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Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) Report



***Páirc na hAbhainn,
Athenry,
Co. Galway***



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Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) Report – Páirc na hAbhainn, Athenry, Co. Galway

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Report

A Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) has been undertaken by Ash Ecology & Environmental Ltd (AEE) on behalf of Galway County Council (GCC) for the proposed residential development of 16 no. two-storey houses at Páirc na hAbhainn, Athenry, Co. Galway. The site location is shown on Figure 1. This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna (the Habitats Directive), as transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), and with regard to the OPR Practice Note PN01 (2021) and the European Commission Methodological Guidance (EC, 2021).

This report provides information on, and assesses the potential for, the proposed development to impact on the Natura 2000 network (hereafter referred to as European sites).¹ An AA is required if significant effects on European sites arising from a proposed development cannot be ruled out at the screening stage, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. It is the responsibility of the competent authority to make a decision as to whether or not the proposed development is likely to have significant effects on European sites, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects.

This report constitutes the information required by the competent authority — An Bord Pleanála (ABP), in its capacity as competent authority for this Part 10 application — to make that determination. Having undertaken Stage 1 Screening for Appropriate Assessment, it has been concluded that a likely significant effect on the Galway Bay Complex SAC (Site Code: 000268) and the Inner Galway Bay SPA (Site Code: 004031) cannot be excluded solely. Accordingly, this report screens in both sites and a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared by AEE separately. The NIS (AEE, May 2026) should be read in conjunction with this report.

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report (AEE, May 2026) and an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) (AEE, May 2026) have also been prepared and should be read alongside this report.

¹ The Natura 2000 network is a European network of important ecological sites, as defined under Article 3 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, which comprises both special areas of conservation and special protection areas. Special conservation areas are sites hosting the natural habitat types listed in Annex I, and habitats of the species listed in Annex II, of the Habitats Directive, and are established under the Habitats Directive itself. Special protection areas are established under Article 4 of the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC for the protection of endangered species of wild birds. The aim of the network is to aid the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

In Ireland these sites are designed as European sites - defined under the Planning Acts and/or the Birds and Habitats Regulations as (a) a candidate site of Community importance, (b) a site of Community importance, (c) a candidate special area of conservation, (d) a special area of conservation, (e) a candidate special protection area, or (f) a special protection area. They are commonly referred to in Ireland as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

1.2 Competency of Assessor

This report has been prepared by Aisling Walsh MCIEEM, AMILP, MSc., who is a Full Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and Managing Director of Ash Ecology & Environmental Ltd (AEE). Aisling holds an MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation (TCD), B.Sc. (Hons) Zoology (NUIG) and B.Sc. Applied Aquatic Science (GMIT), along with a Certificate of Competence in Environmental Noise Measurement from the Institute of Acoustics. She is a Licensed Bat Ecologist (NPWS) and an Associate Member of the Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP).

Aisling has over 18 years of experience in environmental consultancy and environmental assessment, including extensive experience in preparing Screening for Appropriate Assessment Reports, Stage II Natura Impact Statements, Ecological Impact Assessments, Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, bat surveys, and habitat surveys across a wide range of project types and ecological sensitivities. AEE is a Registered Practice of the CIEEM (Appendix A).

1.3 Project Description

The proposed development is located at Páirc na hAbhainn, Athenry, Co. Galway (Figure 1). The site comprises improved agricultural grassland with grassy meadow boundary features (Figures 2 and 4). The proposed site layout is shown on Figure 3a and the surface water and wastewater drainage layout is shown on Figure 3b.

The proposed development comprises:

- Construction of 16 no. two-storey houses on a greenfield site accessed from the existing Páirc na hAbhainn housing estate, comprising 8 no. 3-bedroom semi-detached houses and 8 no. 2-bedroom terraced houses.
- Construction of hard and soft landscape works including new roadways and paths, provision of 32 no. car parking spaces (including 2 no. universal access spaces), 8 no. cycle parking spaces, public open space, public lighting, signage, boundary treatments, and all associated infrastructure.

The site is located on a greenfield site to the south of the existing Páirc na hAbhainn housing estate, Athenry, Co. Galway, accessed via the existing road network at Baunmore, connected to the R347 Dublin Road. The red line boundary measures approximately 0.651 hectares and is triangular in shape, bounded by the rear boundary walls and timber fencing of Páirc na hAbhainn estate to the north, old stone walls to the east and south, and the existing road to the west. The site topography is steep, sloping approximately 5.5 metres from its lowest to highest point, with the most significant gradient at the north-east corner.

Foul water from the proposed development will connect to the Athenry Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP D0193). Irish Water has confirmed feasibility of the connection without infrastructure upgrade (Pre-Connection Enquiry reference CDS25006844). Surface water will be managed through a comprehensive Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) incorporating a Graf Eco Bloc attenuation tank with hydrobrake optimum outflow control device, heavy-duty road

gullies (D400), a silt trap, and a Class 1 petrol interceptor, before controlled discharge to the existing surface water network (Figure 3b). A Planning Stage Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be required as a planning condition.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Desk-Based Studies

A desk-based review of relevant information sources was completed. The following data sources were accessed in May 2026:

- Online data on European sites, protected habitats and species as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) at www.npws.ie, including site synopses and Conservation Objectives documents for the Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268) and Inner Galway Bay SPA (004031)
- NPWS (2013) Conservation Objectives: Galway Bay Complex SAC 000268. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- NPWS (2013) Conservation Objectives: Inner Galway Bay SPA 004031. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- Online species records from the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) at www.biodiversityireland.ie
- Water Framework Directive surface water and groundwater status data (2019–2024) from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at www.epa.ie
- GSI groundwater vulnerability mapping from the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) at www.gsi.ie
- WFD catchment characterisation data from www.catchments.ie
- Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) mapping and aerial photography from www.osi.ie
- Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028
- Athenry Local Area Plan 2024–2030
- IFI (2016) Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and Adjacent to Waters, Inland Fisheries Ireland

2.2 Field Survey

The site was visited by Aisling Walsh on 29th August 2025 for an ecological and habitat survey. Habitats were identified and classified according to *Fossitt (2000)* and *Smith et al. (2011)*. A habitat map is shown on Figure 4. Photographic plates are included in Appendix B.

The main habitats recorded on site were as follows:

- Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1): The dominant habitat, covering the majority of the site. Consists of a ryegrass-dominated sward typical of agriculturally managed fields, characterised by low floristic diversity and evidence of intensive agricultural management. This habitat is of low ecological significance.
- Dry Meadows and Grassy Verges (GS2): A strip of grassy meadow habitat along the northern boundary of the site, adjacent to the existing Páirc na hAbhainn estate. Of low to moderate ecological significance.
- Stone Walls and Hedgerows (BL1/WL1): Old dry-stone walls along the eastern and southern boundaries, with intermittent hawthorn and bramble hedging, providing potential habitat for small mammals, birds and invertebrates.

- Buildings and Artificial Surfaces (BL3): Block walls and timber fencing along the northern boundary. Of low ecological significance.

No High Risk Invasive Species listed under S.I. No. 477/2011 (e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Indian Balsam) were recorded on site. No mammal burrows, badger setts, or evidence of other activity were recorded. The site does not support standing water, wetland features, drainage ditches, or any indicator of groundwater influence at the surface.

2.3 Appropriate Assessment Methodology

This Screening for Appropriate Assessment Report has been prepared with regard to the following guidance:

- 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 (European Commission, September 2021)
- OPR Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management (Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021)
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland — Guidance for Planning Authorities (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision)
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10
- Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle (European Commission, 2000)
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission, 2019)

2.3.1 Regulatory Context

Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna (the Habitats Directive) provides the framework for legal protection of habitats and species of European importance. Articles 3 to 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, comprising Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC.

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of its conservation objectives. The competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned.

The Habitats Directive is transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), as amended, and the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

2.3.2 Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1) involves determining whether the proposed project, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on any European site. If the possibility of significant effects cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt, the project must proceed to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (AA), for which a Natura Impact Statement is required.

The screening process involves the following steps:

- Determining whether the project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site
- Describing the details of the project and other plans or projects that may cumulatively affect European sites
- Identifying the potential effects on any European site using a source-pathway-receptor approach
- Assessing the significance of any effects on European sites

2.3.3 Source-Pathway-Receptor Approach

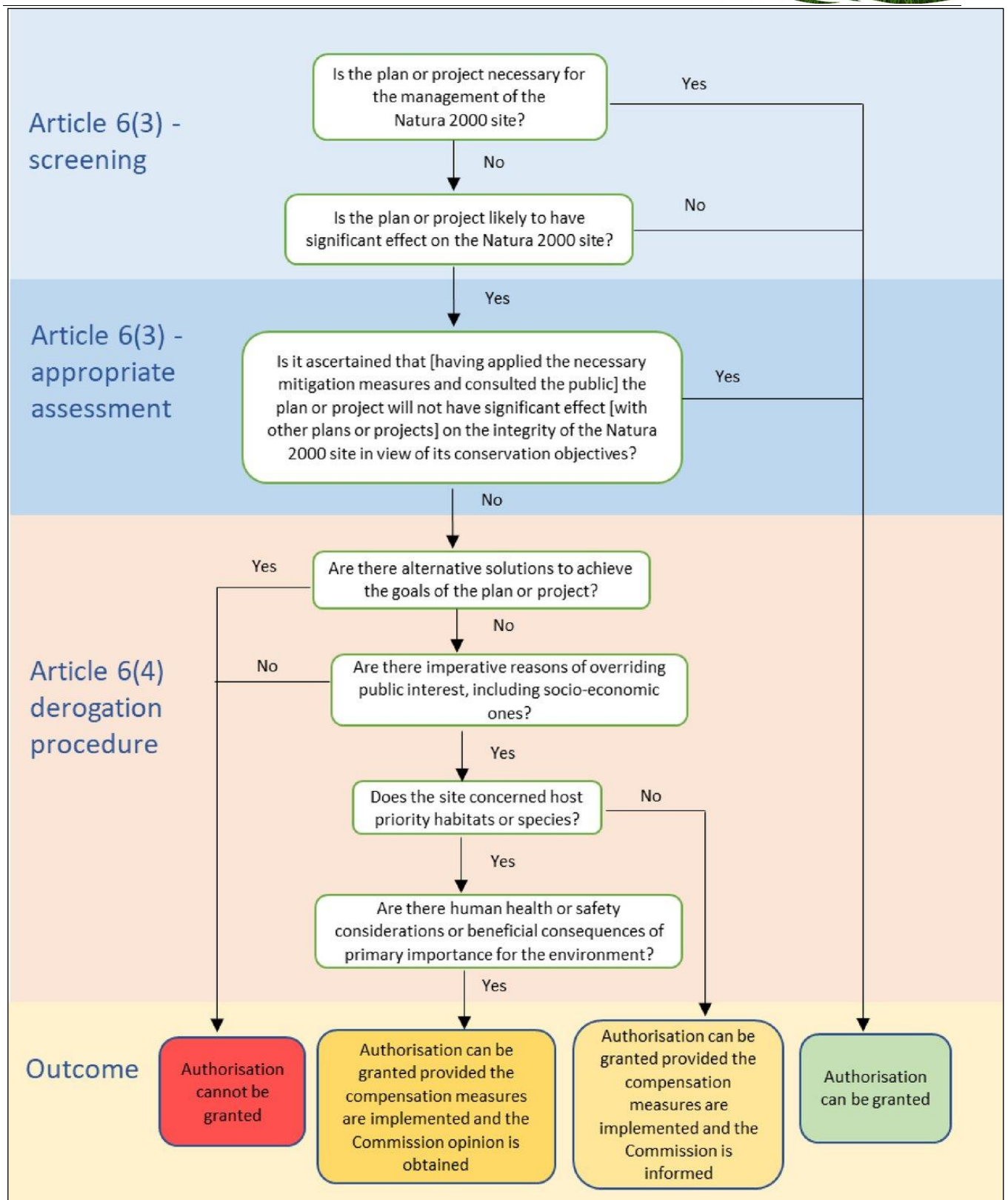
In establishing which European sites are potentially at risk from the proposed development, a source-pathway-receptor approach was applied. In order for an impact to occur, there must be a source (e.g. construction works), a pathway (e.g. surface water drainage), and a receptor (e.g. a European site or its qualifying interests). The absence or removal of any one element means there is no possibility for the impact to occur.

The identification of a source-pathway-receptor link does not automatically mean that significant effects will arise. The likelihood of significant effects will depend upon the characteristics of the source, the pathway, and the receptor. Where a plausible connection exists and cannot be broken on the basis of objective information, the precautionary principle requires that a likely significant effect be assumed and the assessment advanced to Stage 2. The standard of certainty required — that the competent authority must have ascertained beyond reasonable scientific doubt that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the site.

2.3.4 AA Process Stages

The European Commission's Methodological Guidance recommends a four-stage approach. The stages and their applicability to this assessment are described below:²

² Figure 1 of 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 (European Commission, September 2021)



3.0 Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment — Screening

3.1 Zone of Influence and Identification of European Sites

In accordance with the European Commission Methodological Guidance (EC, 2021), a list of Natura 2000 sites that could potentially be affected by the proposed works has been compiled. Adopting the precautionary principle, all SACs and SPAs within a 15 km radius of the site have been identified and assessed. NHAs and pNHAs within 5 km have also been considered. The proposed works do not occur within any European site.

The nearest European site is Rahasane Turlough SAC (Site Code: 000322) at approximately 6.8 km to the south-south-west. The Galway Bay Complex SAC (Site Code: 000268) is located approximately 10.3 km to the south-west. The Inner Galway Bay SPA (Site Code: 004031), which overlaps spatially with the Galway Bay Complex SAC, is located approximately 10.3–11 km to the south-west. Maps showing all SAC and SPA sites within 15 km are shown on Figures 5 and 6 respectively.

Site synopses for the Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268) and Inner Galway Bay SPA (004031), as published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, are attached as Appendix C for reference.

3.2 Source-Pathway-Receptor Analysis

The sources of potential impacts from the proposed development include:

- Construction phase: earthworks, vegetation clearance, construction traffic, noise, dust, potential accidental spillages of fuels or concrete
- Operational phase: surface water runoff from impermeable surfaces, foul water loading, residential activity

The potential pathways examined include:

- Surface water: drainage from the site via the SUDS system to the surface water network and ultimately to the Clarinbridge River (~270 m west of site), flowing approximately 10.3 km south-west to Inner Galway Bay
- Groundwater: the site overlies an area of High GSI groundwater vulnerability (Figure 8). The WFD Groundwater Body status is 'Good' and 'Not at Risk' (2019–2024). The implications of the High vulnerability classification are discussed in Section 4.5
- Air: dust and emissions from construction activities
- Land: direct disturbance to mobile species

The receptors are the qualifying interests (QIs) and special conservation interests (SCIs) of European sites within the Zone of Influence (Zoi).

3.3 European Sites within 15 km — Screening Table

Table 1 identifies all European sites within the 15 km search radius and records the screening conclusion for each. The basis for each screening conclusion is elaborated in Section 4.0.

Table 1 Designated Natura 2000 Sites within 15 km Radius of Site and NHA/pNHA Sites within 5 km

Code	Site Name	Distance	Type	Screening Conclusion
SAC Sites (within 15 km)				
000268	Galway Bay Complex SAC	10.3 km SW	SAC	SCREENED IN. A distant but credible surface water pathway exists via the Clarinbridge River. The site overlies an area of High GSI groundwater vulnerability. Although the WFD Groundwater Body Status is 'Good' and 'Not at Risk', a likely significant effect on water quality-dependent QIs of the SAC cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt. A NIS has been prepared. See Sections 4.5 and 5.0.
000297	Lough Corrib SAC	7.9 km NE/N/NW	SAC	Screened OUT. No hydrological connection. The site drains to the Clarinbridge River system flowing south-west to Galway Bay, not to Lough Corrib. Distance of 7.9 km exceeds any zone of influence for disturbance impacts. The Lesser Horseshoe Bat (a QI of Lough Corrib SAC) is addressed separately in Section 4.2.2.
000322	Rahasane Turlough SAC	6.8 km S/SW	SAC	Screened OUT. The site and Rahasane Turlough are in separate groundwater catchments with no hydrological connection. The Clarinbridge River drainage system does not connect to the turlough groundwater system. Distance of 6.8 km precludes disturbance impacts.
000242	Castletaylor Complex SAC	11.8 km SW	SAC	Screened OUT. No pathway for impacts. Distance and intervening land use preclude any zone of influence.
000606	Lough Fingall Complex SAC	13.2 km SW	SAC	Screened OUT. No pathway for impacts. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
001285	Kiltiernan Turlough SAC	13.7 km SW	SAC	Screened OUT. Separate groundwater catchment. No hydrological connection to the development site. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
002244	Ardrahan Grassland SAC	14.2 km SW	SAC	Screened OUT. No pathway for impacts. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
000304	Lough Rea SAC	14.7 km SE	SAC	Screened OUT. No pathway for impacts. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
SPA Sites (within 15 km)				
004031	Inner Galway Bay SPA	~10.3–11 km SW	SPA	SCREENED IN. The Inner Galway Bay SPA overlaps spatially with the Galway Bay

Code	Site Name	Distance	Type	Screening Conclusion
				Complex SAC. On the same basis as the SAC screen-in, a likely significant effect on the water quality-dependent QI habitats supporting the SPA's bird qualifying interests cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt. A NIS has been prepared. See Sections 4.5 and 5.0.
004089	Rahasane Turlough SPA	7.6 km S/SW	SPA	Screened OUT. No suitable habitat on site for SCI bird species (Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Golden Plover, Wigeon, Shoveler, Coot, Black-tailed Godwit, Black-headed Gull). Site comprises modified grassland with no wetland habitat. Separate groundwater catchment. Distance of 7.6 km precludes disturbance impacts.
004142	Cregganna Marsh SPA	11.5 km SW	SPA	Screened OUT. No suitable habitat for Greenland White-fronted Goose. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
004042	Lough Corrib SPA	11.4 km SW	SPA	Screened OUT. No suitable habitat for SCI bird species. No drainage connection to Lough Corrib. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
004134	Lough Rea SPA	14.7 km SE	SPA	Screened OUT. No suitable habitat for SCI bird species. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
004168	Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA	14.7 km SE/S	SPA	Screened OUT. No suitable habitat for SCI bird species. Distance precludes any zone of influence.
NHA/pNHA Sites (within 5 km)				
N/A	None identified	N/A	N/A	No NHA or pNHA sites are located within 5 km of the proposed development.

4.0 Screening Assessment of Likely Effects

As the proposed development does not overlap with any European site, none of the qualifying interest habitats or species will be directly impacted. The following sections address each potential impact pathway in turn, providing the basis for the screening conclusions recorded in Table 1.

4.1 Habitat Loss and Alteration

There will be no direct habitat loss of any SAC or SPA site. The proposed development is located entirely outside all European site boundaries, the nearest being Rahasane Turlough SAC at 6.8 km. No Annex I habitats are present within or immediately adjacent to the site. Impacts arising from direct habitat loss or alteration to any European site are screened out for all European sites identified in Table 1.

4.2 Disturbance and Displacement of Species

4.2.1 Construction-Phase Disturbance

Construction activities will generate temporary noise, vibration, and visual disturbance. For mammal species such as otter and badger, disturbance effects would not be expected to extend beyond approximately 250 m from works. For most bird species, noise from general construction activities would attenuate to close to background levels within approximately 300 m.

The proposed works are located approximately 270 m from the Clarinbridge River and a minimum of 6.8 km from the nearest European site (Rahasane Turlough SAC/SPA). At these distances, construction disturbance impacts on any Annex II species or SCI bird species associated with European sites are not credible. No Annex II species were recorded on site during the August 2025 survey. The site consists of modified grassland habitat with no wetland, watercourse, or roosting features that could support Annex II species relevant to any European site within the ZOI.

4.2.2 Lesser Horseshoe Bat (Qualifying Interest of Lough Corrib SAC)

The Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) is a qualifying interest (QI) of Lough Corrib SAC (000297, 7.9 km). Desktop review of NBDC records indicates that the closest recorded Lesser Horseshoe Bat records are approximately 5.6–5.8 km to the south-west of the site (Figure 7). This distance is outside the typical 2.5 km foraging and commuting radius for this species. No suitable roost structures (mature trees, traditional buildings, caves or stone walls of sufficient scale) were recorded on site during the field survey. The site comprises open improved grassland with no tree canopy cover. Impacts on Lesser Horseshoe Bat and by extension on Lough Corrib SAC are screened out.

4.2.3 Otter (Qualifying Interest of Galway Bay Complex SAC)

Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is a qualifying interest of the Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268). No otter field signs (spraints, prints, holts, couching sites) were recorded during the site survey. The site is approximately 270 m from the Clarinbridge River, which represents the nearest potential otter habitat. The proposed development does not

include any works within or adjacent to the riverbank. The SUDS drainage design ensures no foul water or untreated surface water discharge to any watercourse. Direct impacts on otter are screened out. Any indirect effect on otter via water quality is considered within the water quality assessment (Section 4.5).

4.3 Habitat and Species Fragmentation

The development site does not function as an ecological corridor between any European sites, nor does it support habitats or species that are functionally linked to any European site. The nearest European sites are separated from the development by extensive areas of existing urban development, road infrastructure, and agricultural land. Habitat fragmentation impacts on all European sites are screened out.

4.4 Changes in Population Density

The proposed development will not cause any reduction in the baseline population of any qualifying species of European sites within 15 km. The site does not support Annex II species or SCI bird species. The small scale of the development (16 no. two-storey houses on 0.651 ha) and the distance to European sites precludes any population-level effects. This impact pathway is screened out for all European sites.

4.5 Impacts on Water Quality

4.5.1 WFD and Catchment Context

The WFD catchment context for the site is shown on Figure 8. The site is located within:

- Hydrometric Area 29 — Galway Bay South East
- WFD Catchment: Corrib
- WFD Sub-Catchment: Clarinbridge_SC_010
- River Sub-Basin: CLARINBRIDGE_030

The Clarinbridge River (approximately 270 m to the west of the site) has a 2019–2024 WFD River Waterbody Status of 'Moderate' and is classified as 'At Risk'. The WFD Groundwater Body Status for the 'Clarinbridge' groundwater body is 'Good' and 'Not at Risk' (2019–2024).

4.5.2 Groundwater Vulnerability

The GSI groundwater vulnerability mapping indicates that the site overlies an area of High groundwater vulnerability (Figure 8 inset). This classification reflects limited natural attenuation capacity of the unsaturated zone and is acknowledged. However, the WFD Groundwater Body Status for the 'Clarinbridge' groundwater body is 'Good' and 'Not at Risk', confirming that the High vulnerability classification has not resulted in deterioration of groundwater quality in the receiving groundwater body.

Furthermore, and critically, the nearest groundwater-dependent European sites — Rahasane Turlough SAC/SPA (6.8–7.6 km) and Kiltiernan Turlough SAC (13.7 km) — lie in a separate groundwater catchment from the proposed development site, with no

hydrological connectivity between them. The High groundwater vulnerability classification does not therefore create a credible pathway to any groundwater-dependent European site. These sites are screened out on this basis.

4.5.3 Surface Water Pathway

Surface water from the development will discharge via the engineered SUDS system (Figure 3b) to the existing municipal surface water network, ultimately connecting to the Clarinbridge River approximately 270 m to the west. The Clarinbridge River flows approximately 10.3 km south-west to the inner bay, where it enters the area of the Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268) and Inner Galway Bay SPA (004031).

The surface water management system comprises a Graf Eco Bloc attenuation tank with hydrobrake optimum outflow control device, heavy-duty road gullies (D400), a silt trap, and a Class 1 petrol interceptor. All foul water will connect to Athenry WWTP (D0193) with confirmed Irish Water pre-connection feasibility (ref. CDS25006844). No foul water will discharge to the surface water system.

The Clarinbridge River at the point nearest to the site (270 m) is an upland river section with no tidal, intertidal, or estuarine characteristics. The qualifying interest habitats of the Galway Bay Complex SAC — mudflats and sandflats [1140], coastal lagoons [1150], large shallow inlets and bays [1160], reefs [1170], and saltmarsh habitats [1310/1330/1410] — exist exclusively at and near the coast, approximately 10.3 km downstream. They are not present at or near the site. Similarly, the wetland habitats [A999] supporting the bird qualifying interests of the Inner Galway Bay SPA are located at the bay.

Notwithstanding the substantial attenuation provided by the engineered drainage design, the distance to the nearest European site (10.3 km), the absence of any direct watercourse connection, and the WFD Moderate/At Risk status of the Clarinbridge River which confirms this is already a managed catchment, AEE has applied the precautionary principle and concluded that a likely significant effect on the water quality-dependent qualifying interests of the Galway Bay Complex SAC and Inner Galway Bay SPA cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt solely on the basis of this indirect pathway. Both sites are therefore screened in and a Natura Impact Statement has been prepared.

4.5.4 Foul Water

Foul water from all 16 houses will connect to Athenry WWTP (D0193). Irish Water has confirmed pre-connection feasibility without the need for infrastructure upgrade (ref. CDS25006844). No foul water will discharge to any surface water body or groundwater. This pathway is accordingly screened out.

4.6 Climate Change Impacts

The proposed housing development will not result in any significant greenhouse gas emissions during the operational phase. Any temporary and localised emissions during construction are negligible given the small scale and short duration of works (16 no. two-storey houses on 0.651 ha). Climate change impacts on European sites arising from the proposed development are screened out.

5.0 In-Combination Effects of Plans and Projects

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that the assessment considers the potential for plans and projects to act in combination with the proposed development and adversely affect European sites.

For the 11 European sites screened out in Section 3.3 — where no credible impact pathway has been identified from this development alone — the addition of other plans or projects cannot create a significant effect in combination that does not exist individually. In-combination effects for these sites are accordingly screened out.

For the Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268) and Inner Galway Bay SPA (004031), which have been screened in on the basis of the surface water pathway, in-combination effects with other plans and projects in the Clarinbridge catchment have been considered. Key plans and projects assessed include:

- Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028
- Athenry Local Area Plan 2024–2030
- Neighbouring residential planning applications in the Athenry area (including refs. 2461699 and 2561842), for which Natura Impact Statements have been submitted separately by other applicants
- Other permitted and proposed residential and commercial developments in the Athenry area

The in-combination assessment is addressed in full in the Natura Impact Statement (AEE, May 2026), which concludes that the proposed development, in combination with other plans and projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of the Galway Bay Complex SAC or the Inner Galway Bay SPA.

6.0 Screening Statement and Conclusions

In accordance with OPR Practice Note PN01 (2021) and the EC Methodological Guidance (2021), the Appropriate Assessment Screening exercise can conclude either that an Appropriate Assessment is not required (Finding of No Significant Effect, FONSE), or that significant effects are possible or uncertain and therefore a full Appropriate Assessment is required.

Having assessed all European sites within 15 km of the proposed development using a source-pathway-receptor approach, and applying the precautionary principle throughout, the following conclusions are reached:

Screened Out — FONSE: Lough Corrib SAC, Rahasane Turlough SAC, Castletaylor Complex SAC, Lough Fingall Complex SAC, Kiltiernan Turlough SAC, Ardahan Grassland SAC, Lough Rea SAC, Rahasane Turlough SPA, Cregganna Marsh SPA, Lough Corrib SPA, Lough Rea SPA, and Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA. For each of these sites, the possibility of significant effects, alone or in combination, can be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt on the basis of the objective information set out in this report.

Screened In — NIS Required: Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268) and Inner Galway Bay SPA (004031). A likely significant effect on the water quality-dependent qualifying interests of these sites, via the indirect surface water pathway from the development to the Clarinbridge River and thence to Inner Galway Bay, cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is therefore required to accompany the planning application. The LSE Statement is set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Likely Significant Effect (LSE) Statement

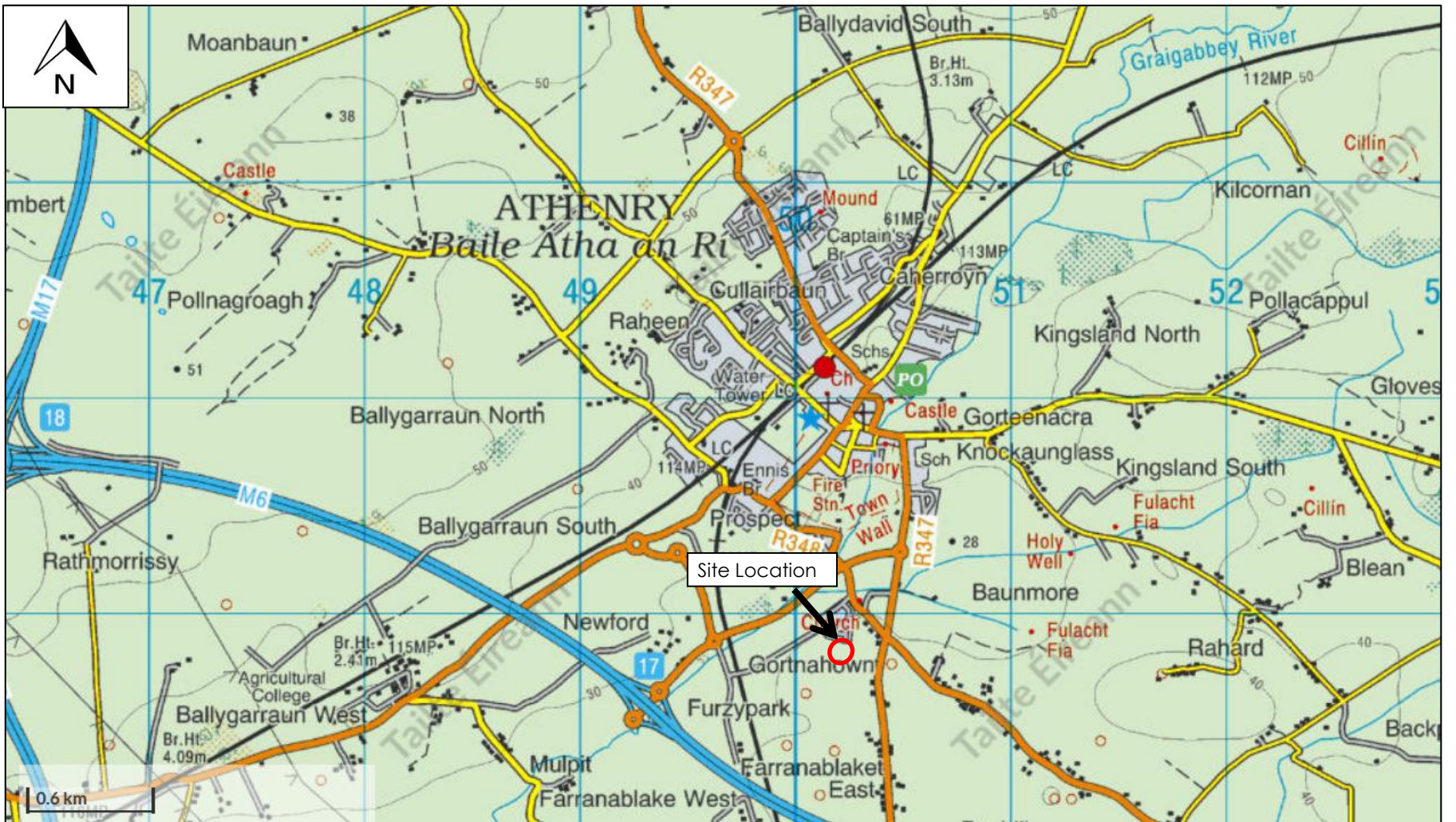
Aspect	Details
Project Description	Construction of 16 no. two-storey houses (comprising 8 no. 3-bedroom semi-detached houses and 8 no. 2-bedroom terraced houses) and all associated site development works including roadways, paths, 32 no. car parking spaces, 8 no. cycle parking, public open space, public lighting, boundary treatments, and all associated infrastructure at Páirc na hAbhainn, Athenry, Co. Galway.
European Screened In	Sites Galway Bay Complex SAC (000268) — 10.3 km SW; Inner Galway Bay SPA (004031) — ~10.3–11 km SW.
European Screened Out	Sites Lough Corrib SAC (7.9 km); Rahasane Turlough SAC (6.8 km); Castletaylor Complex SAC (11.8 km); Lough Fingall Complex SAC (13.2 km); Kiltiernan Turlough SAC (13.7 km); Ardahan Grassland SAC (14.2 km); Lough Rea SAC (14.7 km); Rahasane Turlough SPA (7.6 km); Cregganna Marsh SPA (11.5 km); Lough Corrib SPA (11.4 km); Lough Rea SPA (14.7 km); Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA (14.7 km).
Basis for Screen-In	Indirect surface water pathway via the Clarinbridge River (270 m west) to the Galway Bay Complex SAC and Inner Galway Bay SPA (~10.3 km downstream). The site overlies an area of High GSI

Aspect	Details
	groundwater vulnerability. Applying the precautionary principle, a likely significant effect on water quality-dependent qualifying interests cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt.
Impact Pathways	Indirect surface water pathway only. No direct impact pathway. No groundwater pathway to any European site (separate catchment from turlough SACs; WFD Groundwater Body Status 'Good' and 'Not at Risk'). No air or land pathways to any European site.
Direct Effects	None. The site is located outside all European site boundaries.
Drainage Design	Comprehensive SUDS: Graf Eco Bloc attenuation tank, hydrobrake flow control device, heavy-duty road gullies (D400), silt trap, and Class 1 petrol interceptor (Figure 3b). Foul water to Athenry WWTP (D0193) with confirmed Irish Water pre-connection feasibility (ref. CDS25006844).
Cumulative Effects	Assessed in the NIS. No significant in-combination effects identified with other developments in the Clarinbridge catchment.
NIS Required	YES — Natura Impact Statement prepared by Ash Ecology & Environmental Ltd (May 2026) and submitted separately.

7.0 References

- European Commission (2000) *Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle*. European Commission, Brussels.
- European Commission (2019) *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*. European Commission, Brussels.
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- Fossitt, J.A. (2000) *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland*. The Heritage Council, Kilkenny.
- IFI (2016) *Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries during Construction Works in and Adjacent to Waters*. Inland Fisheries Ireland, Dublin.
- NPWS (2013) *Conservation Objectives: Galway Bay Complex SAC 000268*. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin.
- NPWS (2013) *Conservation Objectives: Inner Galway Bay SPA 004031*. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin.
- NPWS (2015) *Site Synopsis: Galway Bay Complex SAC 000268*. Version date 10.12.2015. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin.
- NPWS (2019) *Site Synopsis: Inner Galway Bay SPA 004031*. Version date 25.10.2019. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin.
- Office of the Planning Regulator (2021) *OPR Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management*. Office of the Planning Regulator, Dublin.
- Smith, G.F., Delaney, E., Doyle, D., Clinch, R. & Woods, E. (eds.) (2011) *Handbook of Vegetation Survey and Classification*. National Biodiversity D

FIGURES



Map sourced from National Biodiversity Data Centre Website – www.nbdc.ie



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Client Galway County Council		Drawing Site Location Map			
Job AA Screening Report					
Drawing Number Figure 1	Status Final	Sht. Size A4	Scale As Shown	Date May 26	Drawn AW



- Site Location
- Rivers



Client Galway County Council		Drawing Aerial Photo & Drainage Network			
Job AA Screening Report					
Drawing Number	Status	Sht. Size	Scale	Date	Drawn
Figure 2	Final	A4	As Shown	May 26	AW



SITE LAYOUT- SERVICES: WASTEWATER & SURFACE WATER
SCALE = 1:250

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— Site Boundary

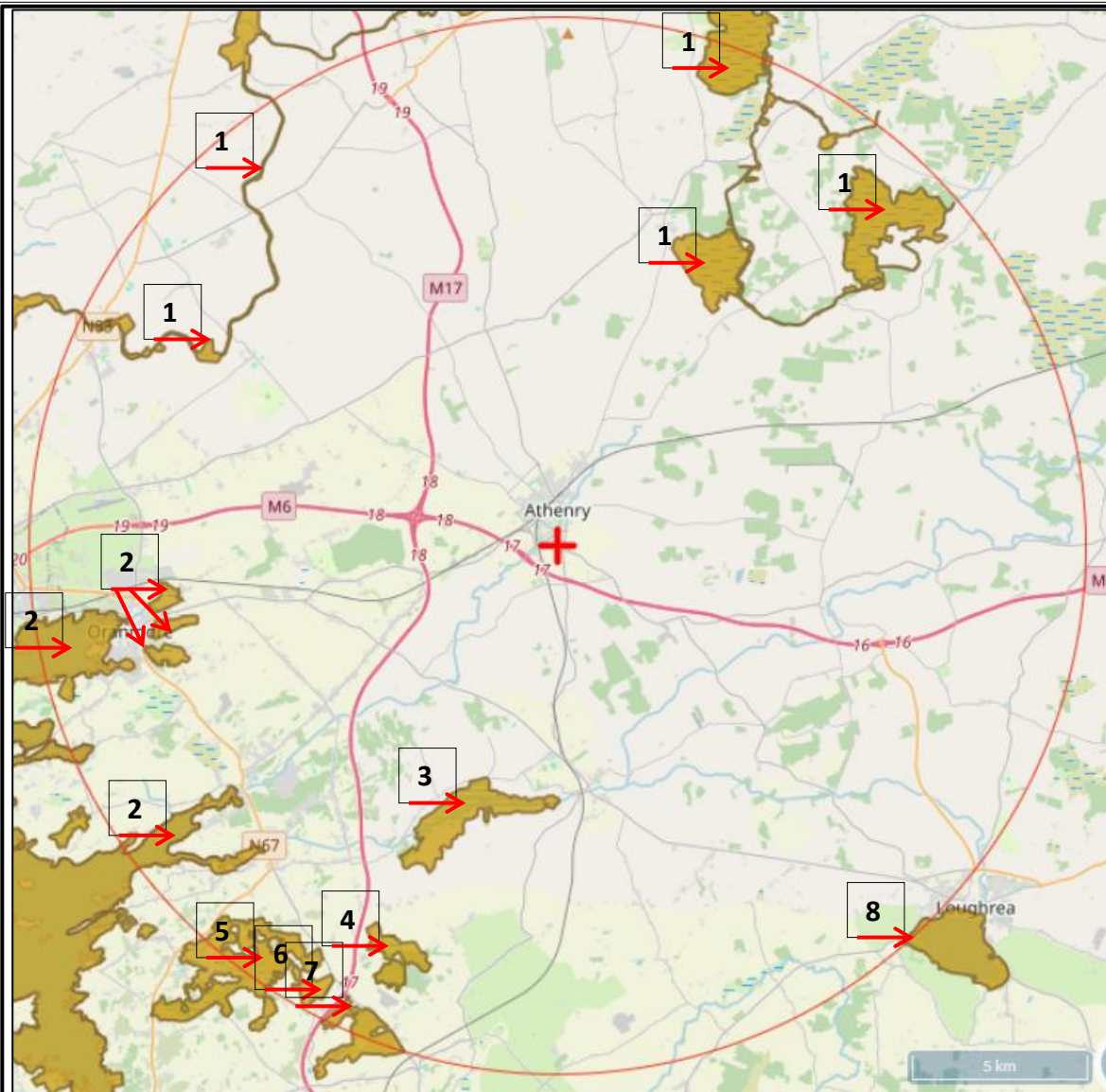
Client Galway County Council		Drawing Proposed Waste Water and Surface Water Drainage Layout			
Job AA Screening Report					
Drawing Number Figure 3b	Status Final	Sht. Size A4	Scale As Shown	Date May 26	Drawn AW



- Approx. Site Boundary
- Grassy Meadows (GS2)
- Intermittent Hedging with Old Stone Walls (WL1/BL1)
- Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1)
- Fencing
- Block Walls - Buildings and Artificial Surfaces (BL3)



Client Galway County Council		Drawing Habitat Map			
Job AA Screening Report					
Drawing Number Figure 4	Status Final	Sht. Size A4	Scale As Shown	Date May 26	Drawn AW



No.	Site Code	Name	Distance
1	000297	Lough Corrib SAC	7.9km NE, N, NW
2	000268	Galway Bay Complex SAC	10.3km SW
3	000322	Rahasane Turlough SAC	6.8km S, SW
4	000242	Castletaylor Complex SAC	11.8km SW
5	000606	Lough Fingall Complex SAC	13.2km SW
6	001285	Kiltiernan Turlough SAC	13.7km SW
7	002244	Ardrahan Grassland SAC	14.2km SW
8	000304	Lough Rea SAC	14.7km SE



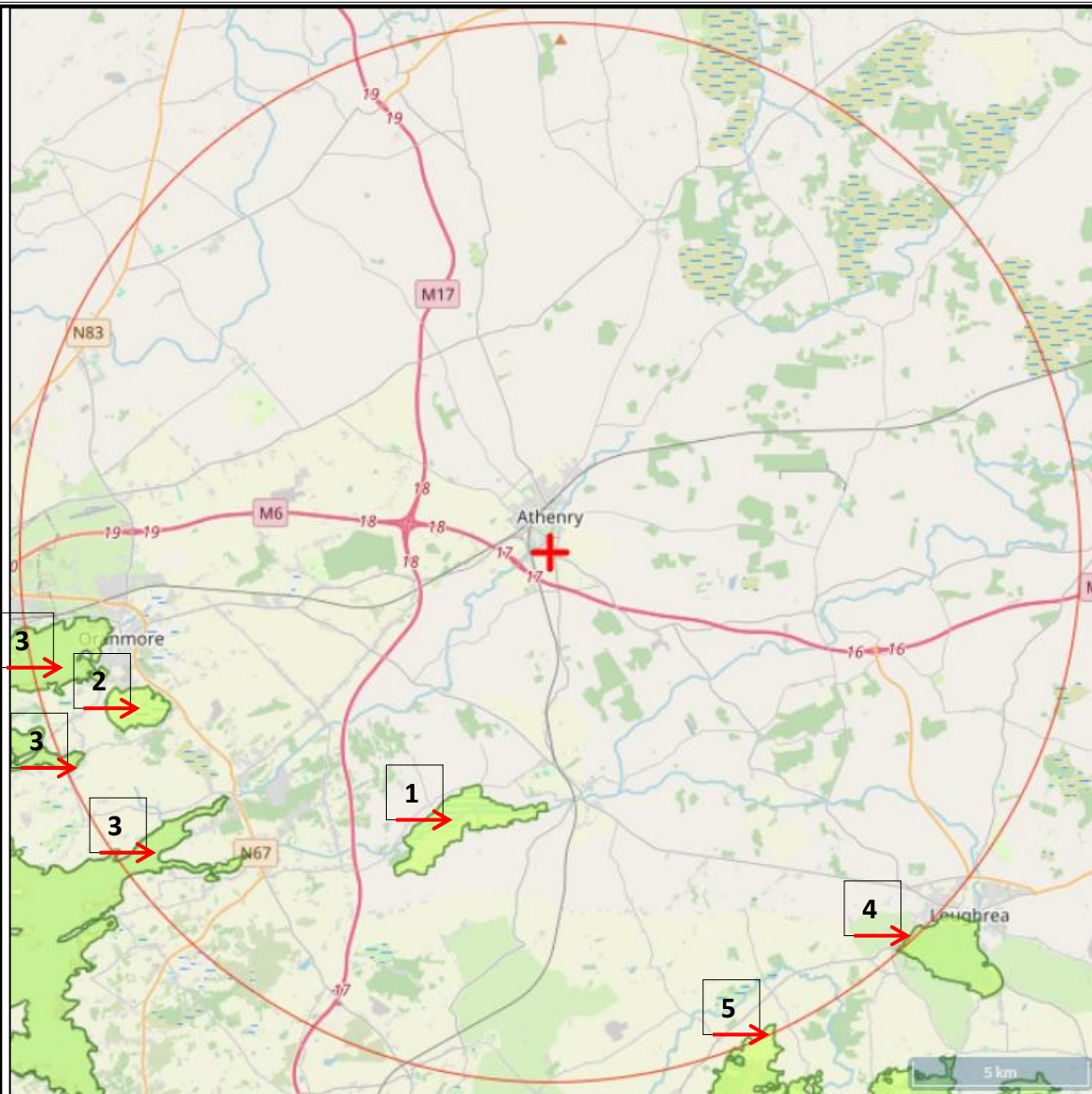
Special Area of Conservation



Site Location



Client Galway County Council		Drawing				
Job AA Screening Report		Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within 15km of Site				
Drawing Number Figure 5	Status Final	Sht. Size A4	Scale As Shown	Date May 26	Drawn AW	



No.	Site Code	Name	Distance (km)
1	004089	Rahasane Turlough SPA	6.8km S, SW
2	004142	Cregganna Marsh SPA	11.5km SW
3	004042	Lough Corrib SPA	11.4km SW
4	004134	Lough Rea SPA	14.7km SE
5	004168	Slieve Mountains SPA	14.7km SE, S

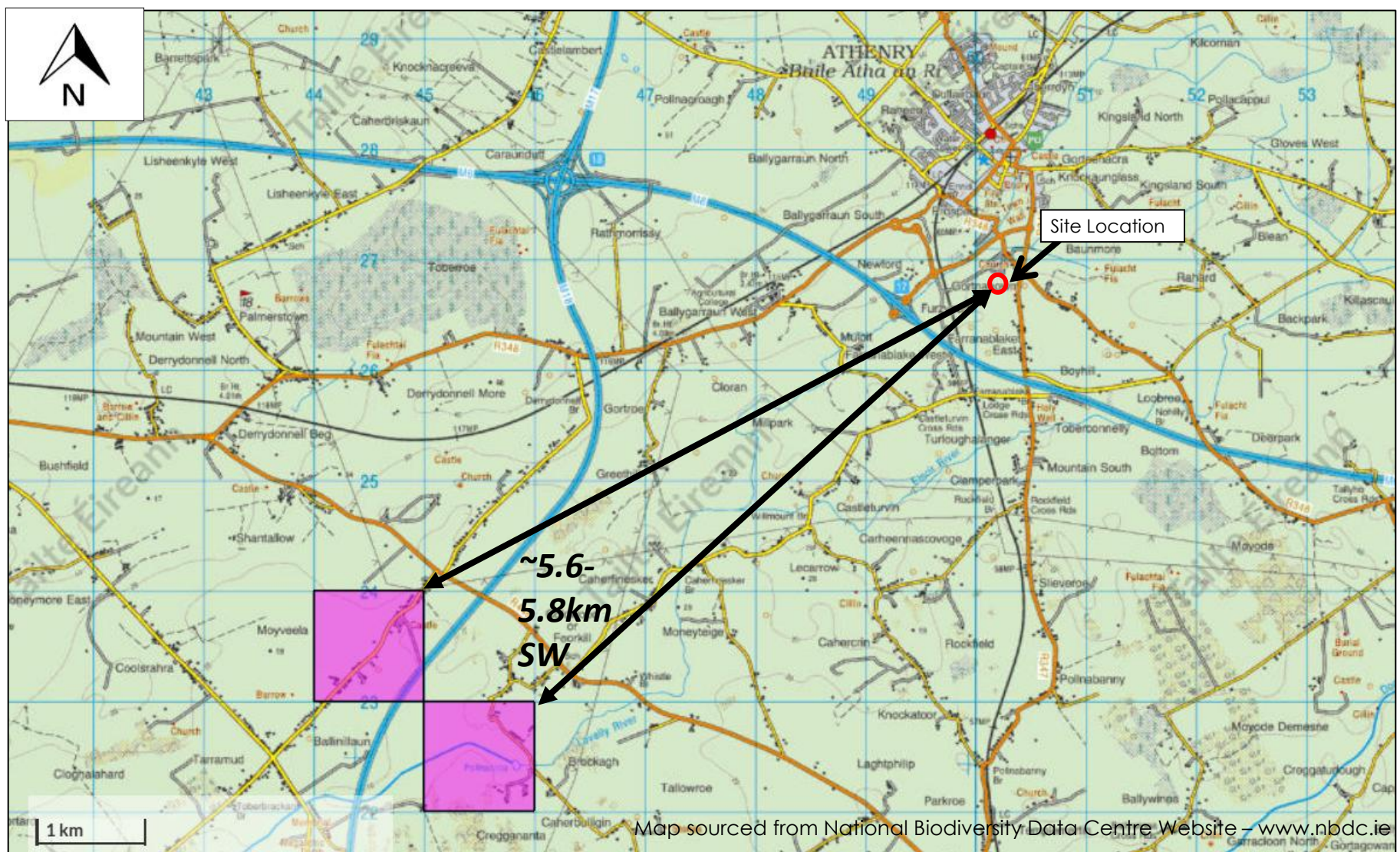


Site Location



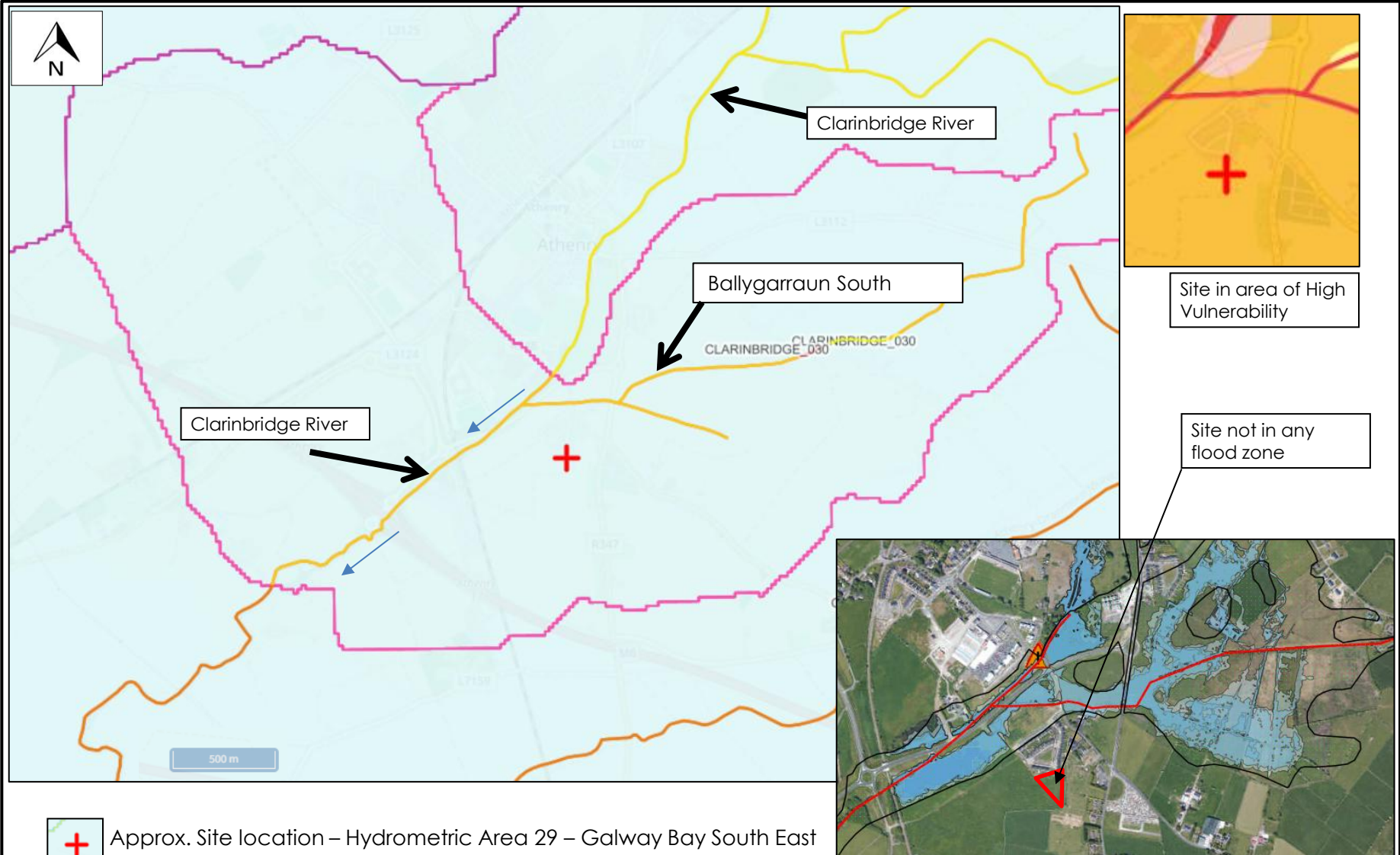
N

Client Galway County Council		Drawing				
Job AA Screening Report		Special Protection Areas (SPAs) within 15km of Site				
	Drawing Number Figure 6	Status Final	Sht. Size A4	Scale As Shown	Date May 26	Drawn AW



 Lesser horseshoe bat records approx. 5.6-5.8km SW of site. Outside the ~2.5km foraging and commuting radius. Unlikely to use site.

Client Galway County Council		Drawing Closest Lesser Horseshoe Bat Records			
Job AA Screening Report					
Drawing Number Figure 7	Status Final	Sht. Size A4	Scale As Shown	Date May 26	Drawn AW



Approx. Site location – Hydrometric Area 29 – Galway Bay South East

Site within the WFD Sub-Catchment 'Clarinbridge_SC_010' and River Sub-Basin 'CLARINBRIDGE_030'

Water Framework Directive River Waterbody Status 2019-2024

'CLARINBRIDGE_030' is 'Moderate'

River Waterbodies Risk 2019-2024 of 'CLARINBRIDGE_030' is 'At Risk'

WFD Groundwater Body Status 2019-2024 of 'Clarinbridge' is 'Good' and 'Not at Risk'

Client Galway County Council		Drawing 2019-2024 WFD Catchment Drainage Information			
Job AA Screening Report		Drawing Number Figure 8	Status Final	Sht. Size A4	Scale As Shown
				Date May 26	Drawn AW

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



Registered Practices Certificate
April 2026—March 2027

Ash Ecology and Environmental Ltd

has been admitted as a Registered Practice
of the

Chartered Institute of Ecology
and Environmental Management

on the 1st day of April 2026

Penny Lewns CEcol CEnv MCIEEM
President

1st April 2026

This certificate remains the property of CIEEM. Membership is subject to annual renewal and may be authenticated by contacting CIEEM at the registered address. Company no. RC000861.

Registered Charity Number (England and Wales): 1189915.

Registered address: Grosvenor Court, Ampfield Hill, Ampfield, Romsey, SO51 9BD United Kingdom.

APPENDIX B



Plate 1: Habitat made up mainly of Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1) which dominates the site area. View across the Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1) showing typical ryegrass-dominated sward.



Plate 2: Northern boundary showing transition from Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1) to Grassy Meadows (GS2) with fence divider. Block walls (BL3) to the rear of existing housing separate the site along the north boundary.



Plate 3: Old stone walls (BL1) forming the eastern site boundary showing typical dry-stone construction.



Plate 4: Intermittent hawthorn and bramble hedging with stone wall features (WL1/BL1) to the south providing limited wildlife corridor connectivity.



Plate 5: Overview of site showing dominance of Improved Agricultural Grassland (GA1) showing evidence of agricultural management and low botanical diversity.

APPENDIX C

Site Name: Galway Bay Complex SAC

Site Code: 000268

Situated on the west coast of Ireland, this site comprises the inner, shallow part of a large bay which is partially sheltered by the Aran Islands. The Burren karstic limestone fringes the southern sides and extends into the sublittoral. West of Galway city the bedrock geology is granite. There are numerous shallow and intertidal inlets on the eastern and southern sides, notably Muckinish, Aughinish and Kinvarra Bays. A number of small islands composed of glacial deposits are located along the eastern side. These include Eddy Island, Deer Island and Tawin Island. A diverse range of marine, coastal and terrestrial habitats, including several listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, occur within the site, making the area of high scientific importance.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

- [1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats
- [1150] Coastal Lagoons*
- [1160] Large Shallow Inlets and Bays
- [1170] Reefs
- [1220] Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks
- [1230] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts
- [1310] *Salicornia* Mud
- [1330] Atlantic Salt Meadows
- [1410] Mediterranean Salt Meadows
- [3180] Turloughs*
- [5130] Juniper Scrub
- [6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*
- [7210] *Cladium* Fens*
- [7230] Alkaline Fens
- [8240] Limestone Pavement*
- [1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
- [1365] Common (Harbour) Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Galway Bay South holds a very high number of littoral communities (12). They range from rocky terraces, to sandy beaches with rock or sand dunes behind. The intertidal sediments of Galway Bay support good examples of communities that are moderately exposed to wave action. A well-defined talitrid amphipod zone in the

upper shore gives way to an intertidal, mid shore zone with sparse epifauna or infauna. On the lower, flat part of the shore, the tubes of the deposit-feeding terebellid worm, *Lanice conchilega*, are common on the surface. Nereid and cirratulid polychaete worms (*Hediste diversicolor*, *Arenicola marina*), small crustaceans and bivalves (*Angulus tenuis*, *Cerastoderma edule* and *Macoma balthica*) are present. The area has the country's only recorded example of the littoral community characterized by *Fucus serratus* with sponges, ascidians and red seaweeds on tide-swept lower eulittoral mixed substrata. This community has very high species richness (85 species), as do the sublittoral fringe communities on the Finavarra reef (88 species). The rare Purple Sea Urchin *Paracentrotus lividus* and the foliose red alga *Phyllophora sicularia* are present at Finavarra, whereas the red alga *Rhodomenia delicatula* and the rare brown alga, *Ascophyllum nodosum* var. *mackii*, occur in Kinvarra and Muckinish Bays. Sublittorally, the area has a number of distinctive and important communities. Of particular note is that Ireland's only reported piddock (bivalve mollusc) bed thrives in the shallows of Aughinish Bay. The rare sponge, *Mycale contarenii*, is also found here. There is further interest in an extensive maerl bed of *Phymatolithon calcareum* which occurs in the strong tidal currents of Muckinish Bay. There is also maerl off Finavarra Point and in Kinvarra Bay (*Lithothamnion corallioides*, *Lithophyllum dentatum* and *Lithophyllum fasciculatum*). An oyster bed in Kinvarra Bay and seagrass (*Zostera* spp.) beds off Finavarra Point are also important features. Other significant habitats which occur include secondary maerl beds and communities strongly influenced by tidal streams.

Saltmarshes are frequent within this extensive coastal site, with both E.U. Habitats Directive types, 'Atlantic Salt Meadow' and 'Mediterranean Salt Meadow' well represented. Most of the saltmarshes are classified as the bay type, with the substrate being mud or mud/sand. There is one lagoon type and one estuary type. Lagoon saltmarshes are the rarest type found in Ireland. The best examples of saltmarsh are located in inner Galway bay, east of a line running between Galway city and Kinvarra. In this area the coastline is highly indented, thus providing the sheltered conditions necessary for extensive saltmarsh development. Common saltmarsh species include Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), Lax-flowered Sea-lavender (*Limonium humile*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardi*) and Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*). On the lower levels of the saltmarshes and within pans there occurs Glasswort (*Salicornia europaea* agg.). A noteworthy feature of the saltmarsh habitat within this site is the presence of dwarfed brown seaweeds in the vegetation. These are also known as "turf fucoids" and typical species include *Fucus* spp., *Ascophyllum nodosum* and *Pelvetia canaliculata*. A number of locally rare vascular plant species also grow in saltmarsh areas within the site. These include Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia distans*) and Sea-purslane (*Halimione portulacoides*), which are both relatively rare in the western half of the country.

Shingle and stony beaches can be found throughout the site, with the best examples along the more exposed shores to the south and west of Galway city and to the north and east of Finavarra, Co. Clare. In general, these shingle shorelines are sparsely vegetated and frequently occur interspersed with areas of sandy beach and/or

bedrock shore. The associated flora is dominated by plant species of frequently disturbed maritime habitats. To the south and west of Galway city, typical plants include Curled Dock (*Rumex crispus*), Common Couch (*Elymus repens*), Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Sea Mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) and Oraches (*Atriplex* spp.). Two rare plant species are associated with the habitat: Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), a threatened species listed in the Irish Red Data Book, grows on shingle beach to the south of Lough Atalia; there are also old records for the threatened plant species Sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*).

Soft coastal cliffs reaching heights in excess of 10m occur at Rusheen. These support coastal grassland with very sparse vegetation cover. Species recorded include Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Cock's Foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Red Fescue, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), and the lichens *Ramalina* sp. and *Xanthoria parietina*. They are considered highly representative of the rarer soft type of sea cliffs in Ireland.

An excellent range of lagoons of different types, sizes and salinities occurs within the site. This habitat is given priority status on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. One unusual type of lagoon, karstic rock lagoon, is particularly well represented. This type of lagoon is common on the Aran Islands, but on mainland Ireland, all but one are confined to this site. Additionally, the best example of all karstic lagoons in the country, Lough Murree, is found at this site. The flora of the habitat is rich and diverse, reflecting the range of salinities in the different lagoons. It is typically brackish, with two species of Tasselweed (*Ruppia* spp.), two Red Data charophytes *Chara canescens* and *Lamprothamnion papulosum*, and *Chaetomorpha linum*, an alga (all lagoonal specialists). The fauna of the lagoon is also rich, diverse and lagoonal. At least 10 lagoonal specialist species were recorded in 1996 and 1998 from the combined habitat of all the lagoons, which is one of the highest number for any lagoonal habitat in the country. Many of the species appear to be rare. The lagoons within this site are excellent examples of the habitat type and of high conservation importance.

Other terrestrial habitats within this site which are of conservation importance include Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*)-dominated fen and Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*)-dominated alkaline fen at Oranmore, a turlough of moderate size at Ballinacourty, limestone pavement at Ballyconry, Gleninagh North and Newquay, dry calcareous grassland with orchids (best examples occurring west of Salthill), Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) scrub formations at Oranmore, wet grassland and an area of deciduous woodland at Barna. The orchid-rich grassland occurs on a series of small drumlin hills found to the west of Galway City, and is largely confined to the sides of the hills. Calcicole species such as Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Lesser Twayblade (*Listera ovata*), Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*) are found here, among others. Juniper is also found in this area.

Areas of alkaline and *Cladium* fen as best represented near Oranmore, and species such as Great Fen-sedge, Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) are found along with the usually dominant, Black Bog-rush. The turlough at Ballinacourty floods to about 25 ha in winter, and has vegetation with a typical zonation. Wetland species such as Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*) and Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*) are found near the swallow-hole, with species of wet grassland close to the flood limit (e.g. Silverweed, *Potentilla anserina*, Water Mint, *Mentha aquatica* and Creeping Bent, *Agrostis stolonifera*). Sedges (*Carex* spp.) dominate in between.

Inner Galway Bay provides extensive good quality habitat for Common Seal (maximum count of 317 in the all-Ireland survey of 2003). This species is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The seals use a range of haul-out sites distributed through the bay - these include inner Oranmore Bay, Rabbit Island, St. Brendan's Island, Tawin Island, Kinvarra Bay, Aughinish Bay and Ballyvaughan. The site provides optimum habitat for Otter, also an Annex II-listed species.

Galway Bay is a very important ornithological site. The shallow waters provide excellent habitat for Great Northern Divers (35), Black-throated Divers (28), Scaup (39), Long-tailed Duck (27) and Red-breasted Merganser (232). (Figures given are peak average maxima over the 3 winters 1994/95 to 1996/97). All of these populations are of national importance. The intertidal areas and shoreline provides feeding and roosting habitat for wintering waterfowl, with Brent Goose (517) having a population of international importance and a further 11 species having populations of national importance. Four of the regular wintering species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive - Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and the two diver species. Breeding birds are also of importance, with significant populations of Sandwich Terns (81 pairs in 1995) and Common Terns (99 pairs in 1995), both also being listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. A large Cormorant colony (approx. 300 pairs in 1989) occurs on Deer Island.

Fishing and aquaculture are the main commercial activities within the site. A concern is that sewage effluent and detritus of the aquaculture industry could be deleterious to benthic communities. Reef and sediment communities are vulnerable to disturbance or compaction from tractors accessing oyster trestles. The *Paracentrotus lividus* populations have been shown to be vulnerable to over-fishing. Extraction of maerl in Galway Bay is a threat. Owing to the proximity of Galway city, shoreline and terrestrial habitats are under pressure from urban expansion and recreational activities. Eutrophication is probably affecting some of the lagoons and is a continued threat. Drainage is a general threat to the turlough and fen habitats. Bird populations may be disturbed by aquaculture activities.

This large coastal site is of immense conservation importance, with many habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, four of which have priority status

(lagoon, *Cladium* fen, turlough and orchid-rich calcareous grassland). The examples of shallow bays, reefs, lagoons and saltmarshes found within this site are amongst the best in the country. The site supports an important Common Seal colony and a breeding Otter population (Annex II species), and six regular Annex I E.U. Birds Directive species. The site also has four Red Data Book plant species, plus a host of rare or scarce marine and lagoonal animal and plant species.

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: INNER GALWAY BAY SPA

SITE CODE: 004031

Inner Galway Bay SPA is a very large, marine-dominated site situated on the west coast of Ireland. The inner bay is protected from exposure to Atlantic swells by the Aran Islands and Black Head. Subsidiary bays and inlets (e.g. Poul-na-clough, Aughinish and Kinvarra Bays) add texture to the patterns of water movement and sediment deposition, which lends variety to the marine habitats and communities. The terraced Carboniferous (Viséan) limestone platform of the Burren sweeps down to the shore and into the sublittoral. The long shoreline is noted for its diversity, and comprises complex mixtures of bedrock shore, shingle beach, sandy beach and fringing salt marshes. Intertidal sand and mud flats occur around much of the shoreline, with the largest areas being found on the sheltered eastern coast between Oranmore Bay and Kinvarra Bay. A number of small islands and rocky islets in the Bay are included within the site.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Wigeon, Teal, Red-breasted Merganser, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Sandwich Tern and Common Tern. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands and, as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

Inner Galway Bay supports an excellent diversity of wintering wetland birds, with divers, grebes, cormorants, dabbling duck, sea duck and waders all well represented. There are internationally important wintering populations of Great Northern Diver (88) and Light-Bellied Brent Goose (676) and nationally important wintering populations of an additional sixteen species i.e. Black-throated Diver (36), Cormorant (266), Grey Heron (102), Wigeon (1,168), Teal (700), Red-breasted Merganser (249), Ringed Plover (335), Golden Plover (2,030), Lapwing (3,969), Dunlin (2,155), Bar-tailed Godwit (447), Curlew (697), Redshank (505), Turnstone (182), Black-headed Gull (1,941) and Common Gull (1,066) - all figures given are five year mean peaks for the seasons 1995/96 to 1999/2000. Of note is that the populations of Red-breasted Merganser and Ringed Plover represent 6.8% and 2.3% of the respective all-Ireland totals. Other species which occur in notable numbers include Little Grebe (35), Long-tailed Duck (21), Scaup (44) and Herring Gull (216). In addition, the following species also use the site: Great Crested Grebe (16), Mallard (200), Common Scoter (87), Oystercatcher (576), Grey Plover (60), Black-tailed Godwit (46), Mute Swan (150) and Great Black-backed Gull (129). The site provides both feeding and roost sites for most of the species. Little Egret, a species which has recently colonised Ireland, also occurs at this site.

The site has several important populations of breeding birds, most notably colonies of Sandwich Tern (81 pairs in 1995) and Common Tern (98 pairs in 1995 on Green Island and 46 pairs in 2001 on Mutton Island). A large Cormorant colony occurs on Deer Island - this had 200 pairs in 1985 and 300 pairs in 1989.

Inner Galway Bay SPA is of high ornithological importance with two wintering species having populations of international importance and a further sixteen wintering species having populations of national importance. The breeding colonies of Sandwich Tern, Common Tern and Cormorant are also of national importance. Also of note is that six of the regularly occurring species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Sandwich Tern and Common Tern. Inner Galway Bay is a Ramsar Convention site and part of the Inner Galway Bay SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.