

Waltham Abbey Bus Stop/Stand (Terminal)

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

National Transport Authority

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and project description

AECOM Ireland Limited ('AECOM') was commissioned by the National Transport Authority (NTA) to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening of Waltham Abbey Bus Stop/Stand and ancillary works (herein referred to as the 'Development') in County Cork. The extent of the Development, as shown in Appendix A Figure 1, is herein referred to as the 'Site'.

The Site is located in a built-up residential and commercial area on the outskirts of Cork City, along Old Fort Road (also known as L2263). The approximate Irish Central Grid Reference of the Site is W 59125 70900 (ITM: 559078, 570940). There are no watercourses within the Site. The nearest watercourse to the Development is the River Lee, which is approximately 628 m north of the Site. From the point at which River Lee is closest to the Site, it is approximately 6.5 km downstream to Cork Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA). The River Lee is separated from the Site by extensive hard-standing surfaces, including roads and residential buildings as well as grasslands and woodlands parcels.

As part of the BusConnects Cork programme, the bus network in Cork has been comprehensively redesigned to provide over 50% more services than the current existing ones. The bus programme aims to serve additional areas, provide more 24-hour operations and make services more accessible with a greater number of people within walking distance of a high frequency bus. It is planned to deliver these benefits during 2025 and 2026.

A detailed operational review of the new bus network has identified the shorter-term stop and terminus alterations needed to support the introduction of the new bus system. The Development will form part of the new bus network redesign and enhance the network in County Cork.

The works required for the Development comprise the following:

- Proposed bus layby to be installed in the existing verge;
- Accessible kerbing to be provided along the length of the eastbound and westbound bus boarding area;
- Uncontrolled crossing with tactile paving to be installed at the existing crossing point across Castlewest Shopping Centre access;
- Existing centreline to be adjusted to allow for a minimum of 3.2m wide lane widths;
- Drainage gullies to be installed within the proposed layby;
- Existing coach set down sign to be relocated and installed east of the proposed bus stop;
- Four existing street trees to be removed / felled;
- Renewal / replacement of other road drainage, signage and markings as might be necessary;
- Existing road verge to be tied-in with new levels;
- Proposed three seated bench to be constructed from the rear of the existing footway;
- New TFI branded bus pole with flag mounted in RS60 socket to be installed; and,
- All other associated ancillary site works.

1.2 Legislative context

Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, which is more commonly known as the 'Habitats Directive', requires Member States of the European Union (EU) to take measures to maintain or restore, at favourable conservation status, natural habitats and wild species of fauna and flora of Community interest. The provisions of the Habitats Directive require that Member States designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for habitats listed in Annex I and for species listed in Annex II. Similarly, Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds, which is more commonly known as the 'Birds Directive', provides a framework for the conservation and management of wild birds. It also requires Member States to identify and classify Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for rare or vulnerable species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive, as well as for certain regularly occurring migratory species. Collectively, SACs and SPAs are known as 'European sites'.

In the Republic of Ireland, the habitats and / or species which are the reason(s) for designation of an SAC are referred to as 'Qualifying Interests' (QI). The bird species for which particular SPAs are designated are referred to as 'Special Conservation Interests' (SCI).

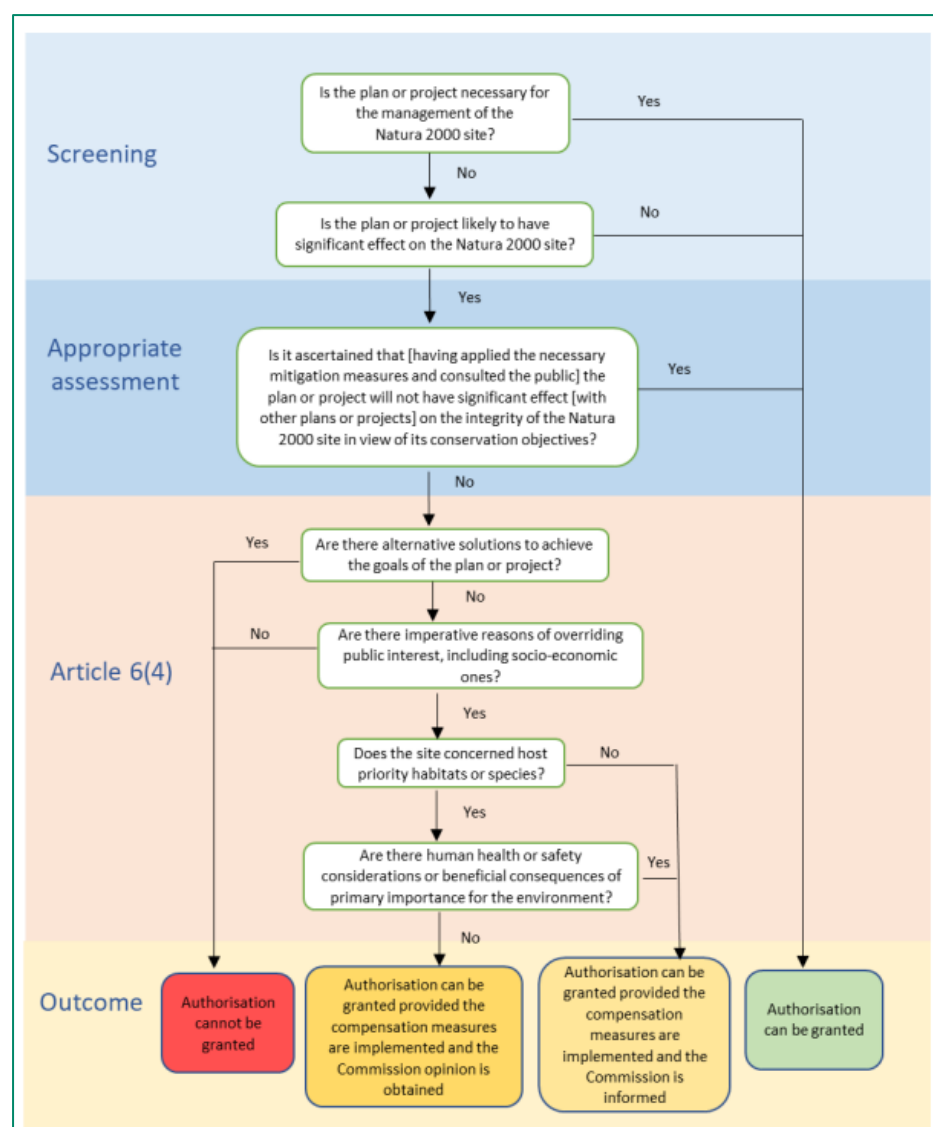
Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, any plan or project which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site but would result in likely significant effects on such a site, either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, must be subject to an AA of its implications for the SAC / SPA in view of the relevant site Conservation Objectives.

The requirements of Article 6(3) are transposed into national law through Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (hereafter abbreviated to the 'PDA') for planning matters, and by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 in relation to other relevant approvals / consents. The legislative provisions for Appropriate Assessment Screening for planning applications are set out in Section 177U of the PDA.

1.3 Overview of the Appropriate Assessment process

The process required by Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive is stepwise and must be followed in sequence. Diagram 1 outlines the stages of AA according to current European Commission (EC) guidance (European Commission, 2021). The stages are essentially iterative, being revisited as necessary in response to more detailed information becoming available, recommendations incorporated, and any relevant changes to the plan or project being made until no significant adverse effects remain.

Diagram 1. The stages in assessment of plans and projects in relation to European sites



Source: European Commission (2021).

The first step in the process is to ascertain whether a plan or project is directly connected with, or necessary to, the management of a European site, and if not, in view of best available scientific knowledge, whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the European Site either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, and, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives. This is often referred to as 'AA Screening'. The outcome of the AA Screening will determine if further AA of the plan or project is required.

Whilst the various steps involved in the AA process must be carried out by a Competent Authority, project proponents or their consultants may undertake a form of screening to establish if an AA is required and provide advice or may submit the information necessary to allow the Competent Authority to conduct a screening of an application for consent. Specifically, Section 177U(3) states that "in carrying out a screening for appropriate assessment of a proposed development a competent authority may request such information from the applicant as it may consider necessary to enable it to carry out that screening and may consult with such persons as it considers appropriate...".

This Report therefore considers the potential for likely significant effects from the Development on European sites, both alone and in-combination with other plans or projects, and provides the information needed for Cork City Council to undertake an AA Screening of the Development, as well as giving AECOM's own opinion on the requirement for the next step in the AA process.

1.4 Sources of guidance

This Report has been prepared in accordance with / with cognisance to the following European Commission (EC) guidance documents:

- *Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly affecting Natura 2000 Sites: Methodological Guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2021).
- *Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly affecting Natura 2000 Sites: A Summary* (European Commission, 2022).
- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: the provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission, 2018).

In addition, the following sources of guidance were also considered when to during the preparation of this Report:

- *Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management* (Office of the Planning Regulation (OPR), 2021).
- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland* (Department of the Environmental Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), 2010).
- *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular Letter National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) 1/10 & PSSP 2/10* (NPWS, 2010).

2. Relevant European sites

A search of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) online maps (EPA, 2025) was carried out to identify European sites within the potential zone of influence (Zoi) of the Development. The potential Zoi comprised an area up to at least 15 km of the Development, which is considered the maximum distance where potential impacts could affect QI / SCIs, given the size, scale and nature of the Development.

This search focused on the surroundings of the Site for construction and operational impacts but was extended to identify European sites further afield which may be hydrologically connected to the Development, or sites designated for QI / SCI species with extensive home ranges (and dependence on functionally linked habitats), such as migratory fish species, otter *Lutra lutra*, and certain non-breeding waterbird species.

This search identified one European site which could potentially be connected to the Development: Cork Harbour SPA. Details of this SPA are given in Table 1. The distance cited as the shortest boundary to boundary distance 'as the crow flies'.

Table 1. European sites which could potentially be connected to the Development

Site name [site code]	Summary of site and relevant QI / SCI	Relationship to the Development
Cork Harbour SPA [004030]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> [A004] • Great crested grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> [A005] • Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> [A017] • Grey heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i> [A028] • Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> [A048] • Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i> [A050] • Teal <i>Anas crecca</i> [A052] • Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i> [A054] • Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i> [A056] • Red-breasted merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i> [A069] • Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> [A130] • Golden plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> [A140] • Grey plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> [A141] • Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> [A142] • Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i> [A149] • Black-tailed godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i> [A156] • Bar-tailed godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i> [A157] • Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i> [A160] • Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i> [A162] • Black-headed gull <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> [A179] • Common gull <i>Larus canus</i> [A182] • Lesser black-backed gull <i>Larus fuscus</i> [A183] • Common tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> [A193] • Wetland and waterbirds [A999] 	Approximately 10.9 km east with no direct hydrological connection

3. Test of likely significant effects

3.1 Considering the Development alone

The Site is not located within any European site, and the Development is not connected with or necessary to the management of any European site.

The Development involves minor works including the addition of a new bus stop and layby along the Old Fort Road, as well as the construction / regrading of a footway and carriageway, uncontrolled crossing with tactile paving, kerbing, kerb dropping and re-levelling of the verge, installation of a three-seated bench and all other associated ancillary works such as drainage (discussed below), markings, and signage. The Development will also require the removal of four street trees along Old Fort Road to facilitate the works and there will be some vegetation maintenance works required to trim any overhanging scrub vegetation that may obstruct works. However, the majority of the Development works will occur on existing hard-standing surfaces and roadside grassland verges. There are no habitats present within the Site which could be used by the SCI species of Cork Harbour SPA or the QI / SCI of any other European sites, as the Site is located along an existing busy road in a local business and residential district.

According to Cutts *et al.* (2013), disturbance of waterbirds can occur at distances of up to 300 m from construction works. There are habitats, outside of the boundaries of Cork Harbour SPA, within 300 m of the Development, which could be used by SCIs of Cork Harbour SPA such as the Ballincollig sport pitches to the north of the Site. However, the minor works of the Development will be temporary, and the works will be of a similar nature to existing background levels of human activity from the Old Fort Road and nearby residential estates and commercial premises. Thus, any SCI species that occur in proximity to the Site would already be habituated to existing levels of disturbance in the area. In addition, there are agricultural fields to the north, south and south-east of the Site which are more suitable for SCI species and more likely expected to be used by SCIs. These green fields are at least 500 m from the Development and far beyond the established disturbance distance quoted by Cutts *et al.* (2013) and so, disturbance of SCI species is highly unlikely to occur. As such, there is no potential for likely significant effects as a result of the Development.

The works associated with the construction of the Development are very minor, and the potential for waterborne pollution to be generated is very low. While there will be some minor drainage works, with renewal / replacement of road drainage along the Development including the addition of two gullies, and removal of one gully, run-off from the works will then enter the existing drainage system and will be subject to the same level of treatment as existing surface water flows. There are no watercourses located within the Site and hence no direct hydrological connection from the Site to Cork Harbour SPA. Likely significant effects from the Development in relation to waterborne pollution are, therefore, excluded.

Guidance published by the Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) advises that air quality impacts can arise up to a distance of around 50 m of works (IAQM, 2024). As discussed in Table 1, the closest European site to the Development, as the crow flies, is Cork Harbour SPA, approximately 10.9 km east. Therefore, direct atmospheric pollution to any European site can be excluded. Furthermore, there are no QI / SCIs from nearby European sites sensitive to atmospheric pollution that rely on supporting habitats within 50 m of the Site. It should also be noted that construction-generated dust and vehicular emissions would be minimal for the minor and temporary works required. Overall, it is concluded that likely significant effects from the Development in relation to atmospheric pollution can be excluded.

The operation of the Development will not differ in any material way to the current baseline environment. Old Fort Road is an existing urban road that results in surface runoff from impermeable surfaces and airborne emissions from road traffic. Thus, in terms of potential impact sources, there will be no increase in disturbance of QI / SCI, and there will be no increase in emissions of waterborne or airborne pollutants. The urban drainage system will remain unchanged, and there will be no increase in surface runoff or possible inputs of pollutants.

3.2 In-combination effects

Cumulative effects can result from individually insignificant but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time or concentrated in a location. Effects which arise in-combination with other projects or plans must be considered as part of AA Screening. In accordance with OPR (2021) guidance, the assessment of in-combination effects must examine:

- Completed projects.
- Projects which are approved but not completed.
- Proposed projects (i.e. for which an application for approval or consent has been made, including refusals subject to appeal and not yet determined).
- Proposals in adopted plans.
- Proposals in finalised draft plans formally published or submitted for consultation or adoption.

A review of the National Planning Application Database (DoHLGH, 2025), An Bord Pleanála's (An Bord Pleanála, 2025) database, and Cork City Council's online planning application register (Cork City Council, 2025) was carried out to identify any planning applications from the last five years within 1 km of the Development. Most recent planning applications identified are small-scale residential and community applications, with some larger residential applications included.

However, as discussed above, no impacts or effects are considered possible from the Development itself to Cork Harbour SPA, or any other European site. Where there is no possibility of an effect from a development to occur (as opposed to a small but insignificant effect, or a significant effect), there cannot be any in-combination effects with other projects or plans. On this basis, it is assessed that there will be no in-combination effects of the Development of any European sites.

For completeness, planning applications within 1 km which are somewhat larger in scale are discussed below. It should be noted that due to their similar location in relation to European sites (i.e. no direct hydrological connection, a general absence of suitable supporting habitats in their vicinity), it is also highly unlikely that any of the listed planning applications are associated with likely significant effects on European sites.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2341760: Located Old Fort Road, Ballincollig, approximately 306 m from the Site. Permission for the construction of a temporary car park for four years, to serve a HSE Enhanced Community Facility granted under Cork City Council Ref. No. 22/41092 and all ancillary development works.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2039380: Located at Junction of Station Road and Church View, Ballincollig approximately 359 m from the Site. Permission for installation of a 0.50 m x 0.87 m x 1.62 m (LxWxH) above ground enclosure, to house a new natural gas District Regulating Installation including a 3 m high 'lamp post' style relief vent stack with all ancillary services and associated site works to replace the existing below ground natural gas regulating unit.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2139822: Located at Baker Street, Ballincollig, Cork, approximately 362 m from the Site. Permission for the construction of a residential development containing 16 no. apartments at Bakers Street, Ballincollig, Cork, comprising eight no. 1 bedroom apartments and eight no. 2 bedroom duplex units in a three block arrangement of three no. storeys as follows: (A) 3 storey apartment Block A to contain 8 units comprising 4 no. 1 bedroom apartments and 4 no. 2 bedroom duplex apartments (B) 3 storey Apartment Block B to contain 4 units comprising 2 no. 1 bedroom apartments and 2 no. 2 bedroom duplex apartments, (C) 3 storey Apartment Block C to contain 4 units comprising 2 no. 1 bedroom apartments and 2 no. 2 bedroom duplex apartments with all apartments in the proposed scheme all with their own private external balcony/terrace, (D) New site vehicular and pedestrian entrances off Baker Street with circulation roadway and footpaths and 10 no. car parking spaces, (E) External bikes parking and enclosed bin storage area, (F) Hard and soft landscaping including open space and boundary treatments and all associated site drainage, utilities and site services and associated site works.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2140554: Located at Old Fort Gate, Ballincollig, Cork, approximately 411 m from the Site. Permission for the construction of a residential development at Old Fort Gate, Ballincollig, Cork, comprising 16 no. apartments (10 no. 1 bedroom apartments and 6 no. 2 bedroom apartments) in a four-storey building and all associated site development works including car parking, bicycle and bin storage, drainage, public lighting, landscaping and amenity areas. The development will have access via Old Fort Gate and Powdermills Road and a pedestrian crossing will also be provided on Powdermills Road.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2543781: Located at Ballincollig Community College, Innishmore, Ballincollig, Co. Cork, approximately 438 m from the Site. Permission sought by Schools Public Private Partnership (Ireland) Limited for the single-storey extension to the northwestern side of the existing school building. The extension is circa 1376m² accommodates of Special Educational Needs (SEN), additional specialist rooms of a science lab, woodwork/ and associated site work, which includes an access roadway, parking associated with SEN and landscaping.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2543804: Located at Texoil, Link Road, Ballincollig, Cork, approximately 677 m from the Site. Permission for development at Texoil, Link Road, Ballincollig, Co. Cork. The development will consist of installation of interceptor tank and all associated site works.

4. AA Screening statement

The need for the next stage of AA can only be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, and in light of the conservation objectives of relevant European sites, that the Development, either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, could not have likely significant effects on any European site.

Following the assessment of the impacts and subsequent likelihood for significant effects of the Development on Cork Harbour SPA, no pathways for impacts were identified between the Site and any European sites, and therefore there is no likelihood of effects, significant or otherwise, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.

Based on the information provided in this Report, it is AECOM's opinion that there is no requirement to proceed to the next stage of AA or for a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) to be prepared for the Development.

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Appendix A Figures

Figure 1. Site location and European sites potentially connected to the Development

