

Appendix A.8.8.9.1

European Site Assessment

Ecological File Note

Date: 9th December 2021

Re: Assessment of the option corridors for the N4 Carrick-on-Shannon to Dromod project against the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Introduction

This purpose of this file note is to document the assessment of the option corridors for the N4 Carrick-on-Shannon to Dromod project against the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. This assessment was undertaken at this early stage to aid the decision-making process with respect to selection of a preferred transport solution in consideration of whether or not any of the option corridors would result in adverse effects on the integrity of any European sites.

Are any of the Option Corridors for the N4 Carrick-on-Shannon to Dromod Project likely to have a significant effect on any European site(s) in view of its/their conservation objectives?

Yes.

There are no European sites located within the study area boundary and as such, none of the Option Corridors impact directly on any Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA).

However, the study area is hydrologically connected to numerous European sites downstream via the River Shannon, including:

- Lough Forbes Complex SAC, located c. 10km downstream;
- Lough Ree SAC, located c. 27.6km downstream;
- River Shannon Callows SAC, located c. 59km downstream;
- Lough Derg, North-east Shore SAC, located c. 116km downstream; and,
- Lower River Shannon SAC, located c. 154 km downstream.

As such, all of the Option Corridors, both to the west and east of Drumsna Junction have the potential to result in a significant effect on downstream European sites. Drainage from the potential road, may discharge to the River Shannon, either directly or via its tributaries, posing a potential risk to water quality in the downstream receiving environment during construction and operation which could affect QI habitats including bog woodland and alluvial forests as well as Qualifying Interest (QI) aquatic species such as otter, brook lamprey, sea lamprey, and the common bottlenose dolphin.

None of the Option Corridors have the potential to result in a significant effect on any SPA as a result of disturbance / displacement of Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species that may use ex-situ habitat areas

beyond the SPA site boundaries¹. The closest SPA to the study area is Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA, located c. 9.4km southeast. Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA is designated for a single bird species: Greenland white-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*). The next closest sites to the study area are Lough Gara SPA and Bellanagare Bog SPA, located 14.8km and 19.6km away respectively. Lough Gara is designated for whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) and Greenland white-fronted goose while Bellanagare Bog is designated for Greenland white-fronted goose. Both whooper swan and Greenland white-fronted goose are known from the study area based on desktop analysis, site surveys and historical knowledge of the study area. The typical foraging range² for Greenland white-fronted goose is between 5km and 8km, while for whooper swan it is less than 5km. In light of the above, none of the whooper swan or Greenland white-fronted goose species present within the study area are associated with any SPA as the closest SPA are further away than these foraging areas. Therefore, any potential disturbance or displacement of local Greenland white-fronted geese or whooper swans will not undermine the conservation objectives, or adversely affect the integrity, of any SPA sites.

Additionally, curlew (*Numenius arquata*) are also known from the study area, however the core foraging range for curlew² is between 1km-2km. There are no SPAs designated for curlew in the vicinity of the study area with the closest site being Inner Galway Bay SPA [004031], located c. 89.5 km south-west. As with whooper swan and Greenland white-fronted goose, any potential disturbance or displacement of local curlew will not undermine the conservation objectives, or adversely affect the integrity, of any SPA sites

Would the likely significant effects identified, despite the implementation of mitigation measures, adversely affect the integrity of any European site(s)?

No.

With the implementation of standard and best practice design measures to minimise any potential effects on water quality in the receiving environment, none of the potentially significant effects identified are likely to affect the favourable conservation condition of the QI habitats/species or SCI bird species of any European site and therefore, none of the Option Corridors are likely to adversely affect the integrity of any European sites.

¹ There is a need to consider use of habitat areas outside of an SPA by SCI bird species where they support the SCI populations and the site's conservation objectives. These habitat areas can comprise alternative roosting sites, foraging areas, staging grounds or migration routes and can, but not necessarily exclusively, be situated within the immediate hinterland of the SPA, or in areas ecologically connected to it

² Scottish Natural Heritage (2016) *Assessing Connectivity with Special Protection Areas (SPAs)*. Guidance