

Ballycurreen Industrial Estate (Eastbound & Westbound)

Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

National Transport Authority

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Table of contents

1.	Introduction	1
1.1	Background and project description	1
1.2	Legislative context	1
1.3	Overview of the Appropriate Assessment process	2
2.	Relevant European sites	4
3.	Test of likely significant effects	5
3.1	Considering the Development alone	5
3.2	In-combination effects	5
4.	AA Screening statement	8
5.	References	9
	Appendix A Figures	10

Figures

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

Tables

Table 1. European sites which could potentially be connected to the Development..... 4

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 Ballycurren Industrial Estate Eastbound and Westbound Bus Stops 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 along Ballycurren Road (R851) (also known as Airport Road), adjacent to the Top Security Service in County Cork. The approximate Irish Central Grid Reference of the Site is W 67468 68469 (ITM coordinates: 567421, 568508). The nearest waterbody to the Site is Industrial Estate Togher Stream, located approximately 220 m to the east. From the point at which Industrial Estate Togher Stream is closest to the Site, it is approximately 4.1 km downstream to Cork Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA). Industrial Estate Togher Stream is separated from the Site by extensive hardstanding surfaces, including roads, residential buildings and industrial developments.

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:

- 1) Proposed buildout to be installed into the carriageway from the northern footway;
- 2) 160 mm accessible kerbing to be provided along the length of the eastbound bus boarding area;
- 3) 2.4m wide uncontrolled crossing with tactile paving at either side road surrounding the two bus stops;
- 4) Removal of existing bus stop pole, signs, road markings buff blister paving, and kerb;
- 5) Regrading of existing footway and construction of new footway;
- 6) Proposed footway extension on the western side of the Curraghconway Court junction;
- 7) Installation of new bus poles with flag. At the eastbound bus stop, the pole will be removed for the installation of a bus shelter (to be determined by the Applicant at a later stage);
- 8) Renewal/replacement of road drainage, signage and markings as required; and,
- 9) 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 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).

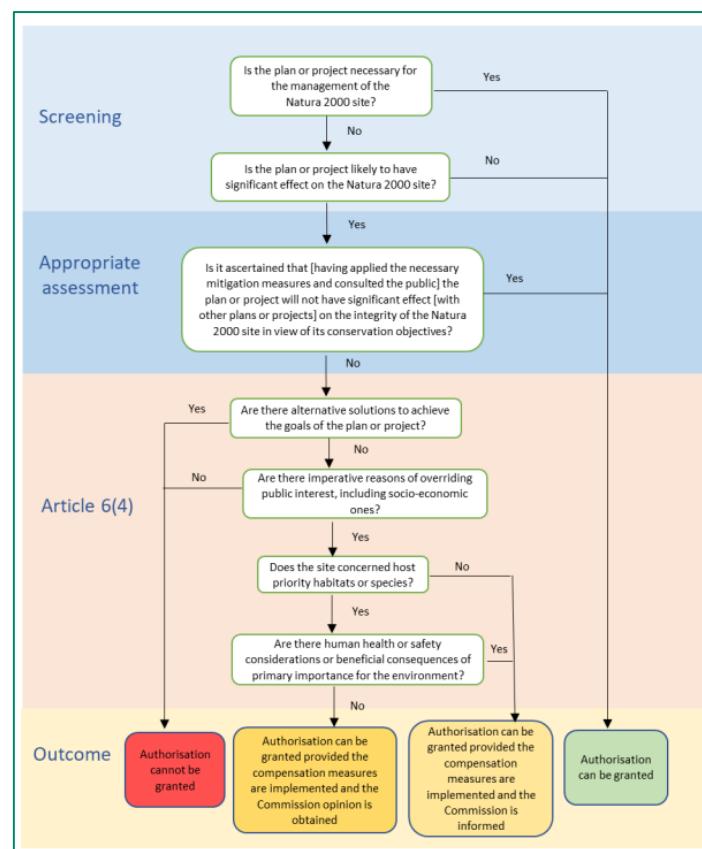
Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, any plan or project which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site but would result in likely significant effects on such a site, either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, must be subject to 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** below 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 (taken from European Commission (2021))



The first step in the sequence of tests is to establish whether an AA is required. This is often referred to as 'AA Screening'. The purpose of AA Screening is to determine, in view of best available scientific knowledge, whether a plan or project, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, could have likely significant effects on a European site, in view of that site's Conservation Objectives.

Whilst the various steps involved in the AA process must be carried out by a Competent Authority, under Section 177U(3) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), 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 further AA.

2. Relevant European sites

A search of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) maps website was carried out to identify European sites within the Zone of Influence where these impacts could affect QI/SCIs to at least 15 km of the Development. This search focused on the surroundings of the Site for construction 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 geese species. This search identified two European sites which could potentially be connected to the Development: Great Island Channel SAC and Cork Harbour SPA. Details of each site are given in **Table 1**. Distances quoted are cited as the shortest boundary to boundary distance 'as the crow flies', unless otherwise specified. Hydrological downstream distances are given where appropriate.

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

Site name [site code]	Summary of Qualifying Interests/Special Conservation Interests	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 2.8 km to the east of the Site with no direct hydrological connection.
Great Island Channel SAC [001058]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Atlantic salt meadows <i>Glaucococcinellietalia maritimae</i> [1330] 	Approximately 9.4 km to the east of the Site with no direct hydrological connection.

3. Test of likely significant effects

3.1 Considering the Development alone

The Development involves minor works including the installation of two 18 m bus cages with bus stops, 2.4 m wide uncontrolled crossings with tactile paving, proposed kerbs, buff blister paving, footway construction and associated, signage, markings, other associated ancillary works and bus shelter clearance area for future bus shelter. There will also be some minor 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 hardstanding surfaces. 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 on an existing road within a highly urbanised area.

According to Cutts *et al.* (2013), disturbance of waterbirds due to visual and noise disturbance can occur at distances of up to 300 m from construction works. However, the only greenfield land within this distance of the Site comprise private gardens and green squares all within a highly urbanised setting and not considered to be suitable supporting habitats for SCI birds. The closest habitat that would be expected to be used by SCI species from the Cork Harbour SPA are agricultural fields to the south and west of the Site which are located over 400 m from the Development and beyond the established disturbance distance quoted by Cutts *et al.* (2013). Overall, there are no likely significant effects from the Development in relation to visual and noise disturbance.

The works associated with the construction of the Development are very minor, and the potential for waterborne pollution to be generated is very low. Any run-off from the works will 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 Great Island Channel SAC or 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 2.8 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. Ballycurren Road (R851) is an existing urban road in an industrial setting 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 Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) 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; and,
- proposals in finalised draft plans formally published or submitted for consultation or adoption.

A review of the National Planning Application Database (NPAD), An Bord Pleanála's (ABP) database and Cork City Council ePlan online inquiry website was carried out to identify any planning applications from the last five years within 1 km of the Development. Most recent planning applications are small scale industrial and commercial applications.

As discussed above, no effects are considered possible from the Development itself. Where there is no possibility of an effect from a scheme to occur (as opposed to a small but insignificant effect, or a significant effect), there cannot be any in-combination effect with other projects or plans. The vast majority of planning applications within 1 km of the Development are small-scale residential, community and industrial applications. 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. 2241671: Located at Unit 21A Ballycurren Industrial Estate, Kinsale Road Cork and Industrial building at Ballycurren, Industrial Estate Kinsale Road, Cork City, approximately 85 m from the Site. The development involves the installation of an approximately 337 kilowatt hour (kWh) rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) array consisting in combination of approximately 812 no. panels (approximately 1,599.64m²) partially extending to an existing rooftop solar PV array (approximately 2,513.72m²) located on Unit 21A, with the extension situated on the most southern roof area of this industrial building; and partially on a vacant roof area located on an adjacent industrial building located to the northeast, with all the proposed panels mounted directly on the roof surface of the buildings and electrically connected to the existing electrical plant rooms via a combined total of four inverters mounted on the wall of the existing plant rooms, and all associated site works.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2240863: Located at Unit 21A, Ballycurren Industrial Estate, Kinsale Road, Cork City, approximately 150 m from the Site. The development involves the installation of a 516.8 kilowatt-peak (kWp) rooftop solar PV array on the roof of an existing factory building consisting of 1,276 no. 405 watt peak (Wp) Suntech Power panels mounted directly on the roof surface, electrically connected to the existing electrical plant room and inverters mounted on the wall of the existing plant room, and all associated work.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2139886: Located at Avoncourt Packaging Ltd, Unit 2, Ballycurren Industrial Estate, Airport Road, Cork City, approximately 180 m from the Site. The development involves the installation of a 199kWp rooftop solar PV array (984m²) on the roof of the existing Avoncourt factory building consisting of 585 no. 340Wp JA Solar panels mounted directly on the roof surface, electrically connected to the existing electrical plant room via four Solis inverters mounted on the wall of the existing plant room, to the rear of the existing factory building and all associated work.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2241608: Located at Avoncourt Packaging Ltd, Unit 2 Ballycurren Industrial Estate, Airport Road, Cork City, approximately 190 m from the Site. The development involves the installation of a 215.8kWp rooftop solar PV array extension (approximately 1,020m²), consisting of approximately 520 no. panels, to an existing rooftop solar PV array (approximately 1032m²), with the proposed panels mounted directly on the roof surface, electrically connected to the existing electrical plant room via four inverters mounted on the wall of the existing plant room, located to the rear of the existing factory building and all associated work.

Planning Application Reference ABP. 314025/ CCC. 2140353: Located at Kinsale Road, Ballycurren, Cork City, approximately 340 m from the Site. The development involves the demolition and removal of an existing dwelling and ancillary structures and the construction of a mixed-use residential and commercial development in 13 no. blocks and all associated ancillary development works, including an ESB substation, landscaping, and amenity areas, solar panels (at roof level), bin storage, and car and bicycle parking.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2443306: Located at the Maltings, South Link, Togher, Cork City, approximately 660 m from the Site. The development involves the construction of reduced emissions malting infrastructure as part of the decarbonisation road map for the business. The development will consist of the construction of a 4-storey energy building with roof mounted equipment, single-storey utilities building, a kiln with roof mounted ancillary equipment, a germination vessel with roof mounted ancillary equipment and adjoining three storey aeration building, associated malt conveying system including a 6-storey elevator enclosure, demolition of existing single-storey storage building and all associated site works including, connections to existing on site services, surface water management, concrete paving and all ancillary site works as part of the malting plant development project at their site at the Maltings, South Link, Togher, Cork City.

Planning Application Reference CCC. 2543882: Located at Blackash Road, Curraghconway, South Link Road, Cork, approximately 720 m from the Site. Permission for retention and completion and planning permission for alterations to the plant/tool hire and warehouse building permitted by CCoC Ref. no. 19/4036 (ABP Ref. no. PL04.305248) and all ancillary site development works at Blackash Road, Curraghconway, South Link Road, Co. Cork. Permission for retention and completion is being sought for amendments to the permitted building which include:

- The modification of the building footprint.
- The reconfiguration of the permitted building including the creation of a new internal mezzanine floor level to accommodate administrative, staff welfare and storage areas.
- Revised elevational treatments and finishes.
- Planning permission for is being sought for:
- The change of use and amalgamation of the permitted plant/tool hire and warehouse building to use as a storage and distribution warehouse facility with ancillary administrative and service areas.

All other ancillary site development works including revised parking, hardstand and landscape areas, the installation of rooftop PV panels and fascia signage.

Planning Application Reference ABP. 312866: Located at the former CMP Dairy Site, known as Creamfields, Kinsale Road and Tramore Road, Cork City, approximately 1 km from the Site. The development involves the demolition of existing structures, construction of 352 no. apartments, 257 no. build-to-rent apartments, creche, and associated site works.

4. AA Screening statement

In view of best available scientific knowledge and on the basis of objective information, likely significant effects from the Development on European sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, can be excluded.

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.

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Appendix A Figures

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

