

Galway County Council

Proposed Demolition & Reconstruction of dwelling house at Meelick, Williamstown, Co. Galway

Appropriate Assessment Screening

July / 2026

0511-MFA- AA-RP-100-01

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

MFA Consulting Engineers has been appointed to prepare a report to inform Screening for Appropriate Assessment for a Part 8 Planning Application for the Proposed Demolition & Reconstruction of dwelling house at Meelick, Williamstown, Co. Galway.

The purpose of the report is to provide the information required to assist the competent planning authority to conduct an Article 6(3) Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the proposed Development and, if considered necessary, an Appropriate Assessment (AA). Based on best available scientific knowledge, the potential impacts on European sites, both as a result of the proposed development alone, and in-combination with other plans and projects, are appraised in this report.

The requirements for “Appropriate Assessment” are set out under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive (92/34/EEC), transposed into Irish law through the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2015 and the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).

1.2 AUTHOR’S QUALIFICATION AND EXPERTISE

This report has been prepared by Sarah Moore.

Sarah Moore is an Environmental Scientist with over 19 years of environmental consultancy experience. She has obtained an MSc in Environmental Engineering from Queens University, Belfast, and a BSc in Environmental Science from University of Limerick. Sarah has been involved as a Project Environmental Scientist on a range of renewable energy, wastewater, structures and commercial projects. She has experience in the preparation of numerous Appropriate Assessments, Natura Impact Statements, Ecological Impact Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments.

1.3 REGULATORY CONTEXT

Collectively, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are referred to as the Natura 2000 Sites. The legal basis on which SACs are selected and designated is the EU Habitats Directive, 92/43/EEC transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), as amended. The designation features of SACs are referred to as Qualifying Interests (QI) and include both species (excluding birds) and habitats. Similarly, Special Protection Areas (SPA’s) are legislated in the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC. The designation features of SPAs are referred to as Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) which comprise bird species as well as wetland bird habitats.

In general terms, SACs and SPAs are considered to be of exceptional importance in terms of rare, endangered or vulnerable habitats and species within the European Community.

Article 6, paragraph 3 of the Habitats Directive states that:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for

the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public”.

This provision has been implemented in the context of the planning code under article 177U and 177V of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended. Under Section 177U (1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, a Screening for AA of the Proposed Development shall be carried out by the competent authority (in this case, Galway County Council) to assess in view of best scientific knowledge, if the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect(s) on any European Sites.

The statutory agency responsible for the European Sites is the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

This report has been prepared in accordance with current guideline documents:

- Assessment of plans and projects significantly effecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2001)
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (DEHLC 2009, Revised February 2010)
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG, 2009, revised 2010)
- OPR Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, March 2021, Office of the Planning Regulator
- Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, (EC, 2000a)
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No.477 of 2011).
- Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats. Version EUR 28. European Commission (EC, 2013)
- EU Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC (EC, 2007)
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2018)
- Strict Protection of Animal Species, NPWS, 2021

The following European Court and Irish High Court rulings have been considered:

- C-127/02 Waddenzee v Staatssecretaris
- C-258/11 Sweetman v An Bord Pleanála

- C-512/12 Briels
- C-387/12 & C388/15 Orleans and others v Vlaams Gewest
- C-142/15 Moorbug
- C-323/17 People Over Wind and Peter Sweetman v Coillte
- C-162/17 Grace and Sweetman
- C-883/18 Holohan and others v An Bord Pleanála
- IEHC 84 (2019) - Kelly v An Bord Pleanála
- C-477/23 Eco Advocacy v An Bord Pleanála

Relevant plans from national to local scales are critical to inform a robust assessment of in-combination impacts; these are listed below:

- National Biodiversity Action Plan, for the period 2023-2030
- River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027
- Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

1.4 THE STAGES IN AN APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

There are 4 stages in an Appropriate Assessment as outlined in the European Commission Guidance document (2001). The following is a brief summary of these steps:

Stage 1 – Screening: This stage examines the likely effects of a project either alone or in-combination with other projects upon a European Site and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these effects will not be significant.

Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment: In this stage, the impact of the project on the integrity of the European Site is considered, with respect to the conservation objectives of the site and to its structure and function.

Stage 3 – Assessment of Alternative Solutions: Should the Appropriate Assessment determine that adverse impacts are likely upon the European Site, this stage examines alternative ways of implementing the project that, where possible, avoid these adverse impacts.

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

2. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

2.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED SITE

The Proposed Development is located in Meelick, c. 4km southeast of Williamstown Co. Galway off the L2201. The Site is located in a rural setting. There is 1 no. existing dwelling house and 1no. outbuilding located on the site. The existing dwelling will be demolished as part of this Proposed Development.

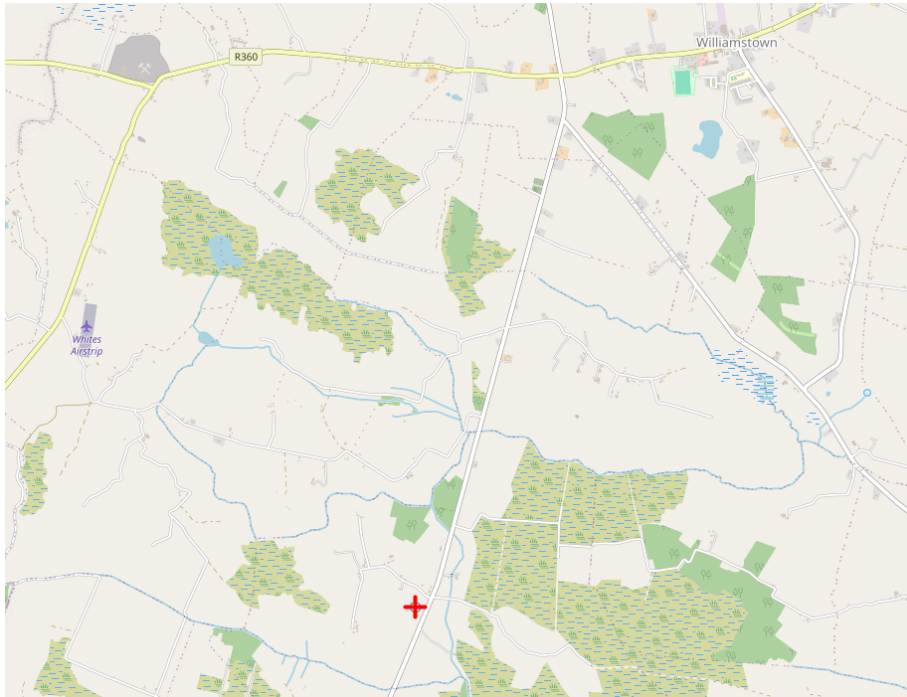


Figure 2.1: General location of the Proposed Development

2.1 PROPOSED WORKS

The Proposed Development of the 0.15 hectare Site will consist of the following:

- 1) Demolish existing dwelling
- 2) Construct 1 no. 2 bedroom dwelling house with tertiary treatment system and infiltration/treatment area, including all other ancillary site works and services

The construction stage will involve the following:

- I. Site clearance and enabling works
- II. Excavation and laying of foundations
- III. Provision of service ducting/trenches
- IV. Construction of new dwelling
- V. Connection to services
- VI. Landscaping and all associated site development works

The operational stage will involve:

The proposed foul water network for the development will consist of a tertiary treatment system and infiltration/treatment area.

The proposed storm water network for the development will be existing soakpits.

2.2 Potential Impact Sources

The Proposed Development has potential to result in different types of impacts and subsequent effects to habitats and species. The Proposed Development is considered permanent; decommissioning is not expected or discussed further. The potential impacts of the Proposed Development comprise:

Pollution or sedimentation events which may impact the water environment and where there is potential for conveyance downstream of the Site. This may arise during construction works within the Site, storm water runoff from the operational stage and treated effluent from the onsite foul water tertiary treatment system and infiltration/treatment area.

3. RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

3.1 GEOLOGY AND SOILS

The site is a brownfield site. The subsoil is classified as Sandstone till (Devonian) (EPA Maps, accessed July 2026).

3.2 HYDROLOGY AND HYDROLOGY

The Site overlies bedrock which is classified as Locally Important Aquifer - Bedrock which is Moderately Productive only in Local Zones. The Groundwater at the Site has natural characteristics that mean it has lower vulnerability to contamination by human activities (EPA Maps, accessed July 2026).

The Site is located in the Corrib Catchment, Sinking_SC_010 sub catchment. There are no waterbodies located on Site. The closest surface water is the Yellow (Sinking) order 3 river located c190m east of the Site, separated from the Site by the L2201 road and agricultural fields.

3.3 FLOODING

The CFRAM flood maps show the Site has no historical flooding and is not located in a flood zone (CFRAM, July 2026).

3.4 HABITATS

No rare, threatened, or protected species of plants as per the Red Data Book (Curtis and McGough, 1988) were found. No species listed in the Flora Protection Order (2022) were found to be growing within or adjacent to the Proposed Development works.

4. ESTABLISHING A ZONE OF INFLUENCE

The approach to screening is likely to differ somewhat between plans and projects, depending on scale and on the likely effects, but the following should be included (following the “Guidance for Planning Authorities”, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2010):

1. Any Natura 2000 sites within or adjacent to the plan or project area.
2. Any Natura 2000 sites within the likely zone of impact of the plan or project
3. Any Natura 2000 sites for which there is doubt as to whether or not such sites might be significantly affected (precautionary principle).

The potential Zol of a project is the geographic extent over which it could affect the receiving environment in a way that could result in significant effects on the QIs or SCIs of a European site (OPR, 2021). In the case of projects, the DoEHLC guidance acknowledges that the Zol must be devised on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size / scale and location of the project, the sensitivity of ecological features under consideration, and potential for cumulative effects.

When seeking to identify the relevant European sites, consideration was given to identified impact pathways and the source-pathway-receptor approach (OPR, 2021), rather than adopting a purely zones-based approach whereby European sites within, potentially arbitrarily set distances of the Proposed Development would be assessed (e.g. 15 km from the Site).

The source-pathway-receptor approach is a standard tool in environmental assessment. For an effect to occur, all three elements of this mechanism must be in place. The absence or removal of one of the elements means there is no possibility of an effect occurring e.g. where a sensitive European site is located close to the Proposed Development but no mechanism by which the Proposed Development could affect that site then there is no potential for a likely significant effect. Furthermore, even where an impact is predicted to occur, it may not result in significant effects.

A plan or project may have the potential to result in numerous impacts, which could potentially affect the qualifying features of European sites. The analysis of these effects, using scientific knowledge and professional judgement, leads to the identification of a Zol for each impact and effect (i.e. the geographic extent at which the impact of the Proposed Development could have potential effects, using professional judgement and published guidance).

5. AA Screening

5.1 IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT EUROPEAN SITES

European sites are considered relevant where there may be a source-pathway-receptor relationship which may give rise to likely significant effects to the European site or its QI / SCI (including where mobile QI / SCI may occur beyond the European site boundary).

The Proposed Development has a clearly defined physical footprint. The Site is not within any or adjacent to any European site. There is no hydrological link to any European site. The closest SAC is the Lough Corrib SAC located 1.5km south of the Proposed Development and the closest SPA is the Bellanagare Bog SPA located 20km northeast.

There is published guidance (SNH, 2016) for several bird species regarding the distances up to which SCI may use functionally linked habitat outside of European sites. There is no functionally linked habitat located on Site, there are no watercourses on site, the Site has an existing house on Site so it is exposed to noise and human disturbance. Therefore, no SPAs are considered within the zone of influence.

No significant effects to any European site are likely due to a lack of source-pathway-receptor relationships identified from the Proposed Development.

6. IN-COMBINATION EFFECTS

While effects on European Sites are not expected as a result of the construction and operation of the Proposed, the potential for cumulative effects on these designated sites due to other plans and projects acting in-combination with the Proposed Development are considered. The Galway County Council on-line planning application portal was used to search planning applications close to the Proposed Development (July 2026). A five-year search timeframe was assessed; Retention, refused and withdrawn planning applications were excluded. There are no projects that would be considered to have in-combination effects with the Proposed Development.

7. CONCLUSION

In Section 3 of the OPR guidance (OPR 2021), it is stated that the first stage of the AA process can have two possible conclusions:

1. No likelihood of significant effects Appropriate assessment is not required and the planning application can proceed as normal. Documentation of the screening process including conclusions reached and the basis on which decisions were made must be kept on the planning file.
2. Significant effects cannot be excluded Appropriate assessment is required before permission can be granted. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be required in order for the Proposed Development to proceed.

Having considered the particulars of the Proposed Development, we conclude that this application meets the first conclusion, because there is no likelihood of significant impacts on any European sites.

Therefore, with regard to Article 42 (7) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, it can be concluded that the Proposed Development will not be likely to have a significant effect on any European sites. On this basis, the assessment can conclude at Stage 1 of the Appropriate Assessment process, and it is not necessary to proceed to Stage 2. In accordance with the OPR 2021 guidance, no mitigation measures have been considered when reaching this conclusion.

8. REFERENCES

1. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2026). Protected sites - listings and maps. See www.npws.ie
2. European Commission Environment DG (2002). Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.
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7. Environmental Protection Agency - [EPA Maps](#) – Accessed 05/07/26



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