

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS



Screening is used to determine if an AA is necessary by examining:

- If the plan / project is directly connected with / necessary to the management of the European site.
- If the effects will be significant on a European site in view of its conservation objectives, either alone / in combination with other plans / projects.

Planning Authority: Offaly County Council

Planning Application Proposed Part VIII

Tullamore Municipal District.

(A) DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AND LOCAL SITE:			
Proposed development:	Proposal to undertake Re-Furbishment / Upgrade of Existing Bus Stops at Church Street, Clara, County Offaly.		
Site location:	Church Street, Clara, County Offaly.		
Site size:	0.050 Hectares	Floor Area of Proposed Development:	N/A
Identification of nearby European Site(s):	European Site Name: Clara Bog SAC Site Code: 000572		
Distance to European Site(s):	2km		
The characteristics of existing, proposed or other approved plans / projects which may cause interactive / cumulative impacts with the project being assessed and which may affect the site:	Given the limited scale of the development applied for it is not considered that it will have any interactive / cumulative impacts with any other plan or project in the vicinity.		
Is the application accompanied by an EIAR?	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> </div>		

(B) IDENTIFICATION OF THE RELEVANT European sites (S):

The reasons for the designation of the European sites (s):

Clara Bog is situated some 2 km south of Clara village in Co. Offaly. Much of it is State-owned and designated a statutory Nature Reserve. 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):

[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*

[7110] Raised Bog (Active)*

[7120] Degraded Raised Bog

[7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation

[91D0] Bog Woodland*

The conservation objectives / qualifying interests of the site and the factors that contributes to the conservation value of the site: (which are taken from the European sites synopses and, if applicable, a Conservation Management Plan; all available on www.npws.ie) **(ATTACH INFO.)**

Active raised bog comprises areas of high bog that are wet and actively peat-forming, where the percentage cover of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) is high, and where some or all of the following features occur: hummocks, pools, wet flats, *Sphagnum* lawns, flushes and soaks. Degraded raised bog corresponds to those areas of high bog where hydrology has been adversely affected by peat cutting, drainage and other land use activities, but which are capable of regeneration. The Rhynchosporion habitat occurs in wet depressions, pool edges and erosion channels where the vegetation includes White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and/or Brown Beak-sedge (*R. fusca*), and at least some of the following associated species: Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), sundews (*Drosera* spp.), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*).

Clara Bog has long been regarded as one of the most important raised bogs in the country, being the largest remaining example of the true midland sub-type. It has well-developed hummock and hollow complexes, and one of the few remaining soak systems. The bog vegetation at this site has been much-studied. Variations in the proportions of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.) have been related to ecological features such as pools, soaks and ridges.

Rhynchosporion vegetation is widespread at this site but is best developed in the wettest areas of active raised bog. This vegetation occurs along pool edges and on flats underlain by deep, wet and quaking peat. Typical plant species which have been recorded from the habitat at the site include the bog mosses *S. cuspidatum* and *S. auriculatum*, Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), White Beak-sedge, Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and the nationally scarce Brown Beak-sedge.

The largest part of the uncut high bog surface is comprised of degraded raised bog. Although the areas of degraded raised bog have a relatively well-developed raised bog flora, they are affected by water loss, to varying degrees, and thus they tend to be associated with the more marginal, sloping areas of the high bog. Common vascular plant species of degraded raised bog areas include Heather, Bog Asphodel, Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Deergrass, Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Carnation Sedge. Indicator species of midland raised bog habitat, such as Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) and *Sphagnum magellanicum*, are present even within areas of degraded bog, however their cover is generally low. The cover of *Sphagnum* is also low (typically < 30%) due to low water levels and perhaps other factors such as burning.

Bog woodland on Clara Bog occurs in several small stands associated with flushes on the western side of the bog, the largest of which lies to the west of Shanley's Lough. There is a good example of a wet birch (*Betula* sp.) woodland which has a diverse vegetation, and the most easterly flush has open water associated with it.


The transitions into calcareous woodland, to the east, and to the esker ridge, to the north, are contained within the site, and some excellent examples of esker grassland also occur. Some peripheral reclaimed farmland is also included in the site, because management undertaken in these areas can affect the hydrology of the bog.

Several rare invertebrate species are associated with the soak on this bog, including the midge, *Lasiodiamesa sphagnicola* (Order Diptera), for which Clara Bog is its only known Irish site, a click beetle, *Ampedus pomorum* (Order Coleoptera), and another midge, *Parhelophilus consimilis* (Order Diptera). Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*, Order Lepidoptera), a butterfly listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, has been recorded from the site, but in its present condition the habitat is only marginally suitable for the species and any populations present are likely to be intermittent, small and short-lived. Natural and human-induced changes are likely to make the habitat less suitable in the future. The bog is also important at the only known Irish station for the rare moss *Tetraplodon angustatus*.

Clara Bog supports breeding Merlin (1-2 pairs), a scarce species in Ireland and one that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Red Grouse also breeds, along with other common bogland species such as Meadow Pipit and Skylark.

The site has been divided into a western and an eastern section by a road. The eastern part of the site has been damaged by previous drainage works, although restoration work is in progress. Continuing peat extraction from the southern margins is also damaging and has a potential effect upon much of the internal bog, including the soak system. Ideally the whole bog should be managed as a hydrological unit. Active raised bogs, once characteristic of central Ireland, are now rare and vulnerable, and have been recognised by the E.U. as habitats of international importance. Ireland has a special responsibility to conserve the best of its remaining bogs. Further drainage, peat extraction, burning or attempted land reclamation is not consistent with this responsibility.

(C) NPWS ADVICE:	
Advice received from NPWS over phone:	None received.
Summary of advice received from NPWS in written form (ATTACH SAME):	-

(D) ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS:	
<p>(The purpose of this is to identify if the effect(s) identified could be significant – if uncertain assume the effect(s) are significant).</p> <p>If the answer is 'yes' to any of the questions below, then the effect is significant.</p> <p>(Please justify your answer. 'Yes' / 'No' alone is insufficient)</p>	
<p>Would there be...</p> <p>... any impact on an Annex 1 habitat? (Annex 1 habitats are listed in Appendix 1 of AA Guidance).</p>	<p>Not likely due to the location and type of development.</p> <p>The site is sufficient distance from the European Site. (2km)</p>
<p>... a reduction in habitat area on a European sites?</p>	<p>There will be no reduction in the habitat area.</p>
<p>... direct / indirect damage to the physical quality of the environment (e.g. water quality and supply, soil compaction) in the European sites?</p>	<p>Not likely due to the location and type of development.</p> <p>The site is sufficient distance from the European Site (2km)</p>
<p>... serious / ongoing disturbance to species / habitats for which the European sites is selected (e.g. because of increased noise, illumination and human activity)?</p>	<p>Not likely due to the location and type of development.</p> <p>The site is sufficient distance from the European Site. (2km)</p>
<p>... direct / indirect damage to the size, characteristics or reproductive ability of populations on the European sites?</p>	<p>Not likely to have an adverse impact due to its location and characteristics</p>
<p>Would the project interfere with mitigation measures put in place for other plans / projects. [Look at <i>in-combination effects</i> with completed, approved but not completed, and proposed plans / projects. Look at projects / plans within and adjacent to European sites and identify them]. Simply stating that there are no cumulative impacts' is insufficient.</p>	<p>No.</p>
(E) SCREENING CONCLUSION:	
Screening can result in:	
1	<i>AA is not required</i> because the project is directly connected with / necessary to the nature conservation management of the site.
2	<i>No potential for significant effects / AA is not required.</i>
3	<i>Significant effects are certain, likely or uncertain.</i> (In this situation seek a Natura Impact Statement from the applicant, or reject the project. Reject if too potentially damaging / inappropriate.
Conclusion: Category 2	
Justify why it falls into relevant category above:	Given the location and the nature and size of the development applied for and the characteristics of European sites in the vicinity and the appropriate assessment guidelines it is considered that the development will have no likely significant impacts on this European site.
Name:	Michael Mullarkey
Position:	Chief Technician
Signed:	
Date:	11-07-2024