



**ENVIROPLAN CONSULTING
LIMITED**

January'24

Title

**APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT
SCREENING REPORT**

Development Description

"This application sets out proposals for construction of 3 no. housing units comprising of 2 no. 2 bed single storey semi-detached unit and 1 no. 2 bed single storey detached unit . The proposal represents an ideal infill opportunity within the confines of the town 50 kph speed limit zones whilst the land benefits from direct access onto the Galway Road and existing water and power services. The area for this proposed site is 1,221m². The proposed density is 25 units/Ha. The Loughrea LAP (2012-2022) advises a plot area ratio of 0.1-0.5. The proposal provides for a plot area ratio of 0.20. Externally the dwellings will reflect the design of the existing dwellings in the estate to provide for consistency in this small cul de sac."

Location

Hillcrest, Loughrea, County Galway

Applicants

Galway County Council

Prepared by:

Colette Casey (B.Sc (Hons)) in partnership with James O' Donnell (BA, MRUP, Dip APM)

Enviroplan Consulting Limited
Suite 3,
Third Floor,
Ross House,
Victoria Place,
Eyre Square,
Galway
M: 087-6066166
info@enviroplan.ie
www.enviroplan.ie

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appendices	2
1 Introduction	3
1.1 Legislative Background	4
1.1.1 EU Nature Conservation Legislation and Natura 2000 Sites.	4
1.1.2 Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites	4
2 Methodology	6
2.1.1 Appropriate Assessment Stages	6
3 Stage 1: Screening for Appropriate Assessment	7
3.1 Description of the Plan or Project	7
3.2 Description of the Existing Environment	7
3.2.1 Site Location in Relation to Natura 2000 Sites	7
4 Brief Description of the Natura 2000 Sites which may be affected	12
5 Soils, Geology & Hydrogeology	15
6 Other Plans and Projects in the Area	17
7 Screening Matrix for Appropriate Assessment in line with EU Commission Guidance	18
8 Conclusions	23

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Site Layout Plan

APPENDIX B NPWS Site Synopses for Lough Rea SAC

Appendix C NPWS Site Synopsis for Lough Rea SPA

Note: The scope of this report is to provide the necessary information to the competent authority, to assess whether the proposed development alone and in combination with other projects, could have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites in the area in view of the sites conservation objectives, in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, and does not purport to be an ecological assessment of the subject site.

1 INTRODUCTION

This Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared by Colette Casey (B.Sc (Hons)) in partnership with James O'Donnell, Planning Consultant (MA, MRUP, Dip APM) on behalf of Galway County Council who are applying for planning permission *“for construction of 3 no. housing units comprising of 2 no. 2 bed single storey semi-detached unit and 1 no. 2 bed single storey detached unit . The proposal represents an ideal infill opportunity within the confines of the town 50 kph speed limit zones whilst the land benefits from direct access onto the Galway Road and existing water and power services. The area for this proposed site is 1,221m². The proposed density is 25 units/Ha. The Loughrea LAP (2012-2022) advises a plot area ratio of 0.1-0.5. The proposal provides for a plot area ratio of 0.20. Externally the dwellings will reflect the design of the existing dwellings in the estate to provide for consistency in this small cul de sac.”* at Hillcrest, Loughrea, County Galway

Colette Casey is an experienced and qualified ecologist. She has obtained a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science (BSc Hons) at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She has been involved in the completion of numerous Appropriate Assessment Screening Reports (AASR's), Natura Impact statements (NIS's), Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP's) and Environmental Impact Assessment Screening. Colette has conducted Hen Harrier, Wintering Bird, Otter and Bat Surveys in the Republic of Ireland. She is an active member of Birdwatch Ireland, Bat conservation Ireland. She is a registered member of CIEEM and has been licensed by National Parks and Wildlife Services.

James O' Donnell is a qualified Town Planner and Project Manager with over 24 years planning experience in both the public and private sector in the west of Ireland, including 6 years experience as a local authority planning officer. James has particular experience in the project management and delivery of a wide range of complex planning applications requiring environmental and ecological assessment, in accordance with the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive and EIA Directives.

The site for the proposed development lies 367 meters to the north from the Lough Rea SAC and SPA (straight line measurement), which have been designated under the EU Habitats Directive & Birds Directive, and so it is necessary that the potential impacts of the proposed works be assessed by the competent authority, in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. This report provides the information necessary for the competent authority to complete an Appropriate Assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed works on sites of European importance in the area. This report has also had regard to the provisions of the March 2021 publication entitled *“OPR Practice Note PN01- Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management.”*

Table 1.1: Step One: Description of the project/proposal and local site characteristics

<p>Brief description of the project plan</p>	<p><i>“This application sets out proposals for construction of 3 no. housing units comprising of 2 no. 2 bed single storey semi-detached unit and 1 no. 2 bed single storey detached unit . The proposal represents an ideal infill opportunity within the confines of the town 50 kph speed limit zones whilst the land benefits from direct access onto the Galway Road and existing water and power services. The area for this proposed site is 1,221m². The proposed density is 25 units/Ha. The Loughrea LAP (2012-2022) advises a plot area ratio of 0.1-0.5. The proposal provides for a plot area ratio of 0.20. Externally the dwellings will reflect the design of the existing dwellings in the estate to provide for consistency in this small cul de sac.”</i></p>
<p>Brief description of site characteristics</p>	<p>The application site is located to the 1.6km to the west of Loughrea Town. The proposed development site lies to the north of the Galway Road. The site is an infill site that lies within the Hillcrest estate. There are no potential Source-Pathway-Receptor links between the application site and any SAC or SPA. The application site has no hydrological connections or risks in relation to flooding.</p>

1.1 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

1.1.1 EU Nature Conservation Legislation and Natura 2000 Sites.

There are three main types of designation for nature conservation in Ireland: Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). NHAs are designated under the Irish Wildlife Act 1976 (amended 2000). SACs and SPAs are designated under European legislation, the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (transposed into Irish law in the European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997 as amended in 1998 and 2005) and the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC, respectively. These European designated sites (SACs and SPAs) are also known as Natura 2000 sites. This means that they are part of the Natura 2000 Network, a network of important ecological sites across the European Union.

Sites are designated on the basis of the presence of certain ‘Qualifying Features’, i.e. the habitats listed under Annex I and the species listed under Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive.

Once a site is designated as a SAC and publicly advertised it is legally protected and becomes a proposed candidate SAC (pcSAC). A three-month period follows during which landowners may lodge an objection to the designation. Details of each proposed SAC are then given to the EU Commission, and thereafter the site is called a “candidate SAC”. Once the sites are approved by the commission, they are formally designated by the Minister.

1.1.2 Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites

Due to the proximity of the proposed development site to a candidate Special Area of Conservation, also known as a Natura 2000 site, an Appropriate Assessment may be required under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, Article 6(3) and (4), Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites. Such assessments are required where it is identified that a proposed plan or project could have significant impact on a Natura 2000 site. Articles 6(3) and (4) of the Directive, state the following;

6.3 *'Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives... 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....'*

6.4 *'If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest... the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected...'*

2 METHODOLOGY

The screening exercise will be conducted in line with the recommendations and protocol set out in the Guidance from the Commission (EC, 2021). This protocol involves a four-stage process to complete an Appropriate Assessment. At each stage, the findings of certain issues and tests will determine whether the next stage in the process is required.

2.1.1 Appropriate Assessment Stages

The four stages in the Appropriate Assessment process are outlined below:

Stage 1: Screening

This step consists of examining the likely potential impacts of a project or plan, alone or in combination with other projects, upon a Natura 2000 site or sites, and considers whether these impacts may be considered significant. If no significant impacts are foreseen, then a 'finding of no significant effects' (FONSE) statement is issued to the appropriate authority, and the process is complete. If the effects are considered significant or their significance is unknown, then the process moves on to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment

Where the screening process has identified potential impacts which are considered significant or unknown, this process examines these potential impacts in detail, in relation to the conservation interests of the Natura 2000 site or sites. Mitigation measures may be suggested to reduce the likelihood or severity of these impacts. If the impacts are still considered to be significant or unknown after this stage is complete, then alternative solutions must be considered (Stage 3).

Stage 3: Assessment of Alternative Solutions

If the potential impacts are still considered to be significant or unknown after the Appropriate Assessment stage, then alternative ways of implementing the project are considered at this stage. If no alternative solutions are possible, then it is considered whether the project or plan may go ahead regardless, if imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) are found.

Stage 4: Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI)

If significant negative impacts on the Natura 2000 site are unavoidable, and no alternative solutions may be found, then this stage involves the consideration of whether the project or plan may go ahead despite these effects, for 'imperative reasons of overriding public interest' (IROPI).

The results of a Stage 1 (Screening) Exercise are detailed in **Section 3** of this report.

3 STAGE 1: SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN OR PROJECT

It is proposed for the “construction of 3 no. housing units comprising of 2 no. 2 bed single storey semi-detached unit and 1 no. 2 bed single storey detached unit. The proposal represents an ideal infill opportunity within the confines of the town 50 kph speed limit zones whilst the land benefits from direct access onto the Galway Road and existing water and power services. The area for this proposed site is 1,221m². The proposed density is 25 units/Ha. The Loughrea LAP (2012-2022) advises a plot area ratio of 0.1-0.5. The proposal provides for a plot area ratio of 0.20. Externally the dwellings will reflect the design of the existing dwellings in the estate to provide for consistency in this small cul de sac.” A Site Layout Plan is included as **Appendix A** to this report.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

3.2.1 Site Location in Relation to Natura 2000 Sites

The proposed site lies in Hillcrest, Loughrea, County Galway (Grid Ref: Easting: 160600.46, Northing: 216619.57). The site for the proposed development lies 367 meters to the north from the Lough Rea SAC and SPA (straight line measurement) (See **Figure 3.1** below).

All Natura 2000 sites within a 15km buffer of the proposed development are listed in **Table 3.1** and **Figure 3.2**.

Table 3.1: Step Two: Identification of relevant Natura 200 sites using Source-Pathway-Receptor Model and Compilation of information on QI and Conservation Objectives

European Site (Code)	List of Qualifying Interest/Special Conservation Interest	Approximate Distance from the proposed development (km)	Receptor/Connection	Screen In – Yes/No
Lough Rea SAC Site code: 000304	QIs – 1 Habitat https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000304.pdf	367 meters	The application site lies approximately 367 meters to the north of Lough Rea SAC (straight line measurement). Construction phase: There are no identifiable hydrological/ecological connector/receptor pathways between the application and the SAC. This, combined with the distance and built-up intervening environment between the application site and the SAC removes any potential connector/receptor pathways. Therefore, no impacts/effects are predicted in this regard during the construction phase.	No

			<p>Operational phase: The proposed development will connect to the existing foul sewer network. A pre-connection application has been submitted to Uisce Eireann and we await confirmation / agreement but no issues are anticipated due to the minor nature of the proposed connection.</p> <p>There is an existing storm sewer on site which it is proposed to connect to.</p> <p>Therefore, there are no impacts/effects predicted on the Lough Rea SPA during the operational phase of development. Overall, no impacts/effects are predicted on the Lough Rea SAC during the construction and/or operational phase of development.</p>	
<p>Lough Rea SPA Site code: 004134</p>	<p>QIs – 2 Species https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004134.pdf</p>	<p>367 meters</p>	<p>The application site lies approximately 367 meters to the north of Lough Rea SPA (straight line measurement).</p> <p>Construction phase: There are no identifiable hydrological/ecological connector/receptor pathways between the application and the SPA. This, combined with the distance and built-up intervening environment between the application site and the SPA removes any potential connector/receptor pathways. Therefore, no impacts/effects are predicted in this regard during the construction phase.</p> <p>Operational phase: The proposed development will connect to the existing foul sewer network. A pre-connection application has been submitted to Uisce Eireann and we await confirmation / agreement but no issues are anticipated due to the minor</p>	<p>No</p>

			<p>nature of the proposed connection.</p> <p>There is an existing storm sewer on site which it is proposed to connect to.</p> <p>Therefore, there are no impacts/effects predicted on the Lough Rea SPA during the operational phase of development. Overall, no impacts/effects are predicted on the Lough Rea SPA during the construction and/or operational phase of development.</p>	
Sonnagh Bog SAC Site code: 001913	QIs – 1 Habitat https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO001913.pdf	7.80km	No pathway to species and habitats associated with this Natura site.	No
Rahasane Turlough SAC Site Code: 000322	QIs – 1 Habitat http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000322.pdf	10.87km	No pathway to species and habitats associated with this Natura site.	No
Peterswell Turlough SAC Site code: 000318	QIs – 2 Habitats http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000318.pdf	11.98km	No pathway to species and habitats associated with this Natura site.	No
Castletaylor Complex SAC Site code: 000242	QIs – 5 Habitats http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000242.pdf	14.29km	No pathway to species and habitats associated with this Natura site.	No
Lough Coy SAC Site code: 002117	QIs – 1 Habitat https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002117.pdf	14.55km	No pathway to species and habitats associated with this Natura site.	No
Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA Site code: 004168	QIs – 2 Bird Species https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004168.pdf	4.38km	No pathway to species and habitats associated with this Natura site.	No
Rahasane Turlough SPA Site code: 004089	QIs – 5 Bird Species and 1 Habitat http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004089.pdf	10.92km	No pathway to species and habitats associated with this Natura site.	No

The site for the proposed development lies 367 meters to the north from the Lough Rea SAC and SPA (straight line measurement). The application site is located entirely outside of the Lough Rea SAC and Lough Rea SPA; therefore, no direct impacts/effects are predicted on the Natura 2000 sites.

Due to the lack of identifiable hydrological/ecological receptor/connector pathways, the distance and the built-up intervening environment between the application site and the Lough Rea SAC/SPA, there are no indirect impacts/effects predicted.

Surface water will be managed via soakaways located on-site. Prior to entering the soakaway, surface water will pass through a petrol/oil interceptor. Due to the high level of treatment on the surface water and the anticipated performance of the system, no impacts/effects are predicted in this regard.

The proposed development will connect to the existing foul sewer network located on the R380 Loughrea bypass. A pre-connection application has been submitted to Uisce Eireann and we await confirmation / agreement, but no issues are anticipated due to the minor nature of the proposed connection.

However, as the Lough Rea SAC and Lough Rea SPA are the closest in location to the application site, they will be considered further below.



Figure 3.1: Site location in relation to the Lough Rea SAC and Lough Rea SPA Natura 2000 sites.

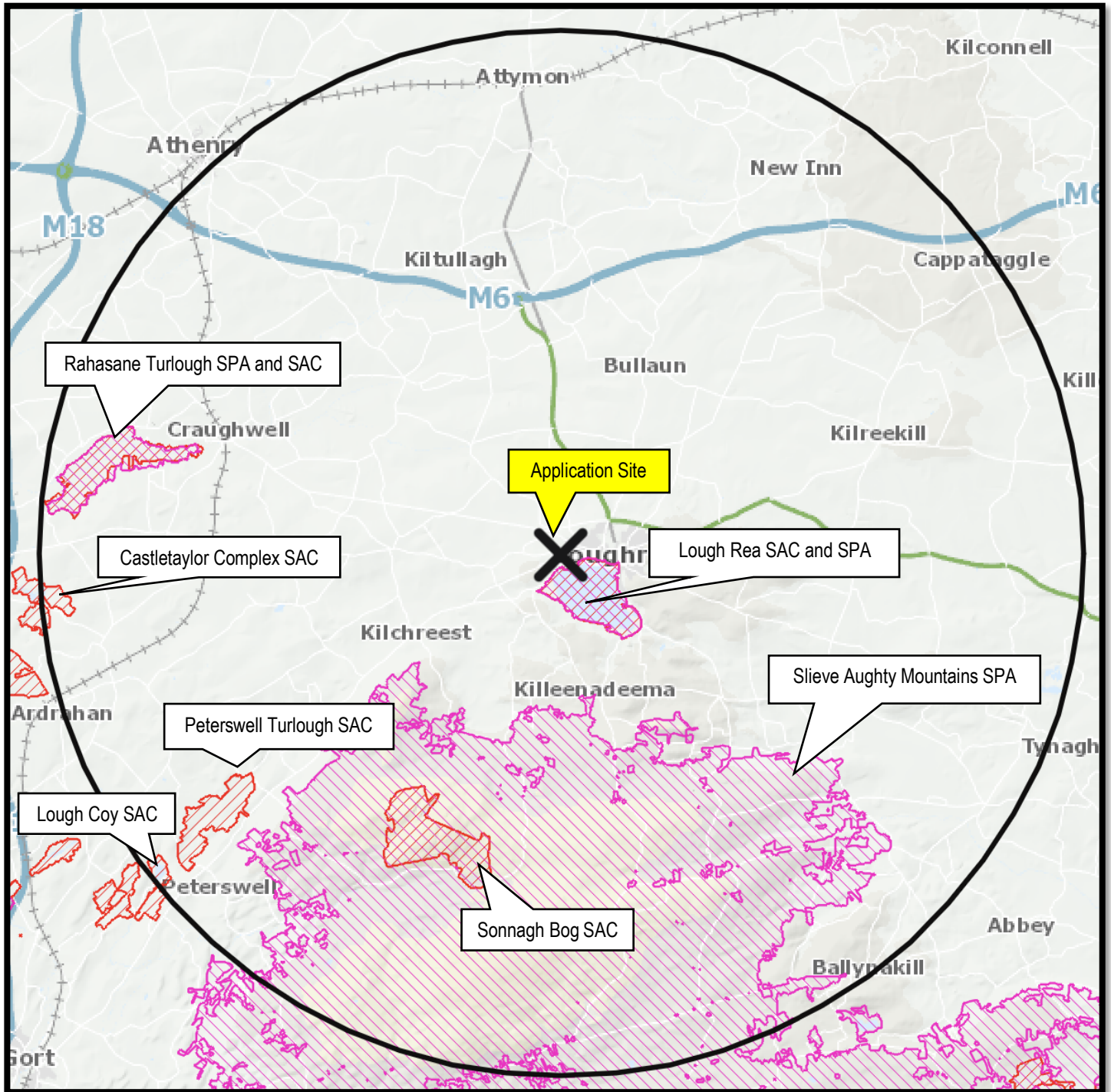


Figure 3.2. 15 km Buffer Surrounding Site

4 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURA 2000 SITES WHICH MAY BE AFFECTED

Qualifying Features

Natura 2000 sites are designated on the presence of certain habitats and species which are afforded protection under the Birds and Habitats Directives. These habitats and species are regarded as ‘qualifying features’ of the Natura 2000 sites. The following section provides details on the qualifying features of the Natura 2000 site in question – Lough Rea SAC and Lough Rea SPA Natura 2000 site. The NPWS site synopses for the Lough Rea SAC and SPA are given as Appendix B and Appendix C to this report.

Table 4.1. Lough Rea SAC Habitat Information

Habitat code	Habitat name	Cover (ha)	Representativity
3140	Hard Oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp.	307.07ha	B

For species, a value is given for ‘Population Significance’. This value is based on the relative density or size of the population of that species within the Natura 2000 site with that of the national population. Population Significance is ranked on a scale from A to D where A - 100>=p>15%, B - 15>=p>2%, C - 2>=p>0% and D - Non-significant population. The qualifying species found in the Lough Rea SPA Natura 2000 sites are outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Lough Rea SPA Species Information

Species code	Latin name	English name	Population significance
A056	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Shoveler	B
A125	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Coot	B

Potential Pressures and Threats to the Natura 2000 Sites

The European Nature Information System (EUNIS) website contains data on all Natura 2000 sites, including details of the main threats to and pressures on their qualifying features. Potential threats to and pressures on the qualifying features of the Lough Rea SAC and SPA Natura 2000 sites are listed in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.3 Potential Pressures and Threats to the Lough Rea SAC Natura 2000 Site

Activity	Location	Intensity	Influence
Continuous urbanisation	Inside	High	Negative
Disposal of inert materials	Both	High	Negative
Diffuse pollution to surface waters due to household sewage and waste waters	Both	High	Negative
Removal of hedges and copses or scrub	Outside	Low	Negative
Forest planting on open ground (native trees)	Inside	Low	Negative
Pollution to surface waters by storm overflows	Both	Low	Negative
Invasive non-native species	Inside	Low	Negative
Flooding and rising precipitations	Both	Low	Negative
Agricultural intensification	Both	Medium	Negative
Paths, tracks, cycling tracks	Inside	Medium	Negative

Storage of materials	Both	Medium	Negative
----------------------	------	--------	----------

Table 4. Potential Pressures and Threats to the Lough Rea SPA Natura 2000 Site

Activity	Location	Intensity	Influence
Leisure fishing	Inside	Medium	Negative
Sylviculture, forestry	Outside	Medium	Negative
Fertilisation	Outside	Medium	Negative
Urbanised areas, human habitation	Outside	High	Negative
Hunting	Inside	Low	Negative
Nautical sports	Inside	Low	Negative

Conservation Objectives of the Natura 2000 Sites

Once a site has been designated as a Natura site, a management plan should be put together for the site which sets out the Conservation Objectives for the site. Every effort should then be made to ensure that these objectives are fulfilled, in order to prevent potential impacts to the qualifying features of the site and maintain as far as possible their favourable conservation status.

European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain at favourable conservation status sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when: its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when: population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Site-Specific Conservation Objectives for Lough Rea SAC have been published. Qualifying interests and objectives (bulleted) are listed below.

Lough Rea SAC

[3140] Hard Oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp.

- Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes
- No decline, subject to natural processes
- Typical species present, in good condition, and demonstrating typical abundances and distribution
- All characteristic zones should be present, correctly distributed and in good condition
- Maintain maximum depth of vegetation, subject to natural processes
- Maintain appropriate hydrological regime necessary to support the habitat
- Maintain appropriate substratum type, extent and chemistry to support the vegetation

- Maintain appropriate Secchi transparency. There should be no decline in Secchi depth/transparency
- Maintain/restore the concentration of nutrients in the water column to sufficiently low levels to support the habitat and its typical species
- Maintain appropriate water quality to support the habitat, including high chlorophyll a status
- Maintain appropriate water quality to support the habitat, including high phytoplankton composition status
- Maintain trace/absent attached algal biomass
- Maintain high macrophyte status
- Maintain appropriate water and sediment pH, alkalinity and cation concentrations to support the habitat, subject to natural processes
- Maintain appropriate water colour to support the habitat
- Maintain appropriate organic carbon levels to support the habitat
- Maintain appropriate turbidity to support the habitat
- Maintain the area and condition of fringing habitats necessary to support the natural structure and functioning of lake habitat 3140

The hard Oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp. is not predicted to be impacted by the proposed development. This is due to the distance, lack of identifiable ecological/hydrological connector/receptor pathways and the built-up intervening environment from the application site to Lough Rea SAC.

Lough Rea SPA

- To maintain or restore the favorable conservation conditions of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA:
 - (*Anas clypeata*) Shoveler
 - (*Fulica atra*) Coot
- To maintain or restore the favorable conservation conditions of the wetland habitat at Lough Rea SPA as a resource for the regularly-occurring migratory waterbirds that utilize it.

There is no impact predicted on the bird species associated with the SPA, due to the distance between the application site and the SPA and no identifiable hydrological/ecological corridors. Therefore, due to the lack of a connector/receptor pathway no impacts are predicted.

5 SOILS, GEOLOGY & HYDROGEOLOGY

The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) website was consulted for available geological / hydrological information. Topsoil on site consists of coarse loamy drift with limestones. The site is underlain by Limestone till (carboniferous). The groundwater vulnerability within the site is classified as Extreme to Rock at or near Surface or Karst. Vulnerability is a term used to represent the intrinsic geological and hydrogeological characteristics that determine the ease at which groundwater may be contaminated by human activities.

Table 5.1 details information taken from catchments.ie on the water status of the GWDTE-Rahasane Turlough groundwater waterbody. This concludes that the GWDTE-Rahasane Turlough groundwater waterbody is of good status.

GWDTE-Rahasane Turlough Groundwater Waterbody Information	
Name	GWDTE-Rahasane Turlough
Code	IE_WE_G_0100
Catchments	25C Lower Shannon 26D Upper Shannon 29 Galway Bay South East 30 Corrib
Longitude	53.2506634
Latitude	-8.5894601
Cycle 1 RBD	Western
Local Authority	Galway County Council
Waterbody Category	Groundwater
WFD Risk	At risk
Protected Area	N/A
High Status Objective	No
Heavily Modified	N/A
Artificial	N/A
Area (km ²)	N/A
Length (km)	N/A
Transboundary	No
Canal	No
GW 2016-2021 Overall, Groundwater Status	Good

Table 5.2 details information taken from catchments.ie on the water status of the Rea Lake waterbody. This concludes that the Rea Lake waterbody is of good status.

Rea Lake Waterbody Information	
Name	Rea
Code	IE_WE_29_194
Catchments	29 9 Kilcogan SC 010 29 Galway Bay South East
Longitude	-8.5765
Latitude	53.18864
Cycle 1 RBD	Western

Local Authority	Galway County Council
Waterbody Category	Lake
WFD Risk	Not at risk
Protected Area	Yes
High Status Objective	No
Heavily Modified	No
Artificial	No
Area (km ²)	3.01
Length (km)	N/A
Transboundary	No
Reservoir	Not a reservoir
GW 2016-2021 Overall Groundwater Status	Good

6 OTHER PLANS AND PROJECTS IN THE AREA

It is a requirement of the Appropriate Assessment process to consider the 'in combination' effects of the proposed development with other plans and projects in the area. **Table 6.1** below gives details of the other plans and projects in the area which may be affecting the Lough Rea SAC and SPA 2000 Natura site.

Table 6.1: Other Plans and Projects Affecting the Natura 2000 Sites.

Name of Plan or Project	Key policies/issues/objectives directly related to the relevant Natura 2000 sites	Potential cumulative or in-combination effects on the relevant Natura 2000 sites
Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028	Designated Sites, Habitats and Species Policies and Objectives, Natural Heritage and Biodiversity Policies and Objectives, Natural Water Systems Polices Improve water quality, nature conservation/biodiversity. The integration of Green/Blue infrastructure and ecosystem services.	Positive Impact
River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 - 2021	The River Basin Management Plan for Ireland, issued in April 2018, sets out a number of objectives and measures for all national water bodies which aim: (1) to prevent the deterioration of water bodies and to protect, enhance and restore them with the aim of achieving at least good status and (2) to achieve compliance with the requirements for designated protected areas.	Positive impact
NPWS Conservation Management Plans	Site-Specific Conservation objectives have been published for Connemara Bog Complex SAC sites and its aims and objectives are outlined from Page 10 to 16 above.	Positive impacts
Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) Corporate Plan 2021-2025	Goals: To protect, manage and conserve Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources and to maximize their sustainability and natural biodiversity. To play a leadership role in achieving our climate action and biodiversity goals	Positive impact
Planning Applications in the area	A search was carried out on Galway County Council's online planning query system. It was ascertained that there have been two other local planning applications granted within a 300m radius of the site in the past 5 years, which are listed below: PI Ref no – 191009- Completion of minor revisions to 10 no. residential units previously approved under PL. Ref. No.'s 08/1967 and PI. Ref. No.'s 14/237 and 19/229. The development consists of Retention and completion of external alterations to (i) House Type B6 (Unit No.'s 11 & 12 within the permitted "Páirc an Triantáin" part of the estate), (ii) House Type D2 (Unit No.'s 5, 6, 7 & 8 within the permitted "Páirc an Triantáin" part of the estate), (iii) House Type B7 (Unit No.'s 1 & 2 within the permitted "Páirc an Triantáin" part of the estate) and (iv) House Type B8 (Unit No.'s 34 and 35 within the permitted "Gort na dTulach" part of the estate) together with all associated site works. The housing development will be connected to the public sewer and public mains network. Gross floor space of proposed works: 961 sqm. Gross floor space of work to be retained: 961 sqm	Neutral Impact

	<p>PI Ref no – 19229- for the construction of 76 no. residential units, 2 no. commercial units and creche giving the following accommodation: a) 52 no. semi-detached houses (comprising 46 no. 3 beds and 6 no. 4 beds) b) 8 no. 4 bed detached c) 19 no. terraced units in 3 no. blocks comprising 12 no. 3 bed, 4 no. 2 bed houses, 2 no. commercial units & 1 no. creche d) and pumping station with overnight storage capacity, temporary treatment system & ancillary site works. (Gross floor area 8578.8 sqm) Previous planning reference 08/1967 & EOD 14/237</p> <p>PI Ref no – 191015- to construct a new garage with floor area of 47.80m² to the rear of existing dwelling house at No. 4 Taoibh Uisce. Gross floor space of proposed works: 47.8 sqm</p> <p>PI Ref no – 2260835- to construct 8 No. two storey dwellinghouses with access through the waterfront estate. Gross floor space of proposed works 1,306.30 sq m.</p> <p>PI Ref no –211923- to construct 4 No. two storey dwelling houses with access through The Waterfront Estate and all associated services. Gross floor space of proposed works: 673.12 sqm.</p>	
--	--	--

7 SCREENING MATRIX FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT IN LINE WITH EU COMMISSION GUIDANCE

Having established the extent of the proposed project and the details of the Natura 2000 sites, a screening assessment for possible impacts can be generated. This section follows the format of the Screening Matrix provided in Annex 2 of the following document;

“Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites- Methodology guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission, 2001”.

Table 7.1: Step Three: Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

(a) Identify all potential direct and indirect impacts that may have an effect on the conservation objective of a European site taking into account the size/scale of the project under the following headings:	
Impacts:	Possible significance of Impacts (Duration/Magnitude)
<p>Construction Phase (Examples)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetation Clearance • Demolition • Surface water runoff from excavation/infill • Dust, noise, vibration • Lighting disturbance • Impact on groundwater • Storage of excavation/construction materials • Access to site • Pests 	<p>The application site lies entirely outside of the Lough Rea SAC and Lough Rea SPA and therefore, no direct impacts/effects are predicted on the Natura 2000 site.</p> <p>There are no identifiable hydrological/ecological connector/receptor pathways between the application and the SAC/SPA. This, combined with the distance and built-up intervening environment between the application site and the Natura 2000 sites removes any potential connector/receptor pathways. Therefore, no impacts/effects are predicted in this regard during the construction phase of development.</p>

<p>Operation Phase (Examples)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct emissions to air and water • Surface water runoff containing contaminant/sediment • Lighting Disturbance • Noise/vibration • Changes to water/groundwater due to drainage/abstraction • Presence of people, vehicles and activities • Physical presence of structures (collision risks) • Potential for accidents/incidents 	<p>The proposed development will connect to the existing foul sewer network. A pre-connection application has been submitted to Uisce Eireann and we await confirmation / agreement but no issues are anticipated due to the minor nature of the proposed connection.</p>
<p>In combination/ other:</p>	<p>No likely significant in-combination effects are identified.</p>
<p>(b) Describe any likely changes to the European site:</p>	
<p>Examples of the type of changes to give consideration to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction/fragmentation of habitat • Disturbance to QI species • Habitat/species fragmentation • Reduction/fragmentation in species density • Changes in key indicators of conservation status value • Changes to areas of sensitivity/threats to QI • Interference with the key relationships that define the structure or ecological function of the site 	<p>It is not predicted that the proposed development will result in any likely changes to the Lough Rea SAC and/or Lough Rea SPA or any other protected Natura 2000 site during the construction or operational phase of development.</p>
<p>(c) Are 'mitigation' measures necessary to reach a conclusion that likely significant effects can be ruled out at screening?</p>	
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>	

The findings of the screening matrix are summarised in **Table 7.2** below.

Table 7.2 Stage 1 - Screening Matrix for the Proposed Development

<p>Brief Description of the Project or Plan</p>
<p>Location: The proposed site lies in Hillcrest, Loughrea, County Galway (Grid Ref: Easting: 160600.46, Northing : 216619.57)</p> <p>Distance from Designated Site: The site for the proposed development lies 367 meters to the north from the Lough Rea SAC and SPA (straight line measurement).</p> <p>Brief Description of the Project: Planning permission is being sought for the “<i>construction of 3 no. housing units comprising of 2 no. 2 bed single storey semi-detached unit and 1 no. 2 bed single storey detached unit . The proposal represents an ideal infill opportunity within the confines of the town 50 kph speed limit zones whilst the land benefits from direct access onto the Galway Road and existing water and power services. The area for this proposed site is 1,221m². The proposed density is 25 units/Ha. The Loughrea LAP (2012-2022) advises a plot area ratio of 0.1-0.5. The proposal provides for a plot area ratio of 0.20. Externally the dwellings will reflect the design of the existing dwellings in the estate to provide for consistency in this small cul de sac.</i>”</p> <p>A Site Layout Plan for the proposed development is included as Appendix A to this report.</p>

Brief Description of the Natura 2000 Sites

Site Designation Status: The Lough Rea SAC is designated under EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Lough Rea SPA is designated under EU Bird's Directive (79/409/EEC).

Qualifying Features

The Lough Rea SAC is of conservation significance due to the presence of one habitat listed under Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

The Lough Rea SPA is of conservation significance due to the presence of two species listed under Annex I of the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC).

Qualifying Habitats

Lough Rea SAC

- [3140] Hard Oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp. (EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC)

Qualifying Species

Lough Rea SPA

- [A056] Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)
 - [A125] Coot (*Fulica atra*)
- (EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC).

Habitats and Species of Interest

Full details of the sites are found in the **Lough Rea SAC and SPA Site Synopses** included as **Appendix B** and **Appendix C** to this report.

Unit Size:

Lough Rea SAC: 364.60ha

Lough Rea SPA: 365.41ha

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Describe the individual elements of the project likely to give rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 site.

There are no impacts/effects predicted on the Natura 2000 Network during the construction and/or operational phase of development.

Describe any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the project on the Natura 2000 site by virtue of the following;

- **Size and Scale**
The application site comprises an overall area of **0.3 ha**, the proposed development floor space is 237 Sqm. At this size and scale, and due to the fact that the works will be located entirely outside the designated area, it is not expected that the development will have any significant impact (direct, indirect or secondary in nature) on the Natura 2000 site in this regard.
- **Land-Take**
The proposed works will be entirely located outside the designated site and so there will be no impacts in this regard.
- **Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site**
The site for the proposed development lies 367 meters to the north from the Lough Rea SAC and SPA (straight line measurement).

- Resource Requirements

It is not expected that the proposed development will have any significant impact (direct, indirect or secondary in nature) on the designated sites in this regard.

- Emissions

The proposed development will connect to the existing foul sewer network. It is not expected that emissions arising from the development will result in any significant impacts/effects on the Natura 2000 sites. A pre-connection application has been submitted to Uisce Eireann and we await confirmation / agreement but no issues are anticipated due to the minor nature of the proposed connection.

- Excavation Requirements

No impacts are expected on the Natura 2000 site in this regard.

- Transportation Requirements

During the construction phase of the proposed development, there will be a slight increase in the volume of traffic in the area for a short time. It is not expected that this slight increase will result in direct, indirect or secondary impacts on the Natura 2000 site.

- Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning

The construction phase of the proposed development will last approximately 1-3 years. It is expected that the dwelling will remain in use for at least 100 years. Neither the operation nor the eventual decommissioning of the proposed development is likely to result in direct, indirect or secondary impacts on the Natura 2000 sites.

Describe any likely changes to the site arising as a result of the following;

- Reduction of Habitat

There will be no changes in this respect.

Disturbance to Key Species

- There no identifiable suitable habitats for key species on site. There will be no changes in this respect.

- Habitat or Species Fragmentation

There will be no changes in this respect.

- Reduction in species density

There will be no changes in this respect.

- Changes in key indicators of conservation value

There will be no changes in this respect.

- Climate change

There will be no changes in this respect.

Describe any likely impacts on the Natura 2000 site as a whole in terms of the following;

- Interference with key relationships that define the structure and function of the site

No potential impacts which are likely to interfere with the key relationships that define the structure or function of the site are expected.

Provide Indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of the following;

- **Loss**
No loss is expected.
- **Fragmentation**
No fragmentation is expected.
- **Disruption**
No disruption is expected.
- **Disturbance**
No disturbance is expected.
- **Change to key elements of the site**
No change is expected

Describe from the above those elements of the project or plan, or combination of elements, where the above impacts are likely to be significant or where the scale or magnitude of impacts is not known.

It is not considered that the proposed development will have any significant impacts on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA in combination with the other plans or projects in the area (outlined in Section 6 of this report).

8 CONCLUSIONS

Planning is being sought for the “construction of 3 no. housing units comprising of 2 no. 2 bed single storey semi-detached unit and 1 no. 2 bed single storey detached unit . The proposal represents an ideal infill opportunity within the confines of the town 50 kph speed limit zones whilst the land benefits from direct access onto the Galway Road and existing water and power services. The area for this proposed site is 1,221m². The proposed density is 25 units/Ha. The Loughrea LAP (2012-2022) advises a plot area ratio of 0.1-0.5. The proposal provides for a plot area ratio of 0.20. Externally the dwellings will reflect the design of the existing dwellings in the estate to provide for consistency in this small cul de sac.” in Hillcrest, Loughrea, County Galway .

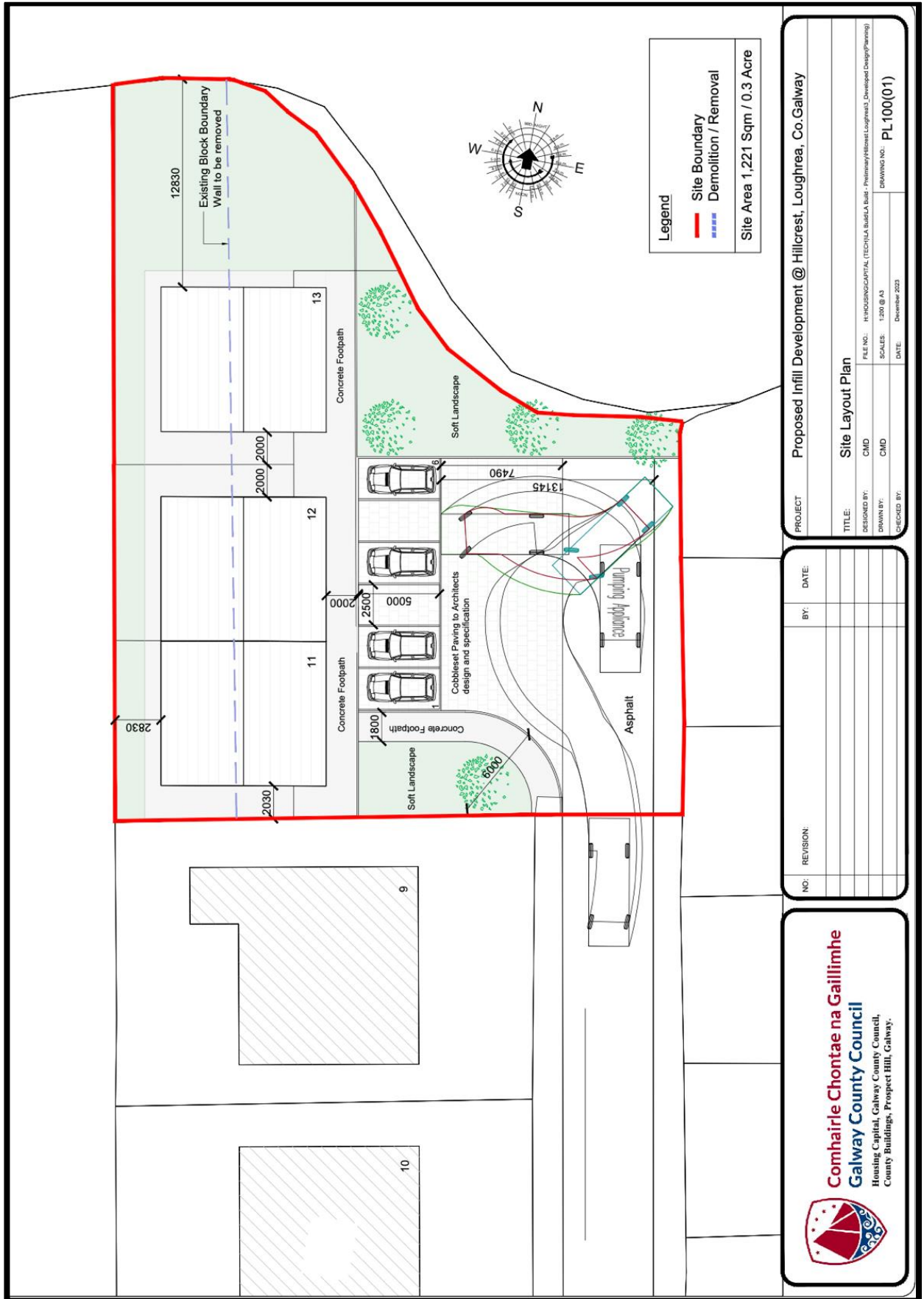
A Site Layout Plan for the proposed development is included as **Appendix A** to this report. The screening exercise examined impacts on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA Natura 2000 site.

The proposed development will connect to the existing foul sewer network located on the R380 Loughrea bypass. It is not expected that emissions arising from the development will result in any significant adverse effects on the Natura 2000 sites. A pre-connection application has been submitted to Uisce Eireann and we await confirmation / agreement but no issues are anticipated due to the minor nature of the proposed connection.

The site for the proposed development lies 367 meters to the north from the Lough Rea SAC and SPA (straight line measurement), the built-up intervening environment and the lack of ecological/hydrological connector/receptor pathways to the Natura 2000 sites.

Therefore, the conclusion of this screening exercise is that no significant effects are expected on the qualifying interests or conservation objectives of the surrounding Natura 2000 sites, as a result of the proposed development in question, alone or in combination with the other plans and projects in the area. This report is therefore issued as a ‘Finding of No Significant Effects’ (FONSE) statement, in accordance with the EU Commission’s methodological guidance (EC, 2001)

APPENDIX A-Site Layout Plan



APPENDIX B

NPWS Site Synopses for Lough Rea SAC

Site Name: Lough Rea SAC

Site Code: 000304

Lough Rea is a hard water lake situated directly south of the town of Loughrea, Co. Galway. The lake is 2.5 km at its longest axis. The underlying geology of the area is of Carboniferous limestone and water transparency is very high. The lake, which is fed by springs and by a stream, reaches a maximum depth of 15 m. 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): [3140] Hard Water Lakes.

Some species of stonewort (a type of alga) characteristic of calcareous waters have been recorded in Lough Rea, including *Chara curta* and *C. contraria*. The Red Data Book species *C. tomentosa* has also been found here. Other aquatic plants present include Slender-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton filiformis*), Lesser Pondweed (*P. pusillus*), Fennel Pondweed (*P. pectinatus*), Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), Least Bur-reed (*Sparganium minimum*), Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) and the alga *Chaetomorpha incrasston*. On the sheltered western and south-eastern shores of the lake some areas of reedswamp, wet grassland and wet woodland are included in the site.

Lough Rea is of considerable ornithological interest. Internationally important numbers of Shoveler overwinter at the site (max. 467, 1995/96) and nationally important numbers of Tufted Duck (max. 406, 1995/96) and Coot (max. 1256, 1996/97) have also been reported. A further 10 species of waterfowl reach regionally or locally important numbers. Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*) are present in the lake.

The site is largely surrounded by intensively farmed pasture and consequently the main threat to the lake comes from agricultural run-off. The lake is also vulnerable to nutrient input from the town of Loughrea. Boating activities may have some impact on the site and may need to be monitored. An area has been planted with conifers to the east of the lake, but this does not appear to be adversely affecting the ecology of the lake.

Lough Rea is a hard water lake, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The lake is also important for birds, and holds nationally and internationally important numbers of a number of species.

Appendix C

NPWS Site Synopses for Lough Rea SPA

Site Name: Lough Rea SPA

Site Code: 004134

Lough Rea, a hard water lake, is situated directly south of the town of Loughrea, Co. Galway. The lake is 2.5 km at its longest axis. The underlying geology of the area is of Carboniferous limestone and water transparency is very high. The lake, which is fed by springs and by a stream, reaches a maximum depth of 15 m.

Some species of stonewort (a type of alga) characteristic of calcareous waters have been recorded in Lough Rea, including *Chara curta* and *C. contraria*. The Red Data Book species *C. tomentosa* has also been found here. Other aquatic plants present include Slender-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton filiformis*), Lesser Pondweed (*P. pusillus*), Fennel Pondweed (*P. pectinatus*), Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), Least Bur-reed (*Sparganium minimum*), Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) and the alga *Chaetomorpha incrassata*. On the sheltered western and south-eastern shores of the lake some areas of reedswamp, wet grassland and wet woodland are included in the site.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Shoveler and Coot. 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.

Lough Rea is of considerable ornithological interest. Nationally important numbers of Shoveler overwinter at the site (264); numbers of this species at the site have exceeded the international threshold level on two occasions in recent years (2002/03 and 2006/07). Nationally important numbers of Coot (1,172) also occur. A further 10 species of waterfowl reach regionally or locally important numbers - all population sizes are the mean of peak counts for the five years, 1995/96-1999/2000.

Lough Rea is an important ornithological site for the nationally important populations of Shoveler and Coot and the regionally/locally important populations of a further ten species that it holds.