
 - The sequence of gully work to be followed is to close off and secure inlets and outlets prior to breaking out the chambers. This effectively removes the pathway to the River Blackwater. The gully is replaced and the drainage recommissioned.

Approximately 163m² of existing planting within a traffic island, in addition to 12 existing planted pots will need to be removed as part of the implementation of this project. These will be retained and reused within the design.

Proposed locations for material storage and/or construction compounds have not yet been determined and it will be the responsibility of the contractor to make appropriate arrangements to enable delivery of the works while complying with such waste management, material handling and traffic management requirements as set out in the specification.

The existing environment was surveyed on 26 July 2023 and the predominant habitat found to be Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3) along with Flower beds and borders (BC4). There are no invasive species in the area. Figure 1 shows the Proposed Development location and Figure 2 shows a detailed view of the Proposed Development boundary on recent aerial photography. Figure 3 shows the layout of the Proposed Development.

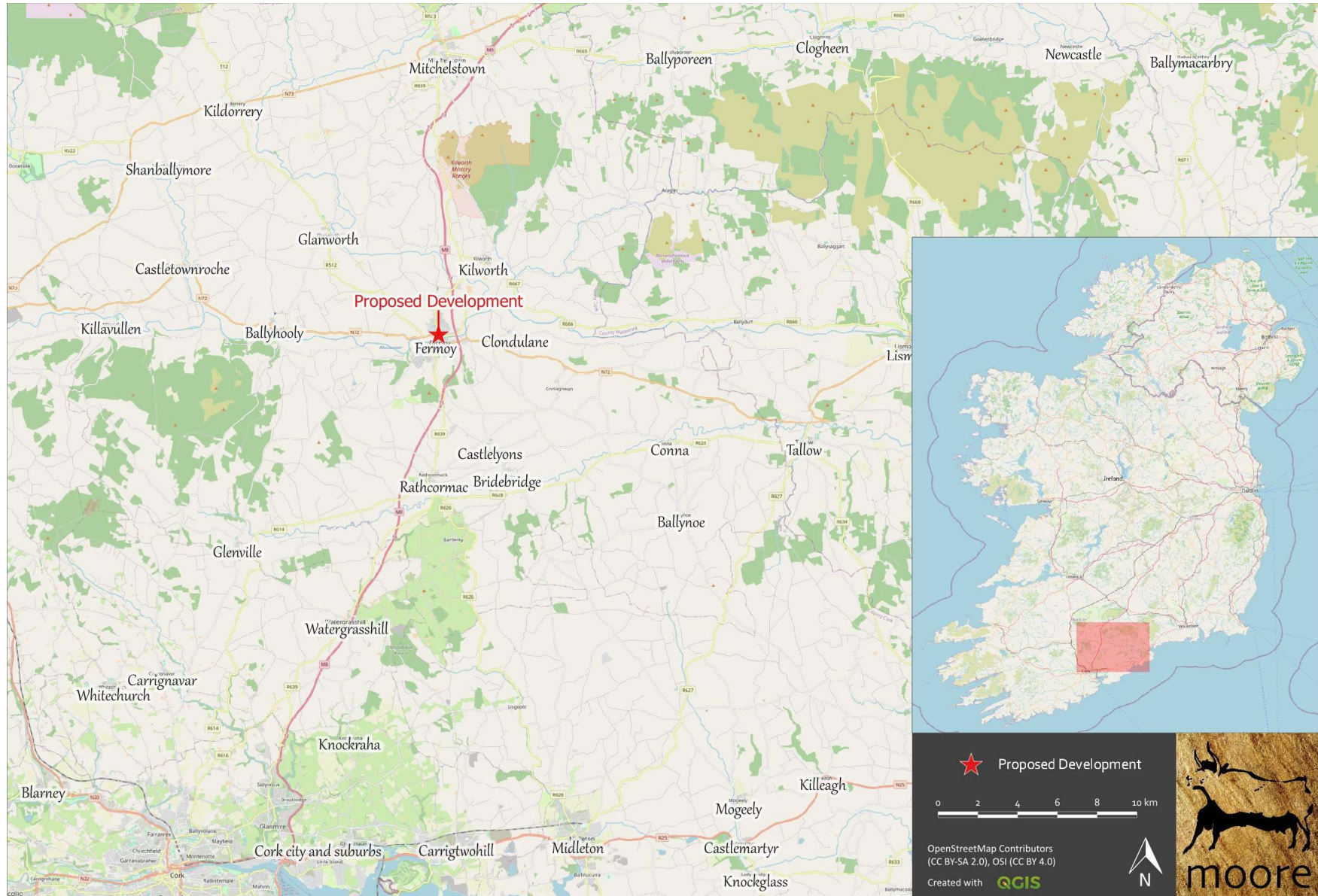


Figure 1. Showing the Proposed Development location at Fermoy, Co. Cork

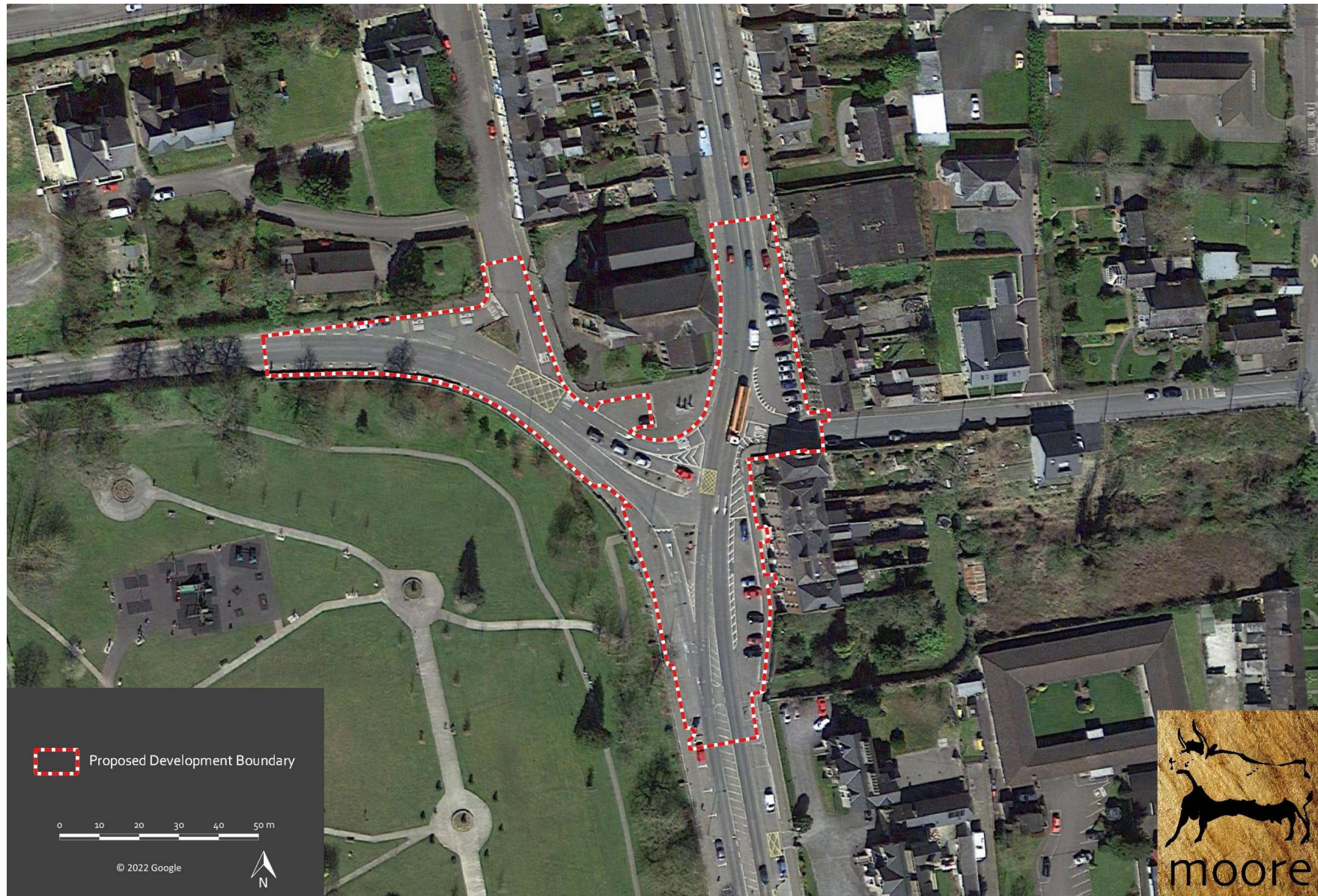


Figure 2. Showing the Proposed Development boundary on recent aerial photography.

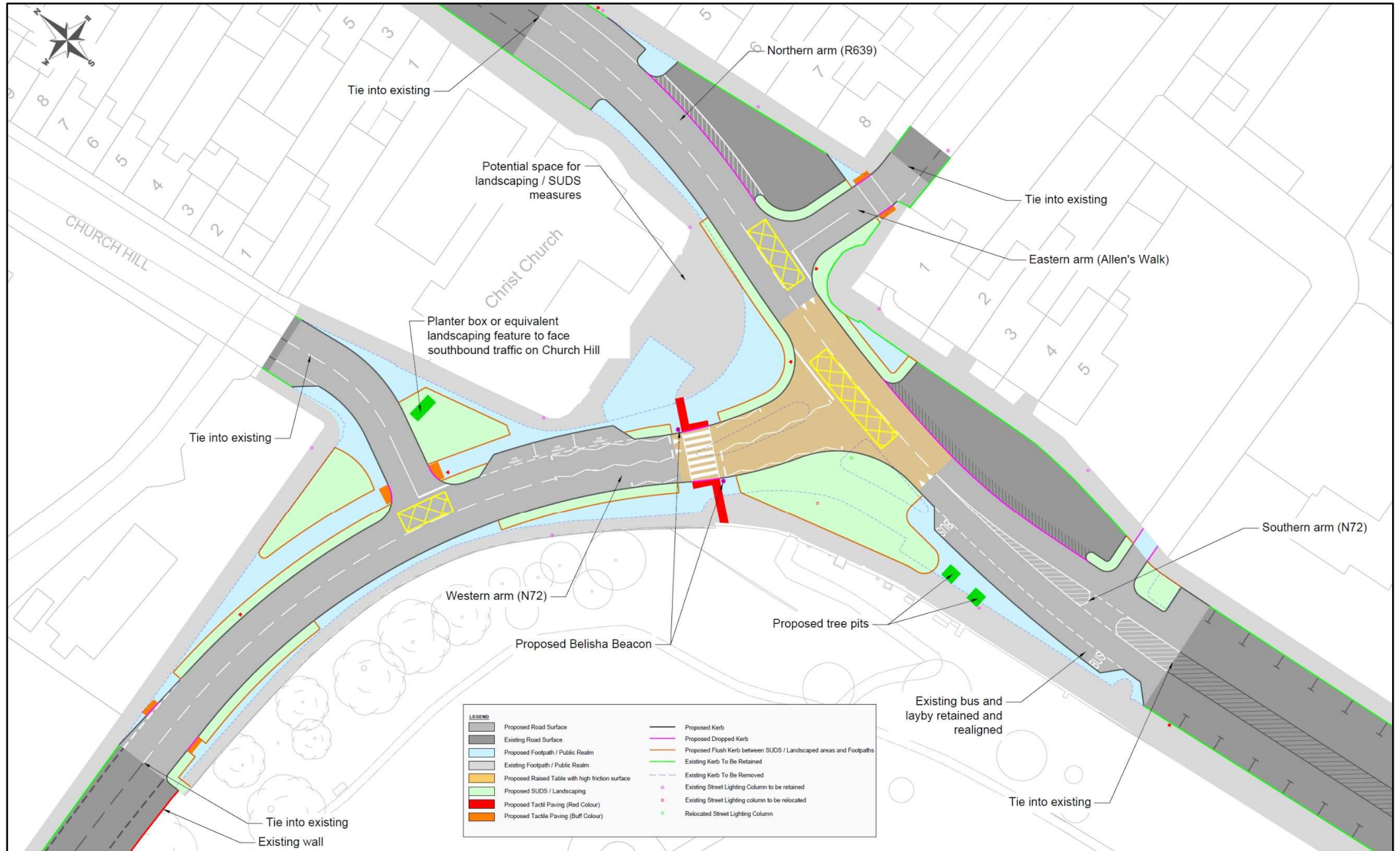


Figure 3. Plan of the Proposed Development.

4. Identification of Natura 2000 Sites

4.1. Description of Natura Sites Potentially Significantly Affected

A Zone of Influence (Zoi) 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. In accordance with the OPR Practice Note (2021), PN01, the Zoi should be established on a case-by-case basis using the Source- Pathway-Receptor framework.

The European Commission's "Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Methodological Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC" published 28 September 2021 states at section 3.1.3, that:

"Identifying the Natura 2000 sites that may be affected should be done by taking into consideration all aspects of the plan or project that could have potential effects on any Natura 2000 sites located within the zone of influence of the plan or project. This should take into account all of the designating features (species, habitat types) that are significantly present on the sites and their conservation objectives. In particular, it should identify:

- *any Natura 2000 sites geographically overlapping with any of the actions or aspects of the plan or project in any of its phases, or adjacent to them;*
- *any Natura 2000 sites within the likely zone of influence of the plan or project Natura 2000 sites located in the surroundings of the plan or project (or at some distance) that could still be indirectly affected by aspects of the project, including as regards the use of natural resources (e.g. water) and various types of waste, discharge or emissions of substances or energy;*
- *Natura 2000 sites in the surroundings of the plan or project (or at some distance) which host fauna that can move to the project area and then suffer mortality or other impacts (e.g. loss of feeding areas, reduction of home range);*
- *Natura 2000 sites whose connectivity or ecological continuity can be affected by the plan or project".*

The range of Natura 2000 sites to be assessed, i.e. the zone in which impacts from the plan or project may arise, will depend on the nature of the plan or project and the distance at which effects may occur. For Natura 2000 sites located downstream along rivers or wetlands fed by aquifers, it may be that a plan or project can affect water flows, fish migration and so forth, even at a great distance. Emissions of pollutants may also have effects over a long distance. Some projects or plans that do not directly affect Natura 2000 sites may still have a significant impact on them if they cause a barrier effect or prevent ecological linkages. This may happen, for example, when plans affect features of the landscape that connect Natura 2000 sites or that may obstruct the

movements of species or disrupt the continuity of a fluvial or woodland ecosystem. To determine the possible effects of the plan or project on Natura 2000 sites, it is necessary to identify not only the relevant sites but also the habitats and species that are significantly present within them, as well as the site objectives.

The Zone of Influence may be determined by considering the Proposed Development's potential connectivity with European sites, in terms of:

- Nature, scale, timing and duration of all aspects of the proposed works and possible impacts, including the nature and size of excavations, storage of materials, flat/sloping sites;
- Distance and nature of potential pathways (dilution and dispersion; intervening 'buffer' lands, roads etc.); and
- Location of ecological features and their sensitivity to the possible impacts.

The potential for source pathway receptor connectivity is firstly identified through GIS interrogation and detailed information is then provided on sites with connectivity. European sites that are located within a potential Zone of Influence of the Proposed Development are listed in Table 1 and presented in Figures 4 and 5, below. Spatial boundary data on the Natura 2000 network was extracted from the NPWS website (www.npws.ie) on 11 October 2023. This data was interrogated using GIS analysis to provide mapping, distances, locations and pathways to all sites of conservation concern including pNHAs, NHA and European sites.

Table 1 European Sites located within the potential Zone of Influence¹ of the Proposed Development.

Site Code	Site name	Distance (km) ²
002170	Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC	0.13
004094	Blackwater Callows SPA	1.25

The nearest European sites to the Proposed Development are associated with the River Blackwater; the Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC (Site Code 002170), 130m to the south, and the Blackwater Callows SPA (Site Code 004094), 1.25km to the east.

The Proposed Development is located at a junction in the northern part of the town of Fermoy, Co. Cork, approximately 200m north of the River Blackwater. A review of aerial photography, Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) mapping and OSI Geographical Information System (GIS) data for rivers and streams indicates that there are no notable surface water features onsite and no direct hydrological pathways to offsite surface water bodies.

The Qualifying Interests (QIs) and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) of the European sites in the Zone of influence of the Proposed Development are provided in Table 2 below.

¹ All European sites potentially connected irrespective of the nature or scale of the Proposed Development.

² Distances indicated are the closest geographical distance between the Proposed Development and the European site boundary, as made available by the NPWS.

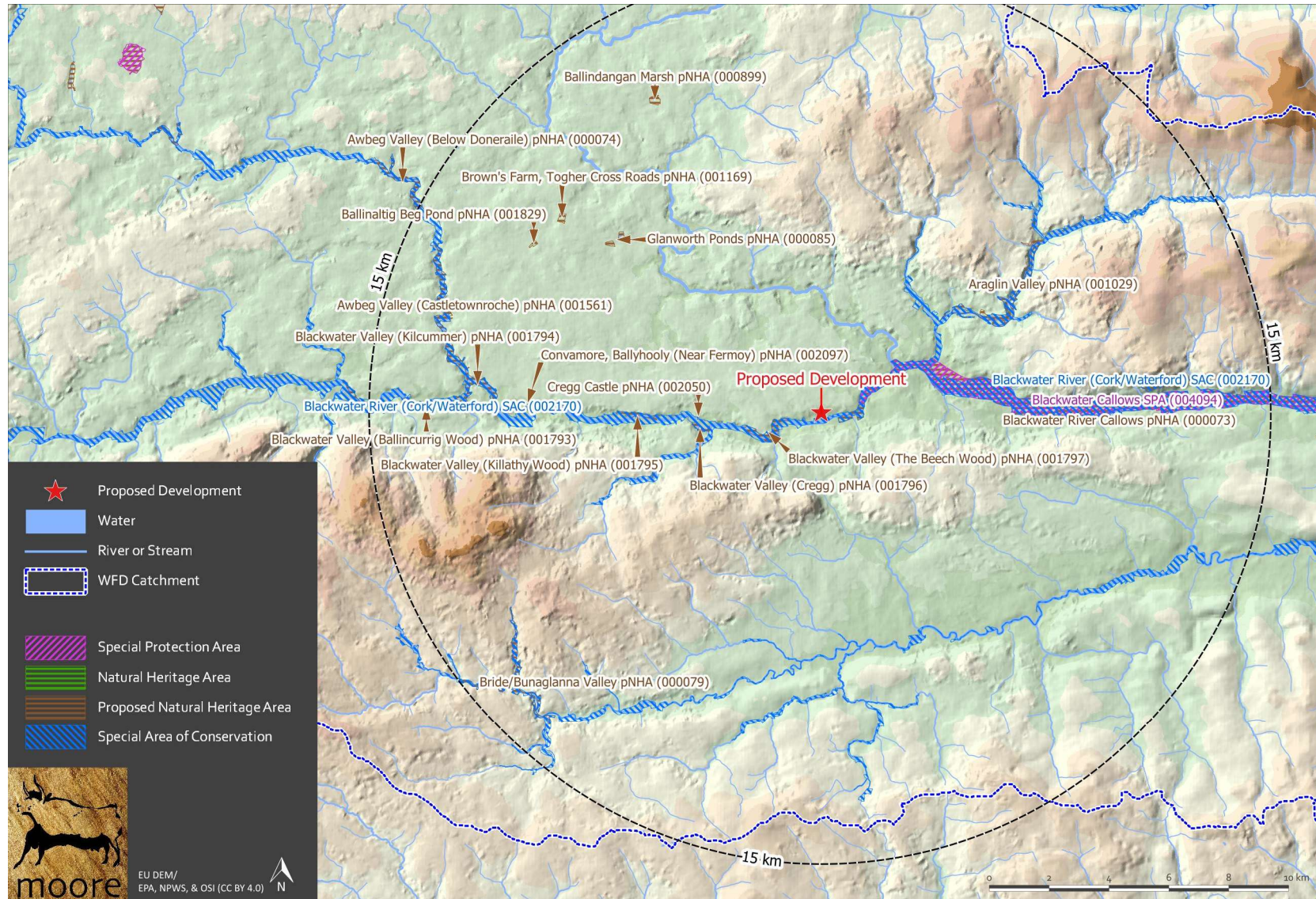


Figure 4. Showing European sites and NHAs/pNHAs within the wider Potential Zone of Influence of the Proposed Development.

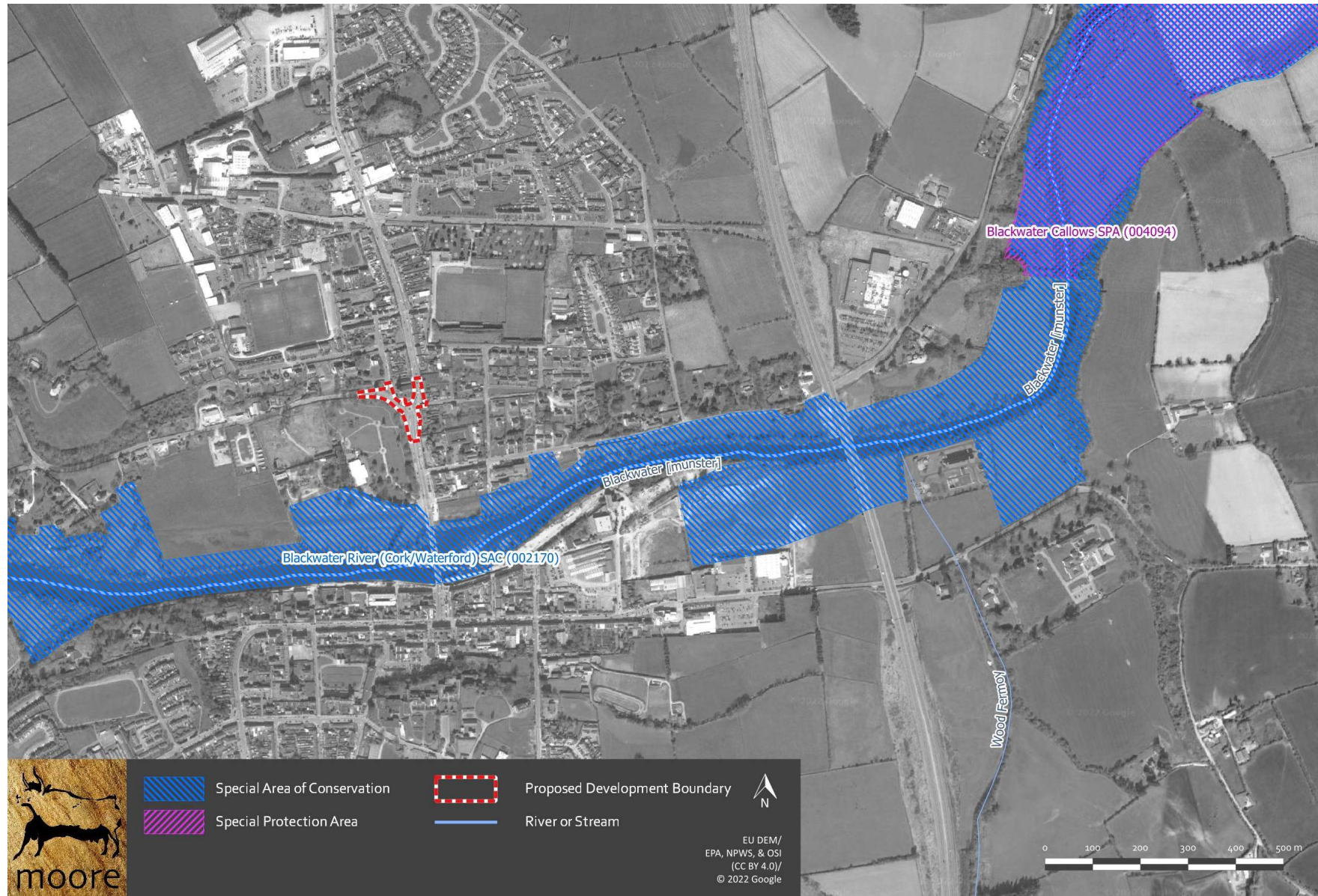


Figure 5. Detailed view of European sites in the nearer Potential Zone of Influence of the Proposed Development.

Table 2 Identification of relevant European sites using Source-Pathway-Receptor model and compilation of information QIs and conservation objectives. *Priority Habitats

European Site name, Site code and Conservation Objectives	Location Relative to the Proposed Development Site	Connectivity – Source-Pathway-Receptor	Considered further in Screening – Y/N
<p>Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC (002170)</p> <p>The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest:</p> <p>1029 Freshwater Pearl Mussel <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i></p> <p>1092 White-clawed Crayfish <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i></p> <p>1095 Sea Lamprey <i>Petromyzon marinus</i></p> <p>1096 Brook Lamprey <i>Lampetra planeri</i></p> <p>1099 River Lamprey <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i></p> <p>1103 Twaite Shad <i>Alosa fallax</i></p> <p>1106 Atlantic Salmon <i>Salmo salar</i> (only in fresh water)</p> <p>1130 Estuaries</p> <p>1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide</p> <p>1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks</p> <p>1310 Salicornia and other annuals colonizing mud and sand</p> <p>1330 Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>)</p> <p>1355 Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i></p> <p>1410 Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>)</p> <p>1421 Killarney Fern <i>Trichomanes speciosum</i></p> <p>3260 Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculon fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation</p> <p>91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles</p> <p>91E0 *Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>)</p> <p>91J0 *<i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles</p> <p>NPWS (2012) Conservation Objectives: Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC 002170. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.</p>	0.13km to the south of the Proposed Development	No There are no direct pathways or connectivity to the habitats and/or species of this site.	Yes, considered in Table 3 below.

European Site name, Site code and Conservation Objectives	Location Relative to the Proposed Development Site	Connectivity – Source-Pathway-Receptor	Considered further in Screening – Y/N
<p>Blackwater Callows SPA (004094)</p> <p>The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest:</p> <p>A038 Whooper Swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i></p> <p>A050 Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i></p> <p>A052 Teal <i>Anas crecca</i></p> <p>A156 Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i></p> <p>A999 Wetlands</p> <p>NPWS (2022) Conservation objectives for Blackwater Callows SPA [004094]. First Order Site specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.</p>	1.25km to the east of the Proposed Development	<p>No</p> <p>There are no pathways or connectivity to the habitats and/or species of this site.</p> <p>Due to distance and the lack of any relevant ex-situ factors of significance to bird species or wetland habitat.</p>	Yes, considered in Table 3 below.

4.2. Ecological Network Supporting Natura 2000 Sites

A concurrent GIS analysis of the proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA) and designated Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) in terms of their role in supporting the species using Natura 2000 sites was undertaken along with GIS investigation of European sites. These supporting roles mainly relate to mobile fauna such as mammals and birds which may use pNHAs and NHAs as ecological corridors or “stepping stones” between Natura 2000 sites.

Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and the Habitats Regulations 2011 place a high degree of importance on such non-Natura 2000 areas as features that connect the Natura 2000 network. Features such as ponds, woodlands and important hedgerows were taken into account in the decision process and during the preparation of this AA Screening report.

The NHAs and pNHAs identified in Figure 4 are located outside the Zone of Influence, and no areas of supporting habitat will be affected by the proposed development.

5. Identification of Potential Impacts & Assessment of Significance

The Proposed Development is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the sites considered in the assessment and therefore potential impacts must be identified and considered.

5.1. Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

The Proposed Development is located at a junction in the northern part of the town of Fermoy, Co. Cork, approximately 200m north of the River Blackwater. A review of aerial photography, Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) mapping and OSI Geographical Information System (GIS) data for rivers and streams indicates that there are no notable surface water features onsite and no direct hydrological pathways to offsite surface water bodies.

There is no connectivity to the River Blackwater or to any European sites within or outside the potential Zone of Influence.

The consideration of all potential direct and indirect impacts that may result in significant effects on the conservation objectives of a European site, taking into account the size and scale of the Proposed Development are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Assessment of Likely Significant Effects.

Identification of all potential direct and indirect impacts that may result in significant effects on the conservation objectives of a European site, taking into account the size and scale of the project.	
Impacts:	Significance of Impacts:
<p>Construction phase e.g.</p> <p>Vegetation clearance</p> <p>Demolition</p> <p>Surface water runoff from soil excavation/infill/landscaping (including borrow pits)</p> <p>Dust, noise, vibration</p> <p>Lighting disturbance</p> <p>Impact on groundwater/dewatering</p> <p>Storage of excavated/construction materials</p> <p>Access to site</p> <p>Pests</p>	<p>None</p> <p>The Proposed Development site is located within the footprint of the existing roads and footpaths, and will not require mitigation to ensure there are no impacts on any European site.</p> <p>The sequence of gully work to be followed is to close off and secure inlets and outlets prior to breaking out the chambers. This effectively removes the pathway to the River Blackwater. The gully is replaced and the drainage recommissioned.</p> <p>The distance to the River Blackwater is significant and there are no likely risks of contaminated surface water run off reaching the river and impacting qualifying interest habitats and species of the Blackwater River SAC during the construction phase.</p>
<p>Operational phase e.g.</p> <p>Direct emission to air and water</p>	<p>All surface water runoff, once the facility is operational, will be contained on site and discharged to existing urban drainage systems.</p>

<p>Surface water runoff containing contaminant or sediment</p> <p>Lighting disturbance</p> <p>Noise/vibration</p> <p>Changes to water/groundwater due to drainage or abstraction</p> <p>Presence of people, vehicles and activities</p> <p>Physical presence of structures (e.g. collision risks)</p>	<p>There is no real likelihood of any significant effects on European Sites in the wider catchment area.</p> <p>The facility is located at a distance of removal such that there will be no disturbance to qualifying interest species in any European sites.</p>
Describe any likely changes to the European site:	
<p>Examples of the type of changes to give consideration to include:</p> <p>Reduction or fragmentation of habitat area</p> <p>Disturbance to QI species</p> <p>Habitat or species fragmentation</p> <p>Reduction or fragmentation in species density</p> <p>Changes in key indicators of conservation status value (water quality etc.)</p> <p>Changes to areas of sensitivity or threats to QI</p> <p>Interference with the key relationships that define the structure or ecological function of the site</p> <p>Climate change</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>The Proposed Development site is not located adjacent or within a European site, therefore there is no risk of habitat loss or fragmentation or any effects on QI habitats or species directly or ex-situ.</p>

On the basis of the information supplied, which is considered adequate to undertake a screening determination and having regard to:

- the nature and scale of the proposed development,
- the intervening land uses and distance from European sites,
- the lack of direct connections with regard to the Source-Pathway-Receptor model,

It may be concluded that the proposed development, individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, would not be likely to have a significant effect on the above listed European sites or any other European site, in view of the said sites' conservation objectives.

5.2. Assessment of Potential In-Combination Effects

In-combination effects are changes in the environment that result from numerous human-induced alterations. In-combination effects can be thought of as occurring through two main pathways: first, through persistent additions or losses of the same materials or resource, and second, through the compounding effects as a result of the coming together of two or more effects.

As part of the Screening for an Appropriate Assessment, in addition to the Proposed Development, other relevant plans and projects in the area must also be considered at this stage. This step aims to identify at this early stage any possible significant in-combination effects of the Proposed Development with other such plans and projects on European sites.

A review of the National Planning Application Database was undertaken. The database was then queried for developments granted planning permission within 300m of the Proposed Development within the last three years, these are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Planning applications granted permission in the vicinity of the Proposed Development.

Planning Ref.	Description of development	Comments
186314	Renovation, alterations to elevations, partial demolition, extension and conversion of existing disused building from office and dwelling to 2 no. dwellings and construction of 1 number detached dwellinghouse to the rear of site and all ancillary site works.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
197026	Planning permission for retention of subdivision of 1 no. dwellinghouse to 2 no dwellinghouses, alterations to elevations and all associated site works and planning permission for completion of boundary walls to the rear of the dwellinghouses.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
204913	To alter the roofs of the existing dwellings at 15 & 16 Frances St, Fermoy. These alterations are proposed to eliminate the valleys which would arise following the construction, on the vacant infill site between the dwellings, of two town houses permitted under PA Ref 17/7420. The dwelling at 16 Frances St is a protected structure.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
205237	The demolition of existing structures on site including former dwelling and ancillary buildings and 1) the construction of 1 no. garden centre with ancillary homeware section and restaurant/café; 2) the refurbishment of an existing shed and cottage on site for reuse as ancillary structures to the garden centre. The shed will be used for ancillary storage and the cottage will be used as an ancillary multi-functional space; 3) the provision of a pedestrian footpath along the N72 and all associated ancillary development works including signage, lighting, parking, footpaths, landscaping and drainage. Access will be via the existing entrance on the N72 to the south east of the site and via the provision of a new entrance on the N72 to the north of the site. The proposed development consists of works to a protected structure ('Brian Boru Square – Boundary Walls and Gates' – Protected Structure Reference number 198). A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be submitted to the planning authority with the application.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
205774	1.)The demolition of a single storey existing commercial, and an existing three storey dwelling unit. 2) the construction of a three storey residential development with two own-door apartment blocks (Total 9	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.

Planning Ref.	Description of development	Comments
	no. units) consisting of 4 no.1 bedroom ground floor apartments, 1 no. 1 bedroom first floor apartment 4 no.2 bedroom first floor duplex units, the relocation of the existing advertising billboard, and the creation of a new vehicular entrance off of Oliver Plunkett Hill.	
214060	Permission for retention of the following: (1) single storey extension to existing dwelling (2) single storey unit for art/hobby use (3) single storey garden pavilion (4) shed for domestic storage and all associated site works and services.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
214542	The demolition of an existing open-air stand including ancillary site works and the construction of an all-weather playing pitch including a hurling wall with associated surrounding fencing, ball catching nets and floodlighting and a car park all with associated site works. This development consists of works in the curtilage of a protected structure.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
215459	Works to existing dwelling 1) construction of extensions to front, side and rear, 2) alterations to front elevation to include removal of door at first floor level and insertion of a window, construction of bay window extension at ground floor level and removal of veranda, 3) alterations to rear elevation to include altering height of window on stairs and insertion of a window at ground floor level, 4) demolition of attached domestic garage to rear and 5) construction of attached garage to side elevation and all associated site works.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
215840	Permission to (1) construct a single storey extension to the rear of the existing dwelling, construct a zinc canopy porch to the front of the existing dwelling (2) alterations to windows and doors, upgrade external render (3) upgrade the existing boundary wall and increase width of driveway to accommodate 2 cars (4) and all associated site works.	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
225866	Permission to erect 2 number single storey extensions to the eastern and western gables, of existing storey and a half dwelling house to carry out internal alterations to dwelling and all associated site works	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.
226081	The construction of new single storey side and rear extensions to the existing dwelling house, alterations to elevations of the existing dwelling and associated site works	No potential for in-combination effects given the scale and location of the project.

There are no predicted in-combination effects given that it is predicted that the Proposed Development will have no effect on any European site.

The Cork County Development Plan in complying with the requirements of the Habitats Directive requires that all Projects and Plans that could affect the Natura 2000 sites in the same potential Zone of Influence of the Proposed Development site would be initially screened for Appropriate Assessment and if requiring Stage 2 AA, that appropriate employable mitigation measures would be put in place to avoid, reduce or ameliorate negative impacts. In this way any, in-combination impacts with Plans or Projects for the proposed development area and surrounding townlands in which the proposed development site is located, would be avoided.

The listed developments have been granted permission in most cases with conditions relating to sustainable development by the consenting authority in compliance with the relevant Local Authority Development Plan and in compliance with the Local Authority requirement with regard to the Habitats Directive. The development cannot have received planning permission without having met the consenting authority requirement in this regard.

Any new applications for the Proposed Development area will be assessed on a case by case basis *initially* by Cork County Council which will determine the requirement for AA Screening as per the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

6. Conclusion

There is no direct connectivity to any European sites within or outside the potential Zone of Influence.

There are no predicted effects on any European sites given:

- The lack of direct connectivity between the Proposed Development and any hydrological pathways; there are no watercourses within the Proposed Development boundary and there is no connectivity between the Proposed Development site and any watercourses that lead to the River Blackwater;
- The sequence of gully work to be followed is to close off and secure inlets and outlets prior to breaking out the chambers. This effectively removes the pathway to the River Blackwater. The gully is replaced and the drainage recommissioned.
- There are no likely risks of contaminated surface water run off reaching the river and impacting qualifying interest habitats and species of the Blackwater River SAC during the construction phase.
- There are no predicted emissions to air, water or the environment during the construction or operational phases that would result in significant effects.

It has been objectively concluded by Moore Group Environmental Services that:

1. The Proposed Development is not directly connected with, or necessary to the conservation management of the European sites considered in this assessment.
2. The Proposed Development is not likely to either directly or indirectly significantly affect the Qualifying interests or Conservation Objectives of the European sites considered in this assessment.
3. The Proposed Development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is not likely to have significant effects on a European site.
4. It is possible to conclude that significant effects can be excluded at the screening stage.

It can be *excluded*, on the basis of objective information, that the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

An appropriate assessment is not, therefore, required.

A final determination will be made by the competent authority in this regard.

7. References

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2010) Guidance on Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland (as amended February 2010).

European Commission (2000) Managing Natura 2000 sites: the provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC.

European Commission (2007) Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC: Clarification of the concepts of: alternative solutions, imperative reasons of overriding public interests, compensatory measures, overall coherence and opinion of the Commission. European Commission, Brussels.

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

European Commission (2021) Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, Brussels 28.9.21.

European Commission (2021) Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive, Brussels 12.10.21.

NPWS (2019) The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin.

NPWS (2023) National Parks and Wildlife Service Metadata available online at <https://www.npws.ie/maps-and-data>

Office-of-the-Planning-Regulator (2021) Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management OPR Practice Note PN01. March 2021